Abstract

**Objective:** This paper aims to review the function of marketing in the field of museum management and offers practical and creative solutions for museums to successfully balance the conflict between the museums' sustainable operation and their original functions, such as education and preservation.

**Methodology:** The research is mainly based on long-term observations of museum management and marketing in both China and Spain. A review and analysis of previous studies has been conducted to build the context.

**Results:** The implementation of appropriate marketing methods by way of cross-industry cooperation and new technologies can not only assist museums in financial issues but could also result in a win-win outcome which could promote the original mission of museums.

**Limitations:** This article is mainly based on the Chinese and Spanish contexts, however, some relevant features of other countries have also been described.

**Practical implications:** The suggested strategies mentioned in this paper contribute to the development of practical marketing methods for Spanish museums, oriented towards meeting the need for sustainable operation, and ways to communicate to the public at large, in accordance with the museum's key objectives.

**Keywords:** Museums; museum’s marketing; museum management; museums’ functions; interdisciplinarity.

**JEL codes:** Z0, Z11, M30, M31, M32.

博物馆与市场营销：有关新策略之探讨

Yin Li
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos

文章摘要

研究目的：本文目的为提出切实可行的营销策略以促进博物馆之发展，并且在财务解决方案与维护博物馆之文化及教育功能之间取得平衡。

分析方法：为了实现本研究目的，我们采用了以下方法：一方面，我们多次参观欧洲和亚洲不同国家的博物馆，特别是西班牙和中国的博物馆，因此直接观察是我们研究的基本支柱。另一方面，我们对书目文献进行了详尽的查阅，以提取有关博物馆运营的信息和数据，以便提出可以改善西班牙博物馆管理营销的实际应用。

研究结论：采用这些适当的策略不仅有助于解决西班牙博物馆的财务问题，同时也达到实现博物馆的原先目的。

研究局限：本文主要以我们对西班牙和中国博物馆的直接观察为基础而进行的，尽管研究也包括了一些位于其他国家/地区的博物馆而未能到场参观的营销案例。

实际应用：根据我们的理解，本研究能为我们的研究对象——各博物馆机构，提供了实用的营销策略，让其在财务上达到可持续发展，并获得最有效的公共沟通方式，同时坚守博物馆的主要使命——收集和保存作品，并向外教育和传播其内容。

关键词：博物馆、博物馆中的市场营销、博物馆的经济管理、博物馆的功能、跨学科。

JEL 分类号: Z0, Z11, M30, M31, M32。
1. Introduction

For museums, marketing has always been a controversial issue. We believe that one of the reasons for this could be that museums, as institutions, have been considered as non-profit organisations. It is therefore common to read opinions of museum managers in the media that oppose a profit-making idea of culture, since they stress that museums need to maintain a certain distance from the market. The controversy dates back to the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, when the museum community began to discuss its marketing projects and a preliminary theoretical basis was created (Zhang, 2010a, p. 7). It was not until the 1980s that theoretical reflection was consolidated as regards considering marketing as an essential part of the sustainable development of museums (Rentschler and Reussner, 2002, p. 1 McLean, 1998, p. 347). In 1988, the publication of the book *Museum Marketing and Strategy*, by Neil and Philip Kotler, marked the development of marketing theory for museums (Zhang, 2010a, p. 8).

The function of museums is not only the acquisition, protection, research and exhibition of objects, but also their role in educating society, as a public service. Gaining increasing importance is also their role in tourism, as places of interest for planning trips and cultural visits. From this, we can see that today’s museums have a closer link with their socio-economic environment, and that through this link the different marketing campaigns play a key role. In this respect, Mclean (1993, p. 351) states that marketing serves to achieve the museum’s mission, which is responsible for effective satisfaction of users’ needs.

Apart from this, the operation of museums is closely related to their holdings. However, one indisputable fact is that there are a large number of museums that have financial difficulties to be able to run their annual cultural programme. With enormous pressures for survival, traditional management methods were not solving their problems, leading many museums to introduce marketing into their management, as Rentschler (1998) has already pointed out: “While collection care and interpretation are acknowledged as basic museum functions, declining public funding and accountability pressure have led to the discovery of museum marketing as an important contribution to museums’ viability”.

This author, in a later article (Rentschler, 2004) stressed this same economic problem, that leads to seeking funds through a greater and better connection of communication with potential visitors: “One of the most serious problems facing marketing in museums today is the erosion of the proportion of income provided by government, and which must be supplemented by income from visitors [...]” (2004, p. 139). Although his study is based on museums in the English-speaking cultural sphere, in both the UK and Canada, the United States and Australia, his proposals are applicable to the problems posed for museum institutions in other countries.

In the case of Spain, since the onset of the economic crisis, especially after 2008, the lack of funding for museums has been, and continues to be, a matter of concern, especially in order to implement new action to achieve sustainability (Rieradevall, Solà, and Gaya, 2011; Ayala, Cuenca-Amigo, and Cuenca Amigo, 2019). Due to the
reduction in state budgets, many museums rely on marketing events to compensate for the scarcity of funds, although this gives rise to controversy due to the “non-profit” nature of these entities.

However, we believe that the term “non-profit” emphasizes the essence of museums and does not mean that the museum cannot have income. Under certain conditions, marketing will promote the operation and development of the museum, as well as the dissemination of culture. But how can a balance be sought between obtaining income without losing sight of its original function of service, and how can marketing strategies be used to promote the development of Spanish museums under the market economy, while at the same time maintaining the characteristic of a non-profit organisation, returning any profits to the museum itself?

This is one of the objectives we set ourselves when tackling this article, after systematic and repeated visits to different museum institutions to personally observe, and subsequently reflect on, possible deficiencies in attracting visitors as a result of a marketing policy which could clearly be improved on.

2. Why do museums need marketing?

The lack of funding is the reason why the museum as a non-profit cultural institution must resort to marketing as a means of improving its image (Lewis, 1992, p. 325) and thus try to arouse interest among a wider potential audience, and consequently increase its income from tickets, although not only that, as we shall see later. Already in the work *Marketing the Arts*, the authors Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve (1980) advocated the application of marketing in the art world to reach a greater number of recipients potentially interested in the field of history of art. This problem of an economic nature is common to many museums that depend largely on state funding, which, in the event of an economic crisis and reduction of contributions, inevitably hinders their development.

In particular, as a result of the economic crisis, the governments of many countries implemented substantial reductions in financial support for cultural institutions and tourism, as was the case in Spain (Arosteguiyi and Uldemolins, 2010). Funders, both corporate and government, as well as foundations, are all calling for museums to take greater responsibility for fundraising (Rentschler and Reussner, 2002, p. 4).

Faced with these economic situations, museums generally experience enormous pressure to survive, as they are custodians of a major proportion of historical and cultural heritage, i.e. the cultural roots of a society. We believe that traditional management methods make it difficult to solve practical problems, a fact which has led many museums to seek other ways of raising funds, increasing their income, and gradually incorporating marketing, precisely in order to achieve this increase in income (Martínez, 2018).

As an example, according to the *Ibérico* newspaper, in a news item by Barrera Fernández (2019), budget cuts have forced regional museums in the United Kingdom
to reduce staff and opening hours. In the report The Mendoza Review, published by the UK Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, the author (Mendoza, 2017, p. 23) indicates that although the UK government kept funding for its museums stable from 2007 to 2016, due to inflation, this funding fell by 13% (from £829 million to £720 million) in real terms.

In China, the government grant to state museums accounts for more than 60% of total revenue (Bollo and Zhang, 2017). However, approximately two-thirds of Chinese public museums face difficulties in surviving (Preziosi and Farago, 2019). This is because the state allocates most of the funds to large museums, and financial support is quite limited for smaller museums because of their size and collection content, so that many medium-sized and small museums only received about eighty thousand euros of state subsidy (Zhongxinshe, 2016). Due to the lack of funds, many collections, historical and cultural materials are not well protected and are even at risk of disappearing. In addition, since 2008, state museums have applied access free of charge, and although this decision facilitates and increases public access, at the same time, it limits a key source of income (Gall-Ely, Urbain, Bourgeon-Renault, Gombault, and Petr, 2008).

In the case of Spain, to reduce the deficit as a result of the economic crisis, the state budget allocated 38% less to museums from 2009 to 2018 (Spanish Ministry of Finance, 2020). On the cultural pages of the national press, both on paper and in digital format, one can read relatively frequent and worrying news items, such as the fact that the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía (hereafter MNCARS) has a budget of only one million euros for the acquisition of collections (in 2010 it was 15 million) and the Museo Nacional del Prado has zero (García, 2019). This El País article by García, of 30 April 2019, states that due to the lack of budget for certain items related to art courses at the Prado Museum, certain events that had been scheduled for 2019 had to be suspended. Figure 1 shows the development of the budget for Spanish museums.

![Figure 1. Evolution of budget for Spanish museums (€ million)](image)

Source: In-house, based on data provided by the General State Budget (2020).
Figure 2 shows the budget outturn for state revenue from MNCARS and the Museo Nacional del Prado.

Figure 2. Budget outturn for state revenue from MNCARS and the Prado Museum 2009-2018 (€ million)

These two figures show that during the last financial crisis, especially from 2009 onwards, Spain’s state budget for museums fell sharply until 2014. Finally, in 2015, there was a slight increase. This reduction affected MNCARS in particular, as over the six years from 2009 to 2014 alone, the budget allocation fell from €58.8m to €33.2m, a drop of 44%. Although the budget for the Prado Museum is slightly more stable than that of MNCARS, it also suffered a considerable drop between 2012 and 2014.

Furthermore, as Lewis (1994) stated in *Museums and Marketing*, almost two decades ago, it is wise to embed marketing within museum management, since they have to be well managed if the key reason for their existence, as well as the spiritual and educational one is not to be gradually forgotten. Likewise for other humanitarian organisations, hospitals, theatres, orchestras or political parties, to prevent them from disappearing (Lewis, 1994, p. 326).

The approaches used in museum marketing tend towards services and take into account the concept of ‘non-profit’. This is therefore a different model from the commercial marketing context and belongs to the concept of social marketing, and must therefore primarily meet the needs of its users and conform to the development of social policies (Rentschler and Reussner, 2002, pp. 4-5). This interpretation sees the development of museums from the viewpoint of collections and research centres to that of a public service (Kotler and Kotler, 2000, pp. 271-272). Today’s museum
values the philosophy of ‘serving the public’, and its main objective is education and disseminating the arts. Therefore, we believe that marketing makes museums pay more attention to the public. Museum collections and exhibitions, and the achievements of academic research associated with them, are public resources – but without visitors, which makes the museum a mere “storehouse” of historically and artistically valuable exhibits. Consequently, attracting the public and maximizing the functions of museums are key objectives for applying marketing approaches (Han and Hyun, 2017). Given this premise, the museum should provide high quality products (exhibitions, cultural activities, lectures, guided tours, among others) and services to actively engage the public, improving repeat visit rates to fulfil their mission and respond as much as possible to the responsibility they have to the public (Anton, Camarero, and Garrido, 2018).

3. Controversies and doubts on marketing in museums

Marketing is a discipline which has taken on a progressively larger role as awareness of its usefulness has grown, since its birth in the United States, at the start of the twentieth century. With the development of the market economy, many non-profit organizations, including museums, began to realize that only by actively confronting the market could they stay alive and maintain their development (Melgar, Elisondo, and Chiecher, 2016).

Today, an increasing number of large museums apply marketing to supplement their management systems and modus operandi in order to adapt to the environment. However, since the introduction of modern marketing theory to museums, the debate in academia has never ceased (Rentschler and Reussner, 2002, p. 4). Certain art historians and museum curators have maintained the position that the ‘sanctity’ of museums and the ‘market’ are incompatible (Toepler, 2006, p. 102), feeling that marketing inevitably causes museums to deviate from their traditional function of collecting, researching and exhibiting cultural heritage. This utopian vision of considering the museum as a veritable sancta sanctorum, in the sense of an ‘untouchable’ and pure place that must not be ‘contaminated’ by an economic focus - which utopians see mostly as dystopian - has had to give way to a management style that cannot and should not be divorced from the laws of the market and the consequent search for economic profitability.

The rapid development of the market economy has a great impact on the traditional concept and value of museums. Today, many museums have developed their own marketing strategies: Among these, the most widely discussed strategy is that of the Louvre Museum (Coblence and Sabatier, 2014).

In 2007, France signed a contract with Abu Dhabi, and the two sides decided to jointly build the new Louvre headquarters in Abu Dhabi, allowing the city to use the name “Louvre” for more than 30 years, in exchange for €400 million. In addition, the UAE will pay almost €600 million more for the artwork loaned, guidance and exhibition organisations. (Huang, 2016, p. 46). From the outset, this
project has produced a great deal of controversy in art and academic circles, as the French government considers its artistic heritage to be a commercial product. Even some historians, such as Jean Clair and Roland Recht, and the director of the Musée d’Orsay, Françoise Cachin, openly criticized this arrangement, questioning whether the Louvre was “selling its soul” (Milliard, 2017). However, not only have these criticisms not prevented implementation of the project, but other museums now have similar expectations, for example, the British Museum (Mahony, Spiliopoulou, Routsis, and Kampsiori, 2017).

In our opinion, the collections are the shared heritage of humanity and a link for communication between countries, to be appreciated by as many people as possible. What France has done is also a new way of sharing art resources, in order to form a multicultural image that aims to build bridges between the West and the East, but without losing sight of its cultural and educational function, rather than over-emphasizing commercial interests. Otherwise, that approach could possibly have a negative impact on the public and be detrimental to the image of the museum.

As a rule, governments in many countries do not allow foreign symbols or logos to appear in their own museums, so as not to provoke cultural conflict. However, in 2007, the discussion about ‘whether or not Starbucks should leave the so-called Forbidden City’, in Beijing provoked a heated debate among the public (Tam and Kim, 2017). Many media, researchers and scholars, such as Rui Chenggang, believed that the Forbidden City was a place that brought together elements of traditional Chinese culture, and that Starbucks was not a symbol of that culture, and therefore represented a threat to the cultural attributes and image of the Forbidden City (Weatherley and Zhang, 2017). In line with this idea, they demanded that Starbucks be removed from the Forbidden City. Naturally, there are specialists who protect the cultural heritage, such as Du Xiaofan, who believed that there is no low or high level for restaurants per se, and stated that the Starbucks opened in the Forbidden City should be seen as an exchange between Chinese and American cultures, rather than a confrontation (Yang et al., 2007). In any case, Starbucks closed its doors due to the influence of public opinion.

A similar case, in October 2018, took place in Paris as a result of the Apple store located at Louvre underground shopping centre and the store announced its closure after nine years of business. From the moment the store officially opened, hundreds of tourists waited in line (Sanchez, 2018). Obviously, this store brought enormous profits to the Louvre, however in the end it was forced to close. As for the reasons, there were different opinions, but we believe that the most significant one was the significance the Louvre has for the French people: A symbol and cultural image of France. Without a doubt, the appearance of the Apple store gave rise to a major cultural conflict.

---

(1) The so-called Forbidden City in Beijing is the complex of historic buildings and museums in the old city of Beijing. This ensemble of monuments, as is well known, has been declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.
Another sizeable controversy is the cooperation between museums and luxury brands. Many museums have resorted to this practice: Louis Vuitton and the National Museum of China; Cartier’s exhibitions at the British Museum, the Hermitage in Saint Petersburg and the National Museum in Tokyo, among others. In Spain, the National Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum is the favourite museum for luxury brands to present their articles. Louis Vuitton, Bulgari, Givenchy and Cartier have all held exhibitions in this museum, which receives funds through the donation of its facilities (Ayala Aizpuru, Cuenca-Amigo and Cuenca Amigo, 2019). Obviously, this is excellent marketing, but it remains to be seen whether or not luxury items can be defined as works of art, and whether museums should put on show exhibits which are excessively commercial in nature.

Whether or not museums should give up space to raise funds also produces debate. The National Museum of China received 250,000 yuan (approximately €30,000) to organize a wedding. Thus, the controversy between citizens for and against was served up. Some felt that this private event was not an appropriate activity for a museum; and others believed that it was a way to “bring people together”, as long as it did not affect the normal exhibition or the security of the works and exhibits on display.

Not only in China but also museums in many other countries raise funds through this practice. El País reported that the large Spanish museums lighten the load of their bills by renting out spaces for private visits or events. The Prado Museum received €4,308 paid by a Russian couple in December 2018 so that they could contemplate their favourite paintings without any distractions. MNCARS (Reina Sofia museum) also received €1,203,625 for rental of space with a total of 98 events, which represented 3.14% of its budget. For the Thyssen-Bornemisza, this represents 4.4% of its budget. Although there is an existing debate, Miguel Zugaza, former director of the Prado Museum, said that ceding public spaces is an effective formula for increasing the income of these institutions, which are always in need of money, publicising them more widely, and conquering new audiences, always behind closed doors (Molina, 2019).

Today, although the museum community and governments generally believe that public, non-profit institutions can undertake commercial enterprise in keeping with the nature of the museum, these controversies limit the application of marketing strategies to some extent, as people equate ‘marketing’ with ‘making money’. The fundamental objective of marketing applied to museums is not to obtain income but, rather, to target society and the public, creating a positive space for development through a series of methods and processes to maximize the cultural value of the museum, as stated by researcher Zhang (2010b, p. 30).

Of course, marketing business in museums should not aim to obtain direct economic benefits in the short term, but, rather, become a strategy that leads to the image of museums filtering through into the minds of the population and provoking interest in visiting them. However, some museums have changed their primary role, such as collecting, protection, research and education, driven by economic interests.
This not only prevents the museum from fulfilling its social function, but will also have a negative impact on the public. The fundamental objective of producing income for museums is more to obtain social benefit, and economic profit is merely a necessary route to obtaining that social benefit. When museums ‘earn money’, it cannot be ignored that their basic functions are education and cultural dissemination.

Therefore, trying to balance the relationship between marketing and the future development of museums is of fundamental importance. Winning new audiences has meant that museum managers are resorting to new methods of attracting the public and turning museums into places for local development (Hervás Avilés, Sánchez Lázaro, and Castejón Ibáñez, 2017).

4. How can museums handle marketing effectively?

In the specific case of Spain, Spanish museums are recognized worldwide for the quality of their collections and exhibits. These collections form part of Spain’s cultural consciousness, and are a channel through which foreigners understand Spain. If Spanish museums apply an appropriate marketing strategy, this will contribute to the extension of Spanish history and culture, while at the same time fulfilling cultural and educational functions. This marketing strategy includes different media and supports to make the information you want to transmit reach the public. Some authors have dealt with this issue from the point of view of rail transport and how Spanish museums take advantage of the high-speed rail network to encourage visits to museums, combining their promotion with the railway system (Campa, Pagliara, López-Lambas, Arce, and Guirao, 2019).

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Spanish museums lack sufficient funds, especially since the beginning of the last economic crisis recently overcome (Santos, 2016). since state subsidies cannot meet all their operating needs. Added to this, according to official annual reports, there was a significant drop in visitor numbers during the years of economic crisis, although these figures are currently in the process of recovering. What we have to consider, therefore, is how Spanish museums can survive and develop under the conditions of the market economy and with limited financial support.

On this point, marketing is fundamental for the management of Spanish museums. According to Rentschler (2004, p. 140), the culture industries have undergone a process of adapting to new needs and have come to terms with the economic, social and aesthetic value of culture today. Thus, they are now treated as a group which needs to introduce creativity in order to enter a broader receiving market. This has to be done through literature, the media –both old and new– applying new technologies, but also through fashion, the performing arts, crafts and a host of other resources that help to attract the attention of the arts customer or visitor.

The introduction and use of these multiple resources requires that museum communication offices be professionalized in order to guarantee the success of the
marketing campaigns launched. With regard to professionalisation, Butler (2000) advocates a thorough knowledge of marketing concepts and processes and critically analyses their usefulness for application to cultural concepts. In this regard, Rentschler (2004, p. 145) quoting Andreasen (1985) recalls that one should not confuse, when analysing art consumer behaviour, marketing and sales.

According to Rentschler (2004, pp. 149-151), marketing has become one of the main components of the management strategies that museums must address, recognising its usefulness as one of the tools that contribute to increasing the positive return on the visitor’s museum experience (Sánchez-Sánchez and Montes-Botella, 2019). This forms an indisputable part of the set of products that the museum must manage in its traditional sense (collections, exhibitions and research) and it serves, at the same time, as an evaluator of the campaigns that the museum institution implements. Ruth Rentschler clearly demonstrates this tripartite relationship in her research in the figure below (Rentschler, 2004, p. 150, Fig. 8.2):

Figure 3. Tripartite relationship of marketing with the target audience, the product portfolio offered to attract more visitors and the organizational culture of marketing focused on the products on offer and how they are offered to the public.


In the article by Rentschler quoted, the concepts classified by the author are given in three columns.
Based on the previous model, we propose strategies aimed at optimizing the use of marketing, achieving a greater influx of visitors, disseminating culture and, at the same time, obtaining additional income in order to achieve sustainable development.

4.1. Planning attractive exhibitions

Exhibitions are the central ‘products’ of a museum, they are also the most direct way of meeting the needs of visitors, so we believe that this premise should be the main objective of marketing when applied to museum institutions.

However, one reason why some exhibitions are not successful, we believe, is because some of the content considered when organizing temporary exhibitions is not stimulating enough to capture the interest of a potential visiting public. Some authors have defined product-orientation in the artistic context as an emphasis on the intensive and continuous development of new products, and non-profit cultural organisations must adopt product-oriented creativity in order to develop new, high-quality products that renew and increase the consumer market (Camarero and Garrido, 2011, p. 34; Voss and Voss, 2000). In the context of the museum, product orientation means understanding that visitors value the exhibitions (Camarero and Garrido, 2011, p. 34).

On this point, we believe that some Spanish museums should organise exhibitions on up-to-date subjects, such as environmental pollution, climate change, food safety, among others, which are of great interest to the public and have social resonance. It would be a matter of linking the contents of historically and artistically valuable exhibits with the current problems that are pressing society. As an example, an exhibition of still life, linked to the problems of scarcity of resources to feed oneself adequately in different layers of society; or an exhibition on children painted by Murillo, linked to child poverty and survival in disadvantaged environments. This type of exhibition, with a social content, is often more attractive than permanent exhibitions because it not only gives priority to the aesthetic and historical aspect, but also encourages reflection, and not only encourages repeated visits by visitors, but also provides new knowledge and raises awareness about different problems that afflict society.

Furthermore, especially for museums of an archaeological nature, theme-based exhibitions can be organised that refer to the history of Spain and take as their starting point films and historical series. There is a precedent that was very well received in the National Museum of China, when it organised an exhibition of “everyday items from the Qing Dynasty”, showing jewellery, utensils, clothing from the period, as well as documents that contextualised the historical period, all of which appear in the TV history series about this dynasty.

In addition, selection of the themes for exhibitions should capture the curiosity of the public. A museum can be perceived as high quality because it often displays valuable exhibits or presents interesting theme-based exhibitions (Pusa and
Uusitalo, 2014, p. 20). On this point we believe that it is of interest to emphasize how to organize exhibitions which present totally different cultures, arts, customs and religions. As an example, in recent years, the travelling exhibition of Terracotta Warriors of Xi’an, presented in different countries including Spain, has had great acceptance in any of the countries it has been taken to. In addition to this, traditional Chinese medicine, Tibetan Buddhism, folklore, art and popular customs of Asian countries are all attractive themes for the Western public. This would offer exoticism and potential knowledge of cultures and customs far removed from people’s usual environment. Consequently, if museums take advantage of this element, we believe that they could attract more visitors and also produce considerable income.

4.2. Producing cultural programmes

Disseminating information and knowledge through cultural programmes is an effective Content Marketing strategy adopted by museums to communicate with both regular and potential visitors. In this strategy of Content Marketing, the aim is to publicize the production of cultural content, in order to promote new temporary exhibitions, or a new exhibition space, mainly to achieve an increase in the number of visitors (Mateos Rusillo, 2013, p. 17). Turning advertising into content is the most attractive point of the cultural programme: its aim is to encourage the interest of potential visitors in the exhibits and works of art, which will undoubtedly increase the number of visitors to the museum itself. The following are cases that we have studied in this research and that we consider relevant to bring up here, on the subject of content marketing.

The British Museum collaborated with BBC Radio 4 in 2010, broadcasting a programme “A history of the world in 100 objects”, where it presented the public with the history of the world and the evolution of humanity through 100 selected pieces, with one object per episode (Lambourn, 2011, p. 529). For a time, it was a very popular and much commented programme, and a book with the same title was published and later a travelling exhibition launched, exhibiting these 100 pieces around the world. This cultural programme not only attracted the attention of the visitor, and aroused curiosity about the exhibits but also helped the British Museum to fulfil its mission of cultural and educational dissemination.

Similar programmes were also promoted in China. The country’s nine major museums collaborated with CCTV (China Central Television) to produce the programme ‘National Treasure’. In each episode three exhibits from the above-mentioned museums were presented in a theatrical way: short documentaries played out by actors telling the story of each exhibit selected, followed by a discussion presented by curators and specialists from each museum. In the opinion of the audience, the programme was informative, entertaining and original (Yu, 2018, pp. 38-39). The success of this programme established connections between the museums and the public, increasing the number of visitors to these nine museums. In fact, we consider
this to be a good example of Content Marketing, as it easily reaches the public not interested in traditional advertising, consulting catalogues or books, or advertising through banners, which, on many occasions, are blocked by users.

The documentary “Master in Forbidden City” reveals the unknown stories of the restorers of China’s cultural heritage, working inside the Forbidden City, as well as the restoration procedures, the protection of the collections and the palace itself. The documentary highlights, above all, the “artisan spirit” rather than the professional knowledge related to restoration (An, 2016, pp. 104-106), thus narrowing the gap between the audience and the specialists and historians.

Other interesting documentaries in China were “Every Treasure tells a Story”, more like a series of short episodes, showing 100 exhibits from ancient China, with a total of 100 5-minute episodes in many languages, broadcasted in the mainstream media of other countries, thus promoting the dissemination of Chinese culture and attracting many visitors from abroad.

Similarly, Spanish museums could also produce similar programmes presenting museum collections and exhibits to make the world aware of Spain’s history and thus increase visits. As Corbos and Popescu (2011, p. 307) indicate, quoting Moldoveanu and Ioan- Frânc (1997), the success of marketing campaigns consists of the ability of the supplier to turn the potential customer into a regular customer. Although the RTVE consortium’s second channel has cultural programmes and, from time to time, it is possible to watch documentaries related to museums or certain aspects of museums, the reality is that effective marketing campaigns must be implemented to encourage the population to come more frequently to watch these cultural programmes which also contribute to raising the level of cultural knowledge and create interest in certain museums.

4.3. Organising educational activities

For the museum, a non-profit institution, no matter what form of marketing is adopted, the ultimate goal is to return the profit to society. How can this goal be achieved? ICOM considers “education” as the common goal among the functions of the museum, in other words, all the work of the museum should be done with an educational aim in view. For decades, the management of museums has attempted to find a balance between two models: the first of these, essentially concerned with suitable conservation of the exhibits and venues under their custody; and the second, to offer a good service to visitors, capable of educating at the same time as entertaining them (Mateos Rusillo, 2013, p. 17). The logical development of museums in order to reach not only a wider public but also to seek the loyalty of visitors through a positive experience during a tour of the museum facilities, has gradually shifted towards the second of these approaches (Mateos Rusillo, 2013, p. 17).

When the museum is perceived as a “product”, attention should be paid to both the main product (collections and exhibitions) and the add-on product, such as
educational programmes (Pusa and Uusitalo, 2014, p. 20). As museums evolve into institutions that collect, care for and communicate information on exhibits, their educational role expands (Hooper Greenhill, 1998, p. 26). Today, some Spanish museums such as the MNCARS and Madrid’s Museum of Archaeology (Museo Arqueológico Nacional de Madrid), among others, have moved from a focus on organizing exhibitions to a focus on the cultural and educational experience of the public, making the museum a place of dialogue for all, offering educational activities to all types of people, from experts and scholars to the general public, including providing appropriate activities for vulnerable groups. In this way, the concept of “education” would be defined as a broader-based service to reach everyone.

Educational activities consist of visits for the general public, academic conferences for experts and specialists, and workshops for students and families. All these educational activities contribute to making the museum’s collections known to a wider public and also to improving the image of the museum institution. But in fact, education should not be limited to the physical environment of the museum. Rather, it should take various forms in order to be implemented according to the needs and wishes of its users. Visitor orientation is more than a desire to bring culture closer to the public. It is also about knowing what the visitor demands in order to adapt to their expectations (Camarero and Garrido, 2011, p. 34). For example, designing websites for cooperation between schools and museums, offering courses of interest. In addition, museum guides and specialists should also take the initiative to go out to schools to help students to broaden their knowledge. The activity “Getting into Schools”, organized by the Wuxi Museum of China, was the first to break with the traditional idea that museum education can only take place inside the museum. In order to take education out to remote areas, rural areas, and deprived areas with a lack of cultural resources, exhibitions can be organized using vehicles to transport exhibits and learning materials, i.e. the ‘Mobile Museum’.

In addition, applications could be developed with games related to collections and exhibitions to attract children and interact with them and also young people, at the same time as learning and being entertained. This is a way to unconsciously attract children to a cultural context through play. As an example, in 2016, the Beijing Palace National Museum collaborated with Tencent to create a game application called “An Emperor’s Day”, using classic elements from the Museum’s collections and some portraits of the Ming and Qing emperors. The APP was aimed at children between the ages of 9 and 11, to experience a day in the life of the emperor in the Ming and Qing dynasties, with the aim of planning his time more effectively. Through this APP, the Museum also received many visits from children and their parents that year.

---

4.4. Developing merchandising products

Merchandising products, based on the collections and exhibitions, bring unique, interesting, modern and practical cultural advantages. Inevitably, increased sales have an impact on the visitor experience and the presentation of culture in general (Larkin, 2016, p. 109). These products represent an interaction between the museum and the public which continues beyond the time of the visit. They are also an important way of raising funds, disseminating culture and expanding the functions of museums. As stated by Ampuero Canellas, et al. (2018, p. 94), merchandising products contribute to the educational aim of the museum, completing the educational function of exhibitions and expanding this beyond the walls of the museum. Moreover, these products advertise the museum and increase knowledge and recognition of them.

The most famous museums earn very considerable income from merchandising. In the case of the United Kingdom, driven largely by government pressure due to the economic situation, museums there are attempting to navigate through a volatile funding climate by developing self-produced sources of income (Larkin, 2016, p. 109 and p. 115). According to the news from Sohu, annual sales of the British Museum’s merchandising products reached $200 million, becoming one of the main sources of income for this museum (Sohu, 2018). The same news item stated that annual sales in merchandising by the Metropolitan Museum of New York amounted to a sum between $400 and $500 million, which amounts to 80% of its total income, and the total number of items exceeded twenty thousand. The museum’s stores are an independent industry, spread throughout the world, with a total of sixteen stores (Toepler and Kirchberg, 2002).

Since 2008, when Chinese public museums introduced entry free of charge, they have been to look for other ways to produce income. With the development of the cultural and creative industry, some Chinese museums have seen the enormous potential for developing their merchandising, which has proved to be an effective way to increase income.

Thus, for example, the National Museum of the Forbidden City Palace made annual sales of one billion yuan (approximately €125 million), and the National Museum of China authorized the reproduction of - and inspiration in - exhibits to create new merchandising products, granting the intellectual property of many works to the best-known domestic and foreign designers. Merchandising with these products produced sales of 792 million yuan (€99 million) in 2018 (Guangzhou Daily, 2019).

In Spain, according to the news published in Cinco Días (Álvarez, 2016) the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum invoiced €3 million in 2015 for the sale of souvenirs online. At the Guggenheime Museum in Bilbao, 10% of the museum’s income comes from sales in shops. In 2014, the Prado Museum exceeded €5 million in store sales, a 6% increase over the previous year. From these published figures, we can see that, although merchandising has been well received in recent years, it is not the main
source of income for Spanish museums when compared to the countries mentioned above.

Based on the regular personal visits to museum shops and our consultations with the museums’ official websites, in our modest opinion, we consider that the MNCARS, the Prado Museum and the National Museum of Archaeology, among others, reveal deficiencies in marketing ideas and methods. On the one hand, there is a lack of attention towards the market, and the development of merchandising products is divorced from demand and lacks attractiveness. On the other hand, the way of selling and the sales channel are relatively traditional. To optimize this, the following proposals are recommended:

4.4.1. Extending distribution channels and ways of selling

Traditionally, visitors shop at the on-site stores in the museum. With the growing development of the Internet, online stores would be an extension of the on-site store and online transactions would become another form of sale for the museum shops. This method contributes to transforming a purely commercial business into culture marketing. Taking the example of the online shop on the Tmall platform (operated by Alibaba Group), it classifies all products in detail and offers a detailed introduction of creative sources, historical references, design elements and other aspects. In this way, it deepens consumers’ cultural awareness of merchandising products and promotes sales (Bai and Zhou, 2019, p. 3).

The British Museum has already noted the great advantage of online sales. In addition to the enormous potential of the Chinese market, online sales of its products are no longer only sold through the Internet channel at home, but also abroad. It partnered with Alibaba Group in 2018, and in just two weeks of opening, its store on the Tmall platform sat at the top of the sales ranking (kknews, 2018). This not only increased additional revenue but also created a knock-on effect of drawing the public’s attention to the museum and expanding its visibility.

This could be a new idea for Spanish museums to sell their merchandising products, entering e-commerce platforms, such as Amazon or Alibaba, among others, and thus expanding their sales channels. The more people that have access to purchasing museum merchandising products, the more interest there will be in discovering the origin of the exhibits, which will undoubtedly increase the number of visits to the official museum website, and later, personal visits to the museum itself.

(4) As part of the research on items on show, promoted and sold in museum shops over the years of this research, our personal visits to museums have focused not only on the exhibition of the works of art they hold, but also on observing the context of the museum and its functioning as an institution.
Table 1. SWOT analysis of the on-line model for Spanish museums

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SWOT analysis</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strengths</strong></td>
<td>1. Increases the number of potential visitors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Provides sufficient information about products to consumers.</td>
<td>2. Expands the visibility of the museum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Breaks down geographical and space-time restrictions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Expands product categories.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Increases additional income for the museum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weaknesses</strong></td>
<td><strong>Threats</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too virtual: customers can’t have a real experience.</td>
<td>Competitiveness of products from other museums.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: in-house.

4.4.2. Incorporating the concept of ‘culture + creativity’

Merchandising can be seen as a marketing of the arts and the management function (Toepler and Kirchberg, 2002, citing Kotler & Kotler, 1998; McLean, 1997). When museums develop merchandising products, their starting point is usually not based on the principle of economic efficiency, but rather places more emphasis on the added value of the products and their social benefits in the communication process, focusing on the public and the information concerning the knowledge of the heritage of human history and culture (Song and Li, 2018, pp. 1-2). Therefore, adequate development of merchandising for the museum is an extension of the exhibition, without losing its cultural and educational functions at any time - never as simply a business. In this sense, merchandising products based on “culture + creativity” will position museums as transmitters of culture and knowledge and will distance them from mere commercial business.

The designs of the articles are increasingly “inspired” by the collections, which can give them a “second life” beyond the confines of the museum, and at the same time offer the user a commitment more akin to the original material culture (Larkin, 2016, p. 116). The British Museum places great emphasis on the merchandising of its outstanding collections. One of the best-known exhibits is the “Rosetta Stone”, which has inspired many items on sale, from eco-friendly bags to chocolates, covering almost all categories of best-selling merchandising products. This is therefore a good combination of creativity, culture and usefulness.
The Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), also in the UK, always has merchandising items in its shops which are related to the temporary exhibition on at any time. These “souvenirs” help visitors to remember the exhibitions they have visited.

The Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco, USA, completely transfers the concept of art collections over to the dishes of its in-situ restaurant, which undoubtedly stimulates the desire of visitors to acquire them. This again leads us to reflect on the importance of marketing in museums, creating a variety of exquisite dishes called “Art that can be eaten” to attract visitors: The Piet Mondrian-style cake, Frida Kahlo’s themed menu, and dishes based on Alice B’s recipe book, Toklas. All this contributes to making the visit unforgettable, due to its originality.

One might think that merchandising means trivializing art. However, we believe that rather than trivializing art, it contributes to the effective maintenance of the museums; therefore, if these new products and services mentioned above contribute to increase income and to alleviate the deficient financing of the museums, as well as transmitting knowledge of culture and expanding the functions of the museum, these ideas are welcome. In this regard, Weisbrod (1998, p. 54) states that non-profit organisations do not like commercial activities because of possible distractions from their main tasks and objectives. However, where income is insufficient for their maintenance, commercial activities such as merchandising provide additional income for products and services related to the museum’s mission.

Conclusions

Museums are a fundamental part of our cultural environment and a relevant site for the collection, research, preservation and display of cultural heritage. Moreover, as a public educational and social institution, museums take on the task of disseminating culture.

However, today’s museums face unprecedented challenges. On the one hand, the growing demands of the public require that museums continue to expand their functions and services. On the other, the scarcity of funds and the decline in public and private support in the form of donations have forced museums to rely increasingly on market-based income (Toepler, 2006, pp. 100-101). Given this premise, marketing has been introduced into museum management to adapt to the new socio-economic environment and maintain its survival (Hopper-Greenhill, 1998, pp. 43-44), albeit giving rise to controversy and debate.

In fact, the introduction of marketing of museums is a management strategy to fulfil their mission to serve society. The process of marketing is critical in researching, understanding, attracting, maintaining and serving the public, which enhances the influence of museums and establishes and improves their image. Of course, for the museum, marketing is a “double-edged sword” (Shan, 2017, p. 421). On the one hand, it contributes to the development of the museum, and on the other hand, excessive abuse of marketing also puts museums under threat of excessive
commercialisation. It is necessary to find a balance between marketing activities and the social mission of the museum in order to secure sufficient sources of funding, while at the same time ensuring its public function.

On this point, we consider that this article could contribute to keeping alive the academic debate and discussion over museums, with the following approach: How Spanish museums can apply marketing strategies to maintain their operations in line with the market economy, while at the same time not losing sight of their basic functions, i.e., culture and education, returning the benefits to society.

To this end, we aim to provide some appropriate practical strategies for marketing in Spanish museums, which we summarise below as part of the final reflections or conclusions of our article. As is mandatory, these strategies must be directly related to the objectives initially set out, where we indicated that these strategies aimed to provide a balance between financial solutions and the preservation of the cultural and educational functions of the museums.

Firstly, planning creative exhibitions is a priority in museum marketing projects, helping to increase visitor numbers and repeat visitor rates.

Secondly, working with television channels to broadcast cultural programmes related to collections, to raise awareness and give museums more visibility to attract potential visitors to museums in situ, after accounts in documentaries and virtual tours, either in these programmes or on the official pages.

It is also important to organise educational projects, not only at museums, but also to go out to schools and remote areas to reach more people, as well as designing course websites and applications to interact with the public.

Finally comes developing merchandising items to increase revenue and motivate interest in the exhibitions, collaborating with e-commerce to expand sales channels for Spanish museums; manufacturing products from a “culture + creativity” perspective to position the museum as a transmitter of culture and knowledge, balancing the commercial and cultural relationship.

References


Museums and Marketing: A Controversy over New Strategies


Notes on Contributor

Name: Yin Li
Position: Researcher
School / Faculty: Escuela Internacional de Doctorado
University: Universidad Rey Juan Carlos
Address: Paseo de los Artilleros, 38, 28032 Madrid
Email: sofia_1212@163.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-1710-8275