

MAPPING AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT OF CULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract. Audience engagement is a new strategic approach of cultural organizations when they aim to turn audience members to active participants and thus build their personal relationships with the organization. There are various suggestions how to make audience engagement stronger, but lack of evidence how to monitor it. In this article, we introduce integrated approach to audience engagement while evaluating and analysing the concept of mapping. The created prototype of audience engagement mapping can help cultural organizations to efficiently measure and evaluate their actions for choosing effective audience engagement measures. The empirical part of the article includes a study of 18 cultural organizations of Kaunas city. The study revealed numerous gaps among the theoretical recommendations and practical approaches of the organizations. In practice, the organizations tend to pay attention to the online activities, especially for affecting accessibility and cognition, however, there is lack of collective creation and audience involvement and engagement into programme development, discussions and context expansion.

Key words: audience development, audience engagement, cultural organizations, cultural and creative industries, engagement tools, mapping.

Introduction

Relevance of the article

For both commercial and non-profit cultural organizations the efficiency of management processes have become equally important in terms of art quality. The aspect of audience engagement is especially important to them due to the general trend of decrease (or remaining stable) of art consumption combined to the expanding number and variety of art organizations (Milindasunta, 2016). However, there is lack of research works which could help cultural organizations to monitor activities that promote their audience engagement, reveal their strengths and weaknesses, identify the corresponding audience needs, as well as position their activities in the context of audience engagement.

Level of problem investigation

The audience engagement concept has various definitions and interpretations of its components in the academic literature. Nevertheless, the main idea is that each cultural organization seeks to involve audience members physically, mentally, and emotionally to various cultural activities, this way creating relationships between organization and audience. Cultural organizations seeking to make audience engagement stronger before or after an event could apply a variety of tools. For example, it could be technologies- and media-based participatory activities, co-operation with other institutions or providing the ability to find additional information about an event (Harlow, 2014, Brown, Novak, 2007, Taheri, 2014, etc.).

Scientific problem

What tool could help cultural organizations efficiently measure and evaluate the engagement of their audience?

Object of the article – a prototype of audience engagement map.

Aim of the article– to suggest and evaluate a general mapping tool to efficiently gauge and evaluate actions needed to coordinate and choose effective audience engagement measures. The concept of mapping is suggested in the article for analyzing and monitoring audience engagement and the tools that affect it. The created prototype of audience engagement mapping can help cultural organizations to efficiently measure and evaluate their actions for choosing effective audience engagement measures.

Objectives of the article:

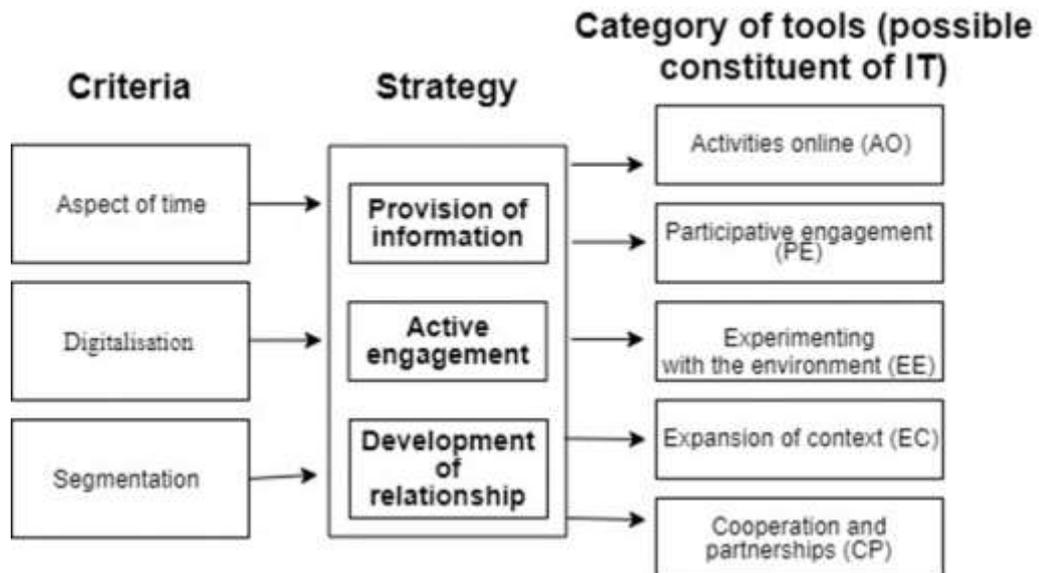
1. To analyze the concept of audience engagement.
2. To evaluate the efficiency of audience engagement mapping concept based on cultural organizations activities and practices.
3. To create a prototype of an audience engagement map.

Methods of the article: The research of the scientific literature, concept development, empirical research, model building and expert analysis methods are applied. In the first part of the article the audience development and audience engagement concepts in academic literature are discussed and summarized. In the second part, the audience engagement concept reflection in the cultural organization's practical activities is analyzed by presenting results of empirical research at 18 cultural organizations. In the third part, the model of conceptual map of audience engagement is presented and evaluated.

1. Concept of Audience Engagement in academic literature

The research literature advises to employ various tools to make audience engagement stronger. There are some prevailing tendencies in Europe to implement audience development and engagement based on application of digital tools and media that not only provide more information to the organization but also assist the audience member to use the desired content and information (Milano, 2015). The impact of technologies in audience engagement promotion activities by the organization is based on not only on marketing principles (increase of accessibility, dispersion of information, advertising), passive content use (viewing broadcasts of plays, listening to music), digital content provision (virtual exhibitions, recordings), but also on active participation while creating (collective creation platforms, ability to add to the content being created, virtual discussion rooms, etc.). A study performed in 2010 distinguishes the following 5 categories which enable interaction between cultural and art content in the digital environment: accessibility (when looking for opportunities and planning participation), cognition (when looking for more information on a creative team or event), experience (when seeking for a direct experience online), sharing and creation (when creating together) (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, 2011). When analyzing audience engagement tools in both online and offline modes, we identify them as follows: activities online (AO) (websites, blogs, social media, virtual tours and virtual exhibitions, event and music recordings, virtual discussion rooms, games), participative engagement (PE) activities (meetings with creators, various occupations, workshops, general creation practice, etc.), activities for experimenting with the environment (EE) in attractive and innovative ways applied by cultural organizations for renewing their halls, entrances, etc. and engaging the visitor since the very entrance into the organization (digital interactive activities in an organization, installations in the halls that reflect production timeline and scenography, etc.), cooperation and partnerships (CP) building activities that help to expand existing resources, reach new audiences and increase engagement (live broadcasts of performance art in cinema theatres, events outside an organization, etc.), activities for expanding the context (EC) and providing additional information (seminars, discussions after a performance, opportunity to watch rehearsals, etc.) (Harlow & Field, 2011, Harlow & Heywood, 2015, Brown, 2011, etc.). It is important to note that technologies can be integrated into all the identified categories.

Several different perspectives may be specified according to the possibilities to apply these tools for analysis and evaluation purposes: firstly, for defining which strategy they are based on (developing mutual connection, promoting active engagement or providing additional information); secondly, for analyzing the total amount of audience members and the ways they are engaged (by evaluating reach, number of views, comments, likes and other indicators captured by social media), and thirdly, for evaluating in the context of segmentation (whether it is directed to the target audience), and time (whether it is a constantly employed tool, whether it is repetitive or one-time) with regard to the fact that the audience engagement is a long-term process based on combining short-term activities and limited duration projects.



Source: created by the authors; based on Tomka (2016), Harlow & Field (2011), McCarthy (2001), Harlow & Heywood (2015), Brown & Novak (2007), Lotina (2015), Huang (2019), Milano (2015), Kawashima (2000), Frau-Meigs (2014), Brown (2011)

Fig. 1. Prototype of mapping tools that promote audience engagement

Having summarized the aspects of audience engagement discussed in the research literature, we introduce the aggregated prototype of audience engagement tool by mapping the most frequently named tools along the highlighted categories and perspectives (Fig.1). The presented prototype does not only generalize and categorize audience engagement tools, but may also serve as an instrument for cultural organizations to look for means for strengthening audience engagement and strategically choose categories to be strengthened. It can also be used as a monitoring tool that would help to categorize and position the employed audience engagement tools for evaluating them from the temporal point of view.

2. Empirical evaluation of the audience engagement mapping concept based on practices and activities of cultural organizations

Research methodics

Aim of the research – to evaluate the validity of the created conceptual map and ability of the proposed mapping concept to be applied for audience engagement and development strategies at the cultural organizations

Objectives of the research:

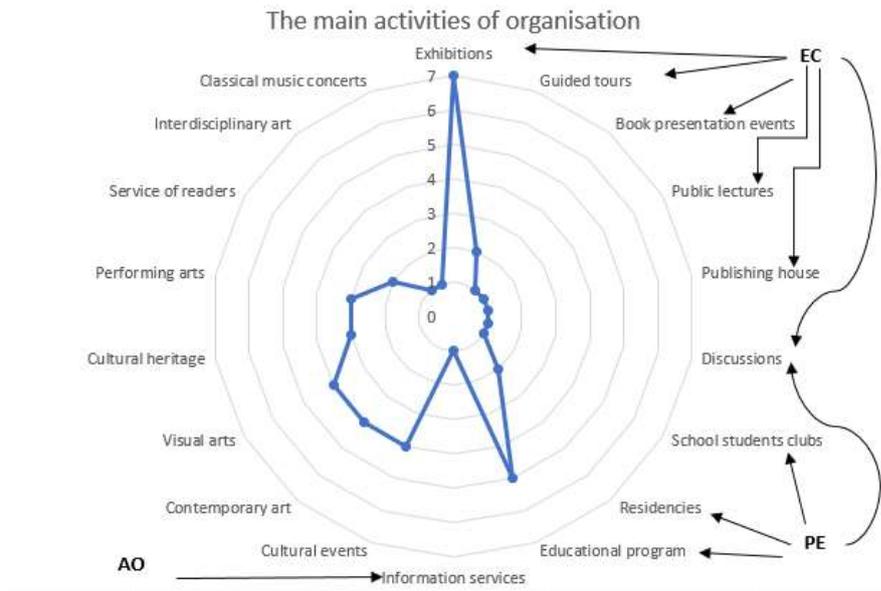
1. To identify audience engagement tools according to their priorities assigned by cultural companies.
2. To analyze and evaluate the difference of theoretical findings in the research literature from the practical application of the tools by the cultural organizations.

Research methods. Two empirical studies were carried out in order to reach the research objectives. During the first study, the cultural organizations survey results were processed for analyzing the first objective. Although the survey was conducted for different purpose and related to audience development strategies, part of the survey questions was related to the audience engagement and served for the empirical study. The results showed that the organizations do not provide sufficient information and do not clearly address many of their activities for audience engagement. Therefore, we did the second empirical research where we analyzed the practical activities as reflected in the Internet media presence of the selected organizations. The information for the empirical study was captured in several sources: the corresponding website sections of the organizations, the news published on the websites (the time span for analysis was January 1, 2018 - September 5, 2019, and posts in the social networks accounts of the organizations). This selected period reflects differences in the frequency and variety of the tools used. Using these two types of

empirical research gave us the possibility to identify and compare theoretical and practical approaches and their analytical capacity.

Research sample. 18 Kaunas cultural organizations (that submitted applications to participate in Kaunas 2022 audience development teaching sessions of August - September of 2018).

During survey research, the questions provided in the survey encompass information about an organization (its type, status, number of employees, funding sources), main and additional activities, audience research practices, and challenges that the organizations face. Out of 18 organizations under analysis, 16 are budgetary institutions funded by the municipality or the state, whereas 2 organizations have the status of non-profit making organizations. Most of the applications were submitted by performing arts organizations (5), museums (4) and interdisciplinary cultural centers (4). 2 libraries, 2 galleries, and 1 biennial. The main constant activities that the operating organizations pointed out are mainly an expansion of context (EC) (exhibitions, guided tours, book presentation events and etc.), participative engagement (educational activities, school student clubs, residencies and etc.), activities online (information services). Even though not all the organizations pointed out educations along with the main activities (only 5 out of 18 mentioned it) but 94% of them pointed out that they were implementing educational programs when this question was provided in the upcoming stages. This shows that many of the organizations see educational activities as an additional activity that creates added value or is irregular, but participative engagement is a very important element for audience engagement.



Source: created by the authors

Fig. 2. Main activities of the organizations are divided into tool categories (N=18)

15 out of 18 organizations point out to be collecting and accumulating information on audiences. The main methods for collecting information are as follows: data of sales and registration systems, online and physical surveys, data of the loyalty program. The least collected pieces of information deal with age and the exact number of visitors. The provided data shows that most organizations carry out registrations to events or collect information to send newspapers (collecting email address 72 percent), and collect statistical data rather than to figure out the true needs of audience and to know the audience better (segmentation), 50% of organizations use the data to promote events, and only 35% analyze the data when planning new programs, 15% of the organizations collect data yet do not analyze it. This research reveals that cultural organizations in Kaunas mainly focus on marketing, but not audience engagement. Because of that, we did a qualitative analysis of the websites and social media data, seeking to understand what kind of audience engagement measures cultural organization uses.

Empirical study results show that one of the most popular constant tools is communication and promotion of engagement on Facebook (Fig. 3). Social network Instagram is used less frequently and

is especially rarely used (only one-time in one of 4 organizations) in interdisciplinary cultural centers. YouTube is used by museums and performing arts institutions. Meanwhile, galleries and some of the museums also publish their activities on Twitter, and one of the museums sometimes uses Pinterest. The second most frequently used tool (repeated the most) are various events that add to an organization's activities (for instance, film reviews or concerts in the library, literary reading sessions in the theatre, etc.). It is believed that organizations use these activities to develop their audience and promote their engagement by providing various new experiences. The third tool deals with educational occupations that are intended for various audiences, i.e., families, children, seniors, etc. These activities are often repeated or constant in almost all of the organizations. This can be found among constant tools mainly in museums. Almost all organizations constantly or repeatedly carry out activities outside the organization; this includes various participations in the city, national or foreign festivals, display of exhibits in other organizations or public places, etc. These are also important tools in order to attract new audiences.

A volunteering program is the most popular in libraries and museums and is carried out 100% there; however, not all of the organizations use it as a constant practice. For instance, 50% of museums implement volunteering only in random cases when they look for volunteers for a specific event. An organization may try to keep the volunteers in their daily practices; however, there is no information about this. Over 60% of organizations try to engage audiences into various activities by sometimes suggesting to join the process of generating ideas, applying in various invitations, providing items (e.g., a bathtub in a festival's advertising campaign or a guitar in the implementation of the play). In order to introduce audiences to the backstage of an organization, the personalities who create there or creators who are presented, social networks are used to present information about them, share their thoughts and insights. Thematic excursions are mostly employed in performing arts organizations.

Even though theoretical works provide the invitation to create content together as an important element that promoted audience engagement, only one organization has such a platform. Virtual tours, mobile applications, and virtual museums, expositions are also not frequently used tools. Events for people with special needs (e.g., plays for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, the blind) or adaptation of content for them (video recordings with sign language) help organizations to attract target audiences; however, only sporadic organizations employ these tools.

3. Prototype of audience engagement map

In summary, analyzing the theoretical audience engagement concept (Fig. 1), questionnaire research results (Fig. 2), and empirical study results, we created a conceptual map of audience engagement (Fig. 3). This map includes and evaluates criteria (such as the aspect of time (constant, repeated, one-time) and digitalization, but we cannot estimate the segmentation aspect) and categories of tools. Analyzing this map, we also could see what audience engagement measures cultural organization should use according to theory and which they practically use.

Both theory and practical activities mostly focus on activities online and expansion of context. Cooperation and partnerships and experimenting with the environment have the most not used potential. Analyzing the tools mentioned in audience engagement mapping according to the typography provided in Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (2011), we can see that organizations apply most of the tools online, especially when focusing on reach and cognition categories, and less – on sharing and creating categories. There is no opportunity for audience members to get experiences in the digital space. Meanwhile, offline activities in an organization are oriented towards this the most, i.e., experience and cognition categories when creation is possible not only in volunteering, carrying out practice (this depends on the type of volunteering as well), but also reach is formed by means of activities outside the organization. Participative engagement is implemented in this case the most. However, according to the existing data, organizations cannot satisfy all the needs of the audience, especially creating together, promoting discussions, originally presented additional context.

Conclusions

1. The audience engagement concept has various definitions and component interpretations in academic literature, but until now, no research could help cultural organizations to carry out monitoring of the tools that promote their audience engagement, see into the strengths and weaknesses, identify which audience needs it responds to, as well as position their activities in the context of audience engagement. For this reason, we suggest a prototype of an audience engagement map.
2. Organizations employ certain activities and may promote audience engagement. The main category of tools are activities online, participative engagement, experimenting with the environment, expansion of context, cooperation, and partnerships. In order to monitor audience engagement activities, it is also important to estimate the aspects of time, digitalization and segmentation.
3. The empirical study of cultural organizations allows us to summarize, identify audience engagement activities in a cultural organization, categorize them and evaluate links with theory. Using 60% of tools defined in the literature and not creating conditions for mutual creation, active engagement into creating a program, organizations cannot satisfy all the needs of their audience. However, it is recommended to carry out an additional expert study of tool evaluation and rate the weight of each of the tool categories as well as what their interaction is to determine what tools are most expedient to employ by cultural organizations in order to implement their audience engagement goals.

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| No. | Tool | Category of tools | Method | Constant (%) | Repeated (%) | One-time (%) |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------|--------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| In theory and practice | | | | | | |
| 1 | Webpage | AO | ⊕ | 100 | | |
| 2 | Acts in social media | AO | ⊕ | 100 | | |
| | Facebook | | ⊕ | 100 | | |
| | Instagram | | ⊕ | 44 | 5 | 5 |
| | Youtube | | ⊕ | | 28 | |
| | Twitter | | ⊕ | 5 | 17 | |
| | Tripadvisor | | ⊕ | 11 | | |
| | Pinterest | | ⊕ | | 5 | |
| 3 | Various events | EC | ⌒ | 11 | 78 | 11 |
| 4 | Various occupations, workshops | CP | ⌒ | 22 | 50 | 5 |
| 5 | Events outside an organisation | PE | ⌒ | 33 | 33 | 11 |
| 6 | Audience engagement into programme development | PE | ⊕⌒ | 11 | 22 | 28 |
| 7 | Meetings with creators | EC | ⌒ | 5 | 28 | 11 |
| 8 | Interactive games on social media (competitions, tests, etc.) | AO | ⊕ | | 17 | 22 |
| 9 | Provision of additional information in the digital space | AO/ EC | ⊕ | 4 | 24 | 3 |
| 10 | Cooperation with other organisations | CP | ⌒ | 17 | 28 | |
| 11 | Digital interactive activities in the organisation | EE/ EC | ⌒ | 28 | | |
| 12 | Virtual exhibitions | EC/ AO | ⊕ | 22 | 5 | |
| 13 | Virtual tours | AO | ⊕ | 17 | | |
| 14 | Special events for communities | CP/ EC | ⌒ | | 8 | 3 |
| 15 | General creation practice | PE | ⊕ | 5 | | |
| In practice | | | | | | |
| 1 | Volunteering, training programmes | PE | ⌒ | 33 | 17 | 17 |
| 2 | Excursions | EC | ⌒ | 11 | 28 | 11 |
| 3 | Newsletters | AO | ⊕ | 50 | | |
| 4 | Video recordings | AO/ EC | ⊕ | 11 | 11 | 11 |
| 5 | Live broadcasts | AO/ EC | ⊕ | | 11 | 17 |
| 6 | Content for groups with special needs | CP | ⊕⌒ | 5 | 17 | |
| 7 | Night events | EC | ⌒ | | | 17 |
| 8 | Mobile application | AO | ⊕ | 11 | | |
| 9 | Virtual publications, catalogues | AO | ⊕ | 11 | | |
| 10 | Gifts for visitors | CP | ⌒ | | | 5 |
| 11 | Visitor's vocabulary | EC | ⌒ | | | 5 |
| In theory | | | | | | |
| 1 | Blog | AO | ⊕ | | | |
| 2 | Digital games before the visit | CP/ EC /AO | ⊕ | | | |
| 3 | Virtual discussion rooms, platforms that promote discussion | AO/ PE | ⊕ | | | |
| 4 | SMartART – information about the creation is provided by taking its photo | AO/ EC | ⊕ | | | |
| 5 | Live broadcasts of performance arts in cinema theatres | AO/ CP | ⌒ | | | |
| 6 | Installations in the halls that reflect the production timeline and scenography | EC/ EE | ⌒ | | | |
| 7 | Recreational zones where one can sit down, read books, magazines, etc. | EE | ⌒ | | | |
| 8 | Opportunity to watch rehearsals | EC | ⌒ | | | |
| 9 | Provision of context before the event or during it | EC | ⌒ | | | |

⊕ Digital ⌒ Non-digital

Source: created by the authors

Fig.3 A prototype of audience engagement map