# Instagram and the museum experience: Theorising the connection through aesthetics, space and sharing

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**Instagram and the museum experience: Theorising the connection through aesthetics, space and sharing**

**Abstract**

Many museum or art gallery visitors record their experience through social media platforms. Instagram is a case in point. Instagram is an application for mobile devices where people post images and comments, sharing their experiences in different places, with different people. This paper shares data from a project exploring people's art gallery visitations and how they engage with Instagram in such spaces. The research aimed to answer the following research questions: What are the current practices of art gallery visitors using Instagram? and why do visitors use Instagram to experience the art gallery? Findings showed people use Instagram in art galleries for a range of reasons and these include to extend and evolve their aesthetic experience, to share their experience, and to mediate gallery space. The significance of these findings may influence decisions made by gallery curators to enhance visitor experience as well as people's expressive response to artworks.

**Keywords:** art gallery, museum, aesthetic experience, Instagram, sharing, space

**Introduction**

When people visit museums or art galleries, they often record their experiences of art through a range of social media platforms (Author 1 2020). One such platform is Instagram as it is an application for mobile devices where people post images and comments. People's responses to art are important as it means they have engaged with exhibitions through the expression of their thoughts and feelings. When curatorial design is well considered this kind of engagement can be

enhanced (Budge, 2017). As such, it is important to know how visitors to art galleries use Instagram as part of this engagement with art. Also, it is vital we know why people use Instagram as this can inform future development of exhibition spaces and programs.

This paper shares data from a project exploring people's art gallery or museum visitations and how they engage with Instagram in such spaces. The research aimed to answer the following research questions: What are the current practices of art gallery visitors using Instagram? and why do visitors use Instagram to experience the art gallery? Without such knowledge there could be a risk that people have limited engagement with art and that exhibitions have lessened impact on people's aesthetic experience, hence transformation from viewing art both personally and socially. The significance of investigating people's practices and reasons for using Instagram during and after their art gallery visit includes assisting gallery curators' decisions to enhance visitor experience as well as people's expressive response to artworks.

**Review of the literature**

*Aesthetic Experience*

An aesthetic experience involves some form of affect and appreciation of something that is inherently beautiful, consequently representing fullness of experience (Dewey 1934). Aesthetic experience often occurs when we interact with art and can influence us behaviourally and cognitively (Author 2 and colleague 2022/in press). It can be self-satisfying, the act in itself is worthwhile or has value as learning or knowing something new is intrinsically rewarding (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1999). Learning and knowledge are deeply connected parts of the aesthetic experience, for individuals the aesthetic experience can be understood as the "complex and multifaceted experience of knowledge" (Consoli 2015b, 2).

Epistemologically, a number of scholars have argued that the goal of the aesthetic experience is *knowing* (Burton 1997; Consoli 2014; Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 1990; Custodero

et al. 2005; Hubard 2007; Yenawine 2002). Knowing is fundamentally a lived experience in that it relies on feelings and thoughts (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000; Consoli 2015a). For most people, an aesthetic experience is how we improve our knowledge and how we understand our world; the visualised representation of interpreted reality (Consoli 2014).

To understand is to know, and the way to know something is achieved by the human mind in several ways (Hubard 2015). The aesthetic experience helps us learn how to know things to be true or real (Pierroux et al. 2011). When faced with art uncovering or constructing a meaning may not be something we can be told to know, we must experience it for ourselves. Our goal of an aesthetic experience may be as simple as our emotional response or feeling, yet that is an oversimplification as emotional responses are "complex, multi-layered and varied" (Hubard 2015, 96).

Further, the *object* plays a central role in an aesthetic experience's formation. The object and the viewer form a dialectical relationship in that the viewer investigates the object seeking to elicit and separate the truth from illusion. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) outlined the aesthetic experience dimensions that they considered existed between visitors and objects in art galleries. These dimensions are: the perceptual, being the experience that stems from the character or quality of the aesthetic object; emotional (see also Hubard [2015] on this dimension), feelings or affective responses; intellectual, the experience of knowledge or reflection against the aesthetic object; and communication, the dialogue that exists between the aesthetic object and viewer.

*How aesthetic experience relates to gallery visits*

It could be argued that there is a connection between aesthetic experience and Instagramming when visiting an art gallery (Author 1 2015). Instagram is an aesthetic platform, it is the perceptual, perpetual, and repetitive photographic representation of what we see in the physical world (Hjorth and Pink 2014). The art gallery is a site of aesthetic stimulation (Budge 2017), and visitors to the gallery are encouraged to have a visual experience (Consoli 2014). Pekarik et al. (1999) researched visitors' experience in museums and found the most satisfying experiences reported by their participants were object and cognitive experiences (36% respectively); followed by introspective

(20%) and social (8%) experiences. Age was a notable difference in their sample, with younger

audiences (under 44 years of age) preferring social experiences over object experiences. Object

experiences are associated with experiencing "the real thing" (1999, 157) whilst cognitive

experiences are the "interpretive or intellectual aspects of the experience" (1999, 157). This

highlights a link between object, visitor, and their experience satisfaction level. This is logically why

galleries seek to guide and inform their visitors through an aesthetic experience, either through

pedagogical interventions (such as didactics like wall labels), or through the enabling of a social

experience.

The time spent by individuals viewing an object also influences a visitor's aesthetic

experience. Longer viewing time is linked to the perception of having a deeper aesthetic experience

(Carbon 2017). Burnham (1994) similarly supports the viewer to "look longer and to slow down"

(533) linking this to an evolving experience seeking to increase revelation and awareness in the

aesthetic experience. In short, objects and the aesthetic experience in an art gallery context are

inextricably linked.

An art gallery visitor's aesthetic experience creates value for the individual, work of art,

artist, and gallery (Dewey 1934; Edmonds et al. 2009). Dewey's (1934) historical work researching

the arts was considered seminal in identifying the arts as experiential (Heilig et al. 2010). Objects of

art placed in the gallery are encoded with meaning and the viewer's aesthetic experience

determines how meaning is decoded and subjective meaning constructed (Winget 2009). Stecker

(1994) supports the idea of subjective meaning within the aesthetic experience, arguing that a

single, objective understanding of an art object may never be possible. Single, authoritative

interpretation of art is highly influenced by a scientific, positivistic approach to knowledge (Langridge

1989). Even if the artist's intention is a single interpretation, individuals will determine an

interpretation subjectively (Winget 2009). Meaning will "emerge from the interaction of viewers and

artworks" (Hubard 2015, 104). This is where I see Instagram being of value, it allows us to view

multiple interactions and experiences that otherwise may never be observed. We are provided with

a window into visitors' aesthetic experience that will allow us to know more about the aesthetic

experience in the context of the art gallery.

Art galleries want their visitors to have a deep and meaningful experience (Burnham 1994).

Instagram, through its photography function, gives the visitor the power to deepen their experience

through examining art objects. Visitors can be drawn to the object's aesthetics or meaning and make

judgments or control how their experience unfolds (Budge 2017). They may also photograph

themselves, others, or the environment they are in, or some other thing they have observed that is

meaningful to them. This process from seeing to sharing we could argue, has given us more of the

aesthetic experience to observe. It allows us to consider whether the aesthetic experience has

evolved through Instagramming. Art galleries should consider how an aesthetic experience

continues to evolve over time, and what role they may play in helping the visitor to return to their

experience.

*Sharing*

Why people share an art gallery visit on Instagram is not clear (Author 1 2015). In this section, the

literature as it relates to what we share on Instagram, hashtags and their relationship to sharing, and

how the imagined audience influences individual sharing practices is examined. Russo et al. (2006,

2008), through pre-Instagram social media research, highlighted a museum's role as a sharing

network where visitors may share "images, information, and experiences throughout communities"

(2008, 28). In the past 20 years, the rapid growth in social media has seen the term sharing become

popularised and widely used to categorise many behaviours and concepts online. Even though

sharing is broadly used to define many social media behaviours, as a concept it is under-theorised

and the term overloaded (John 2013).

Many people use the term sharing without understanding what they mean. The

distributional view of sharing is that I have something, I share it with you, and I am left with less than

what I started with (John 2017). This understanding, when placed in the context of Instagram, is not

concomitant (Kennedy 2016). On Instagram, one shares an image and/or text or comments and/or

likes another user's image. This type of sharing does not result in one being left with less and the other more but is a form of sharing that is far more complex and imagined. The technology of Instagram allows us to observe visitor sharing practices, which is a largely unseen practice. Being able to observe sharing provides a valuable opportunity to understand more about the visitor and their expectations (Chlebus-Grudzień 2018; Kiiler 2011).

Sharing is used broadly and understood generally when connected to Instagram and is a popular practice when connected to the art gallery (Budge 2017). In Stylianou-Lambert's (2017) research into visitor photography within the art gallery, sharing was cited by participants as the second highest reason for taking photographs. Sharing was framed as a way of stimulating conversation, sustaining communication between loved ones and close friends, and a public way of asserting a sense of identity.

This way of understanding sharing aligns with the Instagram business model, that every time a user shares something on Instagram they participate in a continuous socially constructed narrative (Vivienne and Burgess 2013). A user posting an image, is sharing a re-contextualised moment of their reality for community consumption (Thurlow and Jaworski 2011). The seven community guidelines on Instagram reference sharing twelve times, guiding users in what to share and what not to share (Instagram 2018). In short, sharing, whatever meaning it has to an individual user, is central to participation on Instagram and a major part of its popularity (Marwick and boyd 2014).

*Instagramming, space and the visitor*

Space is an important focus in a study on Instagram and visitor experience in the art gallery, yet the spatial characteristics of the art gallery visitor experience are largely neglected in the literature (Schorch 2014). Roppola (2013) argues that any examination of visitor experience cannot be adequately done without addressing the spatial conditions of the gallery. Everything that happens to a visitor at the gallery happens in a physical space (Falk and Dierking 2000). A gallery space that is easy for visitors to navigate and move around in helps them achieve their experience objectives (Falk and Dierking 1992). In this section, the relationship between Instagram, spatial conditions,

visitor/gallery spatial practices, spatial theories, and movement is discussed. Spatial conditions

addressed in this section are physical, social, and digital; each affecting a visitor's experience

(Roppola 2013; Tröndle 2014).

*Spatial Conditions and the Aesthetic Experience.*

The gallery space has been found to enhance our aesthetic experience, highlighting the

environmental or spatial power of the gallery in an aesthetic experience (Specker et al. 2017). Biehl-

Missal and vom Lehn (2015) highlighted the Jewish Museum in Berlin as an example of this, claiming

that its synaesthetic atmosphere is created through its concrete walls and chilly air creating an

affective environmental space. Psarra (2005) supports this view, acknowledging that an effective

power of space for galleries is essential to enable them to meet their social and aesthetic objectives.

The literature has addressed various physical spatial conditions on visitor experience including noise

(Tröndle et al. 2012), spatial zones of art objects (Tröndle and Tschacher 2012), curatorial

arrangement (Tröndle et al. 2014), the presence of others (vom Lehn et al. 2001), design (Falk and

Dierking 2000), lighting (Bitgood et al. 1987), movement (Psarra 2005) and labels (Bourdeau and

Chebat 2001; Falk and Dierking 1992; Wurtzler 1993). While physical spatial conditions have been

examined in the literature, examination into digital spatial conditions is limited.

Studies into the human experience and physical spatial conditions have included bike

messenger practice (Kidder 2009), parkour (Kidder 2012), skateboarding (Borden 2001) and riding

the subway (Ocejo and Tonnelat 2014). There is little research into the spatial practices of art gallery

visitors, taking into account the mediation of smart device technology and Instagram. New

knowledge from this study will help address this gap in the visitor experience (Hooper-Greenhill

2007; Roppola 2013). Specifically, the gap in the literature is how visitors mediate space whilst

Instagramming at the gallery; or more so what does a visitor do differently spatially as a result of

using Instagram as part of their experience. It is expected this knowledge could help gallery

professionals create greater value for their institutions and their visitors, and arts educators for their

students.

*Visitor Spatial Practices*

It was stated earlier that Instagramming in the gallery is popular and that it forms part of some

visitors' experience (Budge 2017; R. Smith 2015; Author 1 2015). We know little about this form of

engagement, especially the effect that it has on the spatial practices of visitors. The gallery is

experienced spatially and the use of Instagram forms part of that space. Positioning a photograph,

mediating a post, scrolling, and searching through Instagram are all activities that require a

negotiation of the space around us. My study addresses the concept of space in the setting of an art

gallery, seen through visitor use of Instagram. We need to understand more about the changing

dynamic in the ways people are knowing, learning, and experiencing the world around them through

technology (Gunther and van Leeuwen 2006; Papacharissi and Easton 2013).

An individual Instagramming in a public space creates a contained personal space where

their focus and attention become centred on their device; reducing awareness of their surroundings

(Adkins et al. 2006). DuGay et al. (1997) in their pre-smart device research into Sony Walkman™ use,

highlighted a similar spatial practice when they found wearing headphones was a method of creating

a micro private space whilst within a public space.

The use of Instagram may also be framed as a multi-spatial practice. An Instagram user

mediates more than one presence, being in personal, physical, social, and virtual spaces all at once

(Quan-Haase and Martin 2013; Tzortzi 2017; Wilson 2009). A visitor using Instagram in the art gallery

simultaneously experiences space offline and online (Hjorth and Pink 2014), connecting with

Holloway-Attaway's (2014) concept of "being here and there" (60). One function of Instagram is the

ability to live stream video from the user's device direct to any users watching within Instagram.

Take for example a live music concert, a user live streams the concert from their device through

Instagram. They are not experiencing only being in the physical space of the concert but also the

virtual space of Instagram simultaneously (Tzortzi 2017).

*Gallery Spatial Practices*

Instagramming is influenced by the spatial conditions at the gallery. The spatial conditions at the

gallery are highly mediated, both socially and pedagogically (Eisner and Dobbs 1988; Witcomb 2014),

and the degree to which this spatially mediates behaviour may be implicit or explicit. Take for

example a gallery sign that reads *no photography allowed*, this will mediate the behaviour of visitors

and staff (Falk and Dierking 1992), and generally would be expected to reduce the motivation for

visitors to use Instagram. In a spatial context, the physical environment of the gallery will be affected

as the sign will be likely posted somewhere visible to everyone. For an individual, it will mediate

their use of space by limiting their photography or attempting to circumvent the rule by taking

photographs away out of sight of the gallery service personnel.

This idea of individuals appropriating space in contravention of a set system of rules was

observed by Kidder (2009) when he observed bike messengers running through red traffic lights and

riding down pedestrian stairs. Conversely, we may consider a gallery that encourages photography,

or social media and Instagram specifically. This may also be done through signage, a gallery didactic

for example promoting a hashtag to share any photographs that are taken. In both these

circumstances we conceptually illustrate how the gallery is not a neutral space, but decisions made

by the gallery within the environment may mediate visitors' spatial practices (Mills and Comber

2015).

**Research design**

*Methodology and methods*

Interpretivism was the chosen theoretical field; sharing, aesthetic experience, and space the

theoretical frameworks; ethnography (visual)-grounded theory was the methodology; participant

observations, Instagram posts, and semi-structured interviews were the research methods; and

grounded theory was the analytical framework for the study.

*Participants*

Participants and their recruitment were managed into this study by creating three identifiable

groups. Participant Groups One and Two were visitors to the exhibition who had posted to

Instagram. Participant Group Three were staff from the Gallery involved in the planning and

management of the exhibition.

*Analytical approach: Spatial theory*

Henri Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space* (1991) is a monumental academic work in theorising

space in the context of social relations (Gottdiener 1993). Lefebvre (1991) posited a triadic model of

spatial production, the perceived, conceived, and lived cohesion of space. He argued the user's

space is lived not perceived or conceived (Colleague and Author 2 2014). Instagramming is an

example of a lived spatial experience as it is the result of the perceived and conceived space that is

Instagram, experienced by its users.

An example of a study into lived experience is Kidder's (2009) research into bicycle messengers. He

highlighted that individuals determined how space will be lived through their material interaction

within it, regardless of how use of that space was planned in its design. If we consider Lefebvre's

(1991) model against visitor Instagram use in the gallery, we are observing the lived space of visitors.

The engineers, designers, artists, and programmers of the Instagram software and smart devices,

and the artists, architects, curators, and professionals of the art gallery all had conceptualisations of

how a visitor will use space. Yet it is only when it is lived that we will see the culmination of

Lefebvre's (1991) model. The participant data gathered in this study provided further insight into

Lefebvre's (1991) spatial theory in action.

A further example of the role of spatial theory in the visitors' experience in the art gallery

can be found in Tröndle's (2014) discussion on the idea of positive and negative valence; a concept

that was developed from the work of Lewin (1936). A positive valence occurs when an object

attracts people into a space, and conversely a negative valence drives them away from a space. If we

consider an example relevant to an art gallery, the position of an art object or didactic may create

positive valence, a space that invites people in. Whereas an area of the gallery that may be under

reconstruction (with *do not enter* signage) to set up for a new exhibition would have a negative

valence, pushing people away from that space.

The concept of valence is a powerful tool for a curator as it allows them to consider spatially

the sight lines, spatial logics (Krukar 2014), and spatial forces that will affect visitor movement

throughout the exhibition. Gibson (1977) provides an alternative understanding to valence with his

term *affordance*. Greeno (1994, 338) explains "the term affordance refers to whatever it is about the

environment that contributes to the kind of interaction that occurs" in that environment. If we place

the term affordances into an art gallery context, a gallery information counter affords an individual

seeking a map a space that enables their interaction with the environment that is relational to their

situational needs.

Affordances are not without social and cultural context. A perceived affordance may exist,

for example I can touch that painting to feel what it is like, but it is not a real affordance as I would

likely be confronted by gallery security for touching paintings given "cultural constraints influence

what is considered appropriate behavior" (Stylianou-Lambert 2017, 117). An aesthetically pleasing

object of art, or artistic space, could be framed to an Instagram user as an affordance, as they are

looking for something to photograph and use as a post to Instagram.

The negotiation of space by art gallery visitors using Instagram is also highlighted by the

distance observed by some users created between them and the objects that are the subject matter

of their photograph. Kress and van Leeuwan (1996) discuss the spatial characteristics between close-

up, medium, and long photographic shots. Close-up shots may be used to centre an object into the

frame of the image, such as Budge's (2017) research where visitors to a shoe exhibition placed shoes

at a distance where the viewer could feel they reach out and grab the objects (Kress and van

Leeuwan 1996). In previous research I completed I found some visitors went in for extreme close up

in photographs to highlight intricate detail in the art object; in this case close ups of cracks and splits

in a large-felled eucalyptus tree (Author 1 2015). Long shots on the other hand may be taken to

highlight the entire space of an exhibition. This links to the idea expressed by Tzortzi (2017) that

engagement in the art gallery happens through looking at art objects and spatially recognising

oneself as being in an art environment; "the sense of being engulfed by the materiality of the

physical space" (497). This materiality includes any objects within the space, such as tickets,

pamphlets, and entry stamps (Wood and Latham 2013).

**Research findings and discussion**

*Question 1: What are the current practices of art gallery visitors using Instagram*

The study found that art gallery visitors used Instagram during their visits in a number of ways. Such

diversity shows that Instagram can be a powerful tool to express responses to art as well as

maintaining a record of activities.

Box 1 outlines what the current practices are of art gallery visitors in using Instagram.

- archive their visit, record details and information about what they saw and experienced

- express affinity for the artworks, artist, and gallery

- signal authenticity to their chosen identity and manage others' impressions of them

- engage with art in a contemporary way, intersecting technology with orthodox forms of art appreciation and interpretation

- evolve and/or extend their aesthetic experience

- create photographic images that are personal and/or aesthetically pleasing

- promote, create awareness, and influence others to the artworks, artist, and gallery experience

- amplify their social experience by sharing it with an identified and/or imagined audience; and

- mediate their movement through gallery space.

**Box 1: What art gallery visitors use Instagram for**

It is important to know about the different ways people use Instagram during art gallery visits as this can impact on the ways in which art gallery staff display work, engage and end-users and promote exhibitions. Further, use of Instagram can influence people's emotive responses to art and assist in socialising with others. we will now turn to answering research question two.

*Question 2: Why do visitors use Instagram to experience the art gallery?*

This study found that there are three main reasons why visitors use Instagram when they visit an art gallery. These are: to extend and evolve their aesthetic experience, to share their experience, and to mediate gallery space. Further explanation of each of these three reasons is presented below.

**Evolving and extending the aesthetic experience**

A reason that visitors use Instagram is to extend and/or evolve their aesthetic experience. Extending and/or evolving an aesthetic experience helps a visitor to know more about their experience of art. This is important as the goal of an aesthetic experience is knowing (Consoli, 2014). Through using Instagram, a visitor may build knowledge, understanding, and make sense of art on their own terms. Extending an aesthetic experience means starting it earlier and/or finishing it later. An example of an experience starting earlier is a visitor who checks out an exhibition on Instagram before they visit. In addition, someone who reflects on what to post to Instagram, or who engages with others about their post after they have visited, extends their experience.

Evolving an aesthetic experience means "increased revelation and awareness" (Burnham 1994, 523). By using Instagram, a visitor may be more observant and attentive to detail because they are looking for a moment or experience to capture. Digital photography (Lemon 2010) and reflective writing (Consoli 2014) have both been found to evolve an aesthetic experience. In this study, Instagram-centred activities that led to an evolved aesthetic experience were photography, image editing, writing, reflective thinking, sharing, socialising, posing, increased awareness and

observation. In short, visitors use Instagram in the gallery because it complements, aligns, and amplifies their experience of art.

**Sharing experience through Instagram**

The second reason visitors use Instagram at the gallery is that it aligns with their sharing objectives. Visitors want to share their experiences with others or themselves and Instagram provides them with a modern way to do this. Sharing an art experience on Instagram can be a social act (Falk 2011, 2016; Sintas et al. 2014; vom Lehn et al. 2001), and/or a highly personalised journaling or memorialising practice.

In this study, the understanding of sharing on Instagram was framed as a two-way practice; I share images with others for them to view, and I share in the images of others by viewing them. Visitors' Instagram sharing practices can be understood through the imagined audience, structured affinity, and influencing. Imagining an audience is a key practice for gallery Instagram users (Litt 2012). Visitors imagine what their gallery experience would look like to an audience on Instagram. Sharing with an imagined audience invites others into two-way communication and further dialogue both on Instagram and offline.

The content that a visitor shares can be explained as stance-taking (Thurlow and Jaworski 2011) or broadcasting. The visitor is literally or figuratively saying something about themselves and the way they think or signalling authenticity to their chosen identity. The important point is that whomever the user thinks that they are sharing with, however nuanced, shapes the content and reason for sharing.

Another reason why visitors share their gallery experience through Instagram is to structure affinity. The visitor uses Instagram as a channel to communicate affinity for the artworks, artist, and/or gallery. In the case of expressions of affinity for the artist these are para-social acts or forms of bonding. In the literature review, it was identified how Instagram in the music industry was used to imagine para-social relationships between fans and the musical artist (Morris 2014; Salo et al.

2013). Para-sociality in a social media context signifies the existence of an illusory or imagined

relationship between two people (Horton and Wohl 1956; Usher 2018). It is similar to the concept of

the imagined audience as the user cannot be sure whom they communicating to, or whether their

affinity has any effect. It signifies a social practice that some visitors engage with regardless of any

outcome. It is a means rather than an ends. Structuring affinity is a sharing practice that is

emotionally loaded and is an important practice for galleries that seek to strengthen and deepen

connections into the community.

Influencing is the final practice that explains why visitors use Instagram to share their

experience. Visitors use Instagram to directly influence others to see the exhibition for themselves

or apply implicit influence by amplifying the imagined positive aspects of their experience. As

mentioned in the literature review, influencing is typically associated with Instagram users who have

larger than average numbers of followers. However, this precondition is arbitrary. Influence can be

practiced regardless of the number of followers and similar to structuring affinity, it may only be

practised as a means to an end; the user having the belief that it will work. Influencing signifies a real

or imagined relationship of trust. The visitor posting the content wants to be seen as an authority

and be trusted for their opinion. There are cues that indicate engagement with the content; likes,

comments, and offline dialogue. However, the visitor may never know if their attempts to influence

others has worked beyond this.

**Instagram and mediating gallery space**

Visitors use Instagram at the gallery as it helps them to move through and mediate gallery space.

The best way to explain this is to refer to spatial theory. In particular, Lewin's (1936) concept of

valence, Gibson's (1977) affordances, and Lefebvre's (1991) triadic model. Each of these theories is

explained in detail in Chapter 2: Literature Review (Suess 2020).

Instagram visitors reported looking for opportunities to capture at the exhibition. These

opportunities were not limited to photographs even though every Instagram post contained an

image. Visitors looked for objects, experiences, moments, and spaces that they imagined would be

appropriate for Instagram. In that way, their movement through the gallery space was affected by

valence (Lewin 1936). Whether that was positive valence, being drawn into a space or location seen

as Instagrammable or negative valence, being pushed out or turned away from a space. An example

of this was in the tapestry artworks (Richter 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d). The rich detail and

aesthetic appeal in these objects drew visitors in for a close-up photograph to capture the material

qualities of the artwork; this is what is classified by Budge (2017) as an object-oriented post. As a

result of this the gallery had to install some physical barriers to ensure that visitors kept their

distance and did not get too close when interacting with the works.

Gibson's (1977) affordances also explain why visitors used Instagram. Affordances inform

visitors' movements (Tröndle 2014). The hashtag engagement activity didactic could be described as

an Instagram affordance. Visitors that were Instagram users were drawn into the space where the

didactic was displayed; the front entrance outside the exhibition space. The reason the didactic was

an affordance was that it met a situational need of the visitor to use Instagram (Gibson 1977).

Finally, Lefebvre's (1991) triadic model of space helps us to understand why visitors use

Instagram in the gallery. Even though certain images are recurrent on Instagram due in part to the

hermeneutic cycle (Urry 1990), visitors are not necessarily looking to be directed in their Instagram

practices. Visitors may appropriate space in order to fulfill their Instagram objectives. An example of

this was again the hashtag engagement activity. The gallery staff reported conceptualising the

activity with a certain purpose/outcome in mind. Gallery participants reported being surprised at

how, despite their engineered learning design, it was the visitors who finally decided who would

respond to the activity. This is an example of Lefebvre's (1991) perceived, conceived, and lived

experience model in action. What we observe on Instagram are visitors who live in the space of the

gallery on their own terms and use it in unique and complex ways.

**Conclusion and key takeaways**

This article has focused on a close examination of visitor and gallery use of Instagram at an art exhibition. Further, it has presented an overview of the research in this area and identified key findings. The discussion presented the foundations of a critical understanding of Instagram use in the museum space. It is recommended that museum management and curators consider the research findings of this study when designing future museum experiences as it has potential to improve visitor experience.

This study has three key takeaways for museum management and curators, that is sharing, aesthetic experience, and the mediation of space. The pro-social sharing dynamic of Instagram offers museums a way to cooperate with visitors to promote and raise awareness of the content and experiences they offer. Experience sharing is a powerful visitor practice and facilitates peer-to-peer influencing and nurtures affinity towards the museum. Instagram use offers curators a way to further understand spatial awareness and visitor mediation of museum spaces. The considered use of sight lines, valence, affordances, atmosphere, and movement may lead to higher visitor engagement on Instagram.

By embedding a pedagogy and understanding visitor Instagram practices a museum can help make the use of space appear less abstract and more meaningful. Instagram use also extends and evolves the aesthetic experience. It may extend an aesthetic experience by making it start earlier and finish later, allowing for periods of reflection. It also may evolve the aesthetic experience by helping the visitor to reveal more about their experience, through increased awareness, imagination, revelation, and reflection. As aesthetic experiences are essential for learning, this is a compelling finding for museums seeking to create more educational value for visitors. Instagramming is a popular practice for many visitors to museums and galleries, staff should be energised by this and look for further creative and meaningful ways to channel its popularity alongside the museum's objectives.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Instagram and the museum experience: Theorising the connection through aesthetics, space and sharing**

**Abstract**

Many museum or art gallery visitors record their experience through social media platforms. Instagram is a case in point. Instagram is an application for mobile devices where people post images and comments, sharing their experiences in different places, with different people. This paper shares data from a project exploring people's art gallery visitations and how they engage with Instagram in such spaces. The research aimed to answer the following research questions: What are the current practices of art gallery visitors using Instagram? and why do visitors use Instagram to experience the art gallery? Findings showed people use Instagram in art galleries for a range of reasons and these include to extend and evolve their aesthetic experience, to share their experience, and to mediate gallery space. The significance of these findings may influence decisions made by gallery curators to enhance visitor experience as well as people's expressive response to artworks.

**Keywords:** art gallery, museum, aesthetic experience, Instagram, sharing, space

**Introduction**

When people visit museums or art galleries, they often record their experiences of art through a range of social media platforms (Author 1 2020). One such platform is Instagram as it is an application for mobile devices where people post images and comments. People's responses to art are important as it means they have engaged with exhibitions through the expression of their thoughts and feelings. When curatorial design is well considered this kind of engagement can be

enhanced (Budge, 2017). As such, it is important to know how visitors to art galleries use Instagram

as part of this engagement with art. Also, it is vital we know why people use Instagram as this can

inform future development of exhibition spaces and programs.

This paper shares data from a project exploring people's art gallery or museum visitations

and how they engage with Instagram in such spaces. The research aimed to answer the following

research questions: What are the current practices of art gallery visitors using Instagram? and why

do visitors use Instagram to experience the art gallery? Without such knowledge there could be a

risk that people have limited engagement with art and that exhibitions have lessened impact on

people's aesthetic experience, hence transformation from viewing art both personally and socially.

The significance of investigating people's practices and reasons for using Instagram during and after

their art gallery visit includes assisting gallery curators' decisions to enhance visitor experience as

well as people's expressive response to artworks.

**Review of the literature**

*Aesthetic Experience*

An aesthetic experience involves some form of affect and appreciation of something that is

inherently beautiful, consequently representing fullness of experience (Dewey 1934). Aesthetic

experience often occurs when we interact with art and can influence us behaviourally and

cognitively (Author 2 and colleague 2022/in press). It can be self-satisfying, the act in itself is

worthwhile or has value as learning or knowing something new is intrinsically rewarding

(Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1999). Learning and knowledge are deeply connected parts of the

aesthetic experience, for individuals the aesthetic experience can be understood as the "complex

and multifaceted experience of knowledge" (Consoli 2015b, 2).

Epistemologically, a number of scholars have argued that the goal of the aesthetic

experience is *knowing* (Burton 1997; Consoli 2014; Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson 1990; Custodero

et al. 2005; Hubard 2007; Yenawine 2002). Knowing is fundamentally a lived experience in that it relies on feelings and thoughts (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2000; Consoli 2015a). For most people, an aesthetic experience is how we improve our knowledge and how we understand our world; the visualised representation of interpreted reality (Consoli 2014).

To understand is to know, and the way to know something is achieved by the human mind in several ways (Hubard 2015). The aesthetic experience helps us learn how to know things to be true or real (Pierroux et al. 2011). When faced with art uncovering or constructing a meaning may not be something we can be told to know, we must experience it for ourselves. Our goal of an aesthetic experience may be as simple as our emotional response or feeling, yet that is an oversimplification as emotional responses are "complex, multi-layered and varied" (Hubard 2015, 96).

Further, the *object* plays a central role in an aesthetic experience's formation. The object and the viewer form a dialectical relationship in that the viewer investigates the object seeking to elicit and separate the truth from illusion. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1990) outlined the aesthetic experience dimensions that they considered existed between visitors and objects in art galleries. These dimensions are: the perceptual, being the experience that stems from the character or quality of the aesthetic object; emotional (see also Hubard [2015] on this dimension), feelings or affective responses; intellectual, the experience of knowledge or reflection against the aesthetic object; and communication, the dialogue that exists between the aesthetic object and viewer.

*How aesthetic experience relates to gallery visits*

It could be argued that there is a connection between aesthetic experience and Instagramming when visiting an art gallery (Author 1 2015). Instagram is an aesthetic platform, it is the perceptual, perpetual, and repetitive photographic representation of what we see in the physical world (Hjorth and Pink 2014). The art gallery is a site of aesthetic stimulation (Budge 2017), and visitors to the gallery are encouraged to have a visual experience (Consoli 2014). Pekarik et al. (1999) researched visitors' experience in museums and found the most satisfying experiences reported by their participants were object and cognitive experiences (36% respectively); followed by introspective

(20%) and social (8%) experiences. Age was a notable difference in their sample, with younger

audiences (under 44 years of age) preferring social experiences over object experiences. Object

experiences are associated with experiencing "the real thing" (1999, 157) whilst cognitive

experiences are the "interpretive or intellectual aspects of the experience" (1999, 157). This

highlights a link between object, visitor, and their experience satisfaction level. This is logically why

galleries seek to guide and inform their visitors through an aesthetic experience, either through

pedagogical interventions (such as didactics like wall labels), or through the enabling of a social

experience.

The time spent by individuals viewing an object also influences a visitor's aesthetic

experience. Longer viewing time is linked to the perception of having a deeper aesthetic experience

(Carbon 2017). Burnham (1994) similarly supports the viewer to "look longer and to slow down"

(533) linking this to an evolving experience seeking to increase revelation and awareness in the

aesthetic experience. In short, objects and the aesthetic experience in an art gallery context are

inextricably linked.

An art gallery visitor's aesthetic experience creates value for the individual, work of art,

artist, and gallery (Dewey 1934; Edmonds et al. 2009). Dewey's (1934) historical work researching

the arts was considered seminal in identifying the arts as experiential (Heilig et al. 2010). Objects of

art placed in the gallery are encoded with meaning and the viewer's aesthetic experience

determines how meaning is decoded and subjective meaning constructed (Winget 2009). Stecker

(1994) supports the idea of subjective meaning within the aesthetic experience, arguing that a

single, objective understanding of an art object may never be possible. Single, authoritative

interpretation of art is highly influenced by a scientific, positivistic approach to knowledge (Langridge

1989). Even if the artist's intention is a single interpretation, individuals will determine an

interpretation subjectively (Winget 2009). Meaning will "emerge from the interaction of viewers and

artworks" (Hubard 2015, 104). This is where I see Instagram being of value, it allows us to view

multiple interactions and experiences that otherwise may never be observed. We are provided with

a window into visitors' aesthetic experience that will allow us to know more about the aesthetic

experience in the context of the art gallery.

Art galleries want their visitors to have a deep and meaningful experience (Burnham 1994).

Indeed, research has introduced the idea of visitors' 'Quality of Experience [QoE] (Tsiropoulou, et al.,

2017) which investigates how humans participate in a loop between physical, personal and interest-

aware tours of gallery spaces. Tsiropoulou et al. (2017) argue that there are a number of influential

factors that determine the quality of a visitor's experience. Similarly, earlier research suggests that

the number of people visiting (Wright, 1989), how people move about the space (Eliseo and Martine

(1991) and the links between emotion and experience De Rojas and Camarero (2008). Specifically,

research has quantified they ways in which visitors engage in a museum space e.g., directions and

sequence of their movement in the hope that 'optimal touring' occurs (Yoshimura et al., 2014).

Despite this relatively new work, our study focused more on what visitors chose to do when using

Instagram when visiting a selected gallery space.

Instagram, through its photography function, gives the visitor the power to deepen their

experience through examining art objects. Visitors can be drawn to the object's aesthetics or

meaning and make judgments or control how their experience unfolds (Budge 2017). They may also

photograph themselves, others, or the environment they are in, or some other thing they have

observed that is meaningful to them. This process from seeing to sharing we could argue, has given

us more of the aesthetic experience to observe. It allows us to consider whether the aesthetic

experience has evolved through Instagramming. Art galleries should consider how an aesthetic

experience continues to evolve over time, and what role they may play in helping the visitor to

return to their experience.

*Sharing*

Why people share an art gallery visit on Instagram is not clear (Author 1 2015). In this section, the

literature as it relates to what we share on Instagram, hashtags and their relationship to sharing, and

how the imagined audience influences individual sharing practices is examined. Russo et al. (2006,

2008), through pre-Instagram social media research, highlighted a museum's role as a sharing

network where visitors may share "images, information, and experiences throughout communities"

(2008, 28). In the past 20 years, the rapid growth in social media has seen the term sharing become

popularised and widely used to categorise many behaviours and concepts online. Even though

sharing is broadly used to define many social media behaviours, as a concept it is under-theorised

and the term overloaded (John 2013).

Many people use the term sharing without understanding what they mean. The

distributional view of sharing is that I have something, I share it with you, and I am left with less than

what I started with (John 2017). This understanding, when placed in the context of Instagram, is not

concomitant (Kennedy 2016). On Instagram, one shares an image and/or text or comments and/or

likes another user's image. This type of sharing does not result in one being left with less and the

other more but is a form of sharing that is far more complex and imagined. The technology of

Instagram allows us to observe visitor sharing practices, which is a largely unseen practice. Being

able to observe sharing provides a valuable opportunity to understand more about the visitor and

their expectations (Chlebus-Grudzień 2018; Kiiler 2011).

Sharing is used broadly and understood generally when connected to Instagram and is a

popular practice when connected to the art gallery (Budge 2017). In Stylianou-Lambert's (2017)

research into visitor photography within the art gallery, sharing was cited by participants as the

second highest reason for taking photographs. Sharing was framed as a way of stimulating

conversation, sustaining communication between loved ones and close friends, and a public way of

asserting a sense of identity.

This way of understanding sharing aligns with the Instagram business model, that every time

a user shares something on Instagram they participate in a continuous socially constructed narrative

(Vivienne and Burgess 2013). A user posting an image, is sharing a re-contextualised moment of their

reality for community consumption (Thurlow and Jaworski 2011). The seven community guidelines

on Instagram reference sharing twelve times, guiding users in what to share and what not to share

(Instagram 2018). In short, sharing, whatever meaning it has to an individual user, is central to

participation on Instagram and a major part of its popularity (Marwick and boyd 2014).

*Instagramming, space and the visitor*

Despite emerging research exploring the interrelation between instagramming, space and visitors

very little is known about what types of activities people engage in and why they engage in them

when using Instagram in gallery spaces. Space is an important focus in a study on Instagram and

visitor experience in the art gallery, yet the spatial characteristics of the art gallery visitor experience

are largely neglected in the literature (Schorch 2014). Roppola (2013) argues that any examination of

visitor experience cannot be adequately done without addressing the spatial conditions of the

gallery. Everything that happens to a visitor at the gallery happens in a physical space (Falk and

Dierking 2000). A gallery space that is easy for visitors to navigate and move around in helps them

achieve their experience objectives (Falk and Dierking 1992). In this section, the relationship

between Instagram, spatial conditions, visitor/gallery spatial practices, spatial theories, and

movement is discussed. Spatial conditions addressed in this section are physical, social, and digital;

each affecting a visitor's experience (Roppola 2013; Tröndle 2014).

*Spatial Conditions and the Aesthetic Experience.*

The gallery space has been found to enhance our aesthetic experience, highlighting the

environmental or spatial power of the gallery in an aesthetic experience (Specker et al. 2017). Biehl-

Missal and vom Lehn (2015) highlighted the Jewish Museum in Berlin as an example of this, claiming

that its synaesthetic atmosphere is created through its concrete walls and chilly air creating an

affective environmental space. Psarra (2005) supports this view, acknowledging that an effective

power of space for galleries is essential to enable them to meet their social and aesthetic objectives.

The literature has addressed various physical spatial conditions on visitor experience including noise

(Tröndle et al. 2012), spatial zones of art objects (Tröndle and Tschacher 2012), curatorial

arrangement (Tröndle et al. 2014), the presence of others (vom Lehn et al. 2001), design (Falk and

Dierking 2000), lighting (Bitgood et al. 1987), movement (Psarra 2005) and labels (Bourdeau and

Chebat 2001; Falk and Dierking 1992; Wurtzler 1993). While physical spatial conditions have been

examined in the literature, examination into digital spatial conditions is limited.

Studies into the human experience and physical spatial conditions have included bike

messenger practice (Kidder 2009), parkour (Kidder 2012), skateboarding (Borden 2001) and riding

the subway (Ocejo and Tonnelat 2014). There is little research into the spatial practices of art gallery

visitors, taking into account the mediation of smart device technology and Instagram. New

knowledge from this study will help address this gap in the visitor experience (Hooper-Greenhill

2007; Roppola 2013). Specifically, the gap in the literature is how visitors mediate space whilst

Instagramming at the gallery; or more so what does a visitor do differently spatially as a result of

using Instagram as part of their experience. It is expected this knowledge could help gallery

professionals create greater value for their institutions and their visitors, and arts educators for their

students.

*Visitor Spatial Practices*

It was stated earlier that Instagramming in the gallery is popular and that it forms part of some

visitors' experience (Budge 2017; R. Smith 2015; Author 1 2015). We know little about this form of

engagement, especially the effect that it has on the spatial practices of visitors. The gallery is

experienced spatially and the use of Instagram forms part of that space. Positioning a photograph,

mediating a post, scrolling, and searching through Instagram are all activities that require a

negotiation of the space around us. My study addresses the concept of space in the setting of an art

gallery, seen through visitor use of Instagram. We need to understand more about the changing

dynamic in the ways people are knowing, learning, and experiencing the world around them through

technology (Gunther and van Leeuwen 2006; Papacharissi and Easton 2013).

An individual Instagramming in a public space creates a contained personal space where

their focus and attention become centred on their device; reducing awareness of their surroundings

(Adkins et al. 2006). DuGay et al. (1997) in their pre-smart device research into Sony Walkman™ use,

highlighted a similar spatial practice when they found wearing headphones was a method of creating a micro private space whilst within a public space.

The use of Instagram may also be framed as a multi-spatial practice. An Instagram user mediates more than one presence, being in personal, physical, social, and virtual spaces all at once (Quan-Haase and Martin 2013; Tzortzi 2017; Wilson 2009). A visitor using Instagram in the art gallery simultaneously experiences space offline and online (Hjorth and Pink 2014), connecting with Holloway-Attaway's (2014) concept of "being here and there" (60). One function of Instagram is the ability to live stream video from the user's device direct to any users watching within Instagram. Take for example a live music concert, a user live streams the concert from their device through Instagram. They are not experiencing only being in the physical space of the concert but also the virtual space of Instagram simultaneously (Tzortzi 2017).

*Gallery Spatial Practices*

Instagramming is influenced by the spatial conditions at the gallery. The spatial conditions at the gallery are highly mediated, both socially and pedagogically (Eisner and Dobbs 1988; Witcomb 2014), and the degree to which this spatially mediates behaviour may be implicit or explicit. Take for example a gallery sign that reads *no photography allowed*, this will mediate the behaviour of visitors and staff (Falk and Dierking 1992), and generally would be expected to reduce the motivation for visitors to use Instagram. In a spatial context, the physical environment of the gallery will be affected as the sign will be likely posted somewhere visible to everyone. For an individual, it will mediate their use of space by limiting their photography or attempting to circumvent the rule by taking photographs away out of sight of the gallery service personnel.

This idea of individuals appropriating space in contravention of a set system of rules was observed by Kidder (2009) when he observed bike messengers running through red traffic lights and riding down pedestrian stairs. Conversely, we may consider a gallery that encourages photography, or social media and Instagram specifically. This may also be done through signage, a gallery didactic for example promoting a hashtag to share any photographs that are taken. In both these

circumstances we conceptually illustrate how the gallery is not a neutral space, but decisions made

by the gallery within the environment may mediate visitors' spatial practices (Mills and Comber

2015).

*Visitor Instagram Practices*

The research into art gallery visitors' use of Instagram is developing (Budge, 2017). Previous

research at museums and galleries has found visitors used Instagram to re-curate exhibitions, and

extend dialogue beyond the physical setting (Weilenmann, Hillman, & Jungselius, 2013), engage with

exhibition objects (Budge, 2017), and assert visitor agency and authority (Budge & Burness, 2017).

The four areas of focus in this study coalesce as the gap within the research literature: visitor

Instagram practices, sharing, aesthetic experience, and space. Literature that examined specifically

these areas together was unable to be located, and an objective of this study was to analyse the

participant data against this grouping of concepts that would lead to new knowledge for arts

practitioners, gallery professionals, and visitors.

**Research design**

*Methodology and methods*

Interpretivism was the chosen theoretical field; sharing, aesthetic experience, and space the

theoretical frameworks; ethnography (visual)-grounded theory was the methodology; participant

observations, Instagram posts, and semi-structured interviews were the research methods; and

grounded theory was the analytical framework for the study. A summary of the steps taken in this

research are provided in Table 1.

**Table 1: Steps taken in the overarching research study**

| Steps | Research Activity |
|-------|-------------------|
| 1 | Observation of 550 Instagram posts obtained through a hash/geo-tag search. |
| 2 | 550 observation field notes generated using visual ethnography. Field notes coded and observations stopped when saturation had been reached. |
| 3 | 17 visitor participants (a subset from within the 550 Instagram posts from Step 1) recruited into the study through random selection. |
| 4 | Images from the 17 visitor participants' posts converted to text using visual ethnography. |
| 5 | Interviews conducted with the same 17 visitor participants in Step 4, responses and image text coded and compared with earlier codes, and categories formed. |
| 6 | 4 Gallery participants (a separate group to either of the above) who had worked on the exhibition recruited into the study and interviewed. |
| 7 | Gallery participants' interview responses coded and categorised. |
| 8 | Core code categories which represents the grounded theory developed across all participant groups. |
| 9 | Writing up of the results |

*Participants*

Participants and their recruitment were managed into this study by creating three identifiable

groups. Participant Groups One and Two were visitors to the exhibition who had posted to

Instagram. Participant Group Three were staff from the Gallery involved in the planning and

management of the exhibition.

*Analytical approach: Spatial theory*

Henri Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space* (1991) is a monumental academic work in theorising

space in the context of social relations (Gottdiener 1993). Lefebvre (1991) posited a triadic model of

spatial production, the perceived, conceived, and lived cohesion of space. He argued the user's

space is lived not perceived or conceived (Colleague and Author 2 2014). Instagramming is an

example of a lived spatial experience as it is the result of the perceived and conceived space that is

Instagram, experienced by its users.

An example of a study into lived experience is Kidder's (2009) research into bicycle messengers. He highlighted that individuals determined how space will be lived through their material interaction within it, regardless of how use of that space was planned in its design. If we consider Lefebvre's (1991) model against visitor Instagram use in the gallery, we are observing the lived space of visitors. The engineers, designers, artists, and programmers of the Instagram software and smart devices, and the artists, architects, curators, and professionals of the art gallery all had conceptualisations of how a visitor will use space. Yet it is only when it is lived that we will see the culmination of Lefebvre's (1991) model. The participant data gathered in this study provided further insight into Lefebvre's (1991) spatial theory in action.

A further example of the role of spatial theory in the visitors' experience in the art gallery can be found in Tröndle's (2014) discussion on the idea of positive and negative valence; a concept that was developed from the work of Lewin (1936). A positive valence occurs when an object attracts people into a space, and conversely a negative valence drives them away from a space. If we consider an example relevant to an art gallery, the position of an art object or didactic may create positive valence, a space that invites people in. Whereas an area of the gallery that may be under reconstruction (with *do not enter* signage) to set up for a new exhibition would have a negative valence, pushing people away from that space.

The concept of valence is a powerful tool for a curator as it allows them to consider spatially the sight lines, spatial logics (Krukar 2014), and spatial forces that will affect visitor movement throughout the exhibition. Gibson (1977) provides an alternative understanding to valence with his term *affordance*. Greeno (1994, 338) explains "the term affordance refers to whatever it is about the environment that contributes to the kind of interaction that occurs" in that environment. If we place the term affordances into an art gallery context, a gallery information counter affords an individual seeking a map a space that enables their interaction with the environment that is relational to their situational needs.

Affordances are not without social and cultural context. A perceived affordance may exist, for example I can touch that painting to feel what it is like, but it is not a real affordance as I would likely be confronted by gallery security for touching paintings given "cultural constraints influence what is considered appropriate behavior" (Stylianou-Lambert 2017, 117). An aesthetically pleasing object of art, or artistic space, could be framed to an Instagram user as an affordance, as they are looking for something to photograph and use as a post to Instagram.

The negotiation of space by art gallery visitors using Instagram is also highlighted by the distance observed by some users created between them and the objects that are the subject matter of their photograph. Kress and van Leeuwan (1996) discuss the spatial characteristics between close-up, medium, and long photographic shots. Close-up shots may be used to centre an object into the frame of the image, such as Budge's (2017) research where visitors to a shoe exhibition placed shoes at a distance where the viewer could feel they reach out and grab the objects (Kress and van Leeuwan 1996). In previous research I completed I found some visitors went in for extreme close up in photographs to highlight intricate detail in the art object; in this case close ups of cracks and splits in a large-felled eucalyptus tree (Author 1 2015). Long shots on the other hand may be taken to highlight the entire space of an exhibition. This links to the idea expressed by Tzortzi (2017) that engagement in the art gallery happens through looking at art objects and spatially recognising oneself as being in an art environment; "the sense of being engulfed by the materiality of the physical space" (497). This materiality includes any objects within the space, such as tickets, pamphlets, and entry stamps (Wood and Latham 2013).

**Research findings and discussion**

*Question 1: What are the current practices of art gallery visitors using Instagram*

The study found that art gallery visitors used Instagram during their visits in a number of ways. Such diversity shows that Instagram can be a powerful tool to express responses to art as well as maintaining a record of activities.

Box 1 outlines what the current practices are of art gallery visitors in using Instagram.

- archive their visit, record details and information about what they saw and experienced

- express affinity for the artworks, artist, and gallery

- signal authenticity to their chosen identity and manage others' impressions of them

- engage with art in a contemporary way, intersecting technology with orthodox forms of art appreciation and interpretation

- evolve and/or extend their aesthetic experience

- create photographic images that are personal and/or aesthetically pleasing

- promote, create awareness, and influence others to the artworks, artist, and gallery experience

- amplify their social experience by sharing it with an identified and/or imagined audience; and

- mediate their movement through gallery space.

**Box 1: What art gallery visitors use Instagram for**

It is important to know about the different ways people use Instagram during art gallery visits as this can impact on the ways in which art gallery staff display work, engage and end-users and promote exhibitions. Further, use of Instagram can influence people's emotive responses to art and assist in socialising with others. we will now turn to answering research question two.

*Question 2: Why do visitors use Instagram to experience the art gallery?*

This study found that there are three main reasons why visitors use Instagram when they visit an art gallery. These are: to extend and evolve their aesthetic experience, to share their experience, and to mediate gallery space. Further explanation of each of these three reasons is presented below.

**Evolving and extending the aesthetic experience**

A reason that visitors use Instagram is to extend and/or evolve their aesthetic experience. Extending and/or evolving an aesthetic experience helps a visitor to know more about their experience of art. This is important as the goal of an aesthetic experience is knowing (Consoli, 2014). Through using Instagram, a visitor may build knowledge, understanding, and make sense of art on their own terms. Extending an aesthetic experience means starting it earlier and/or finishing it later. An example of an experience starting earlier is a visitor who checks out an exhibition on Instagram before they visit. In addition, someone who reflects on what to post to Instagram, or who engages with others about their post after they have visited, extends their experience.

Evolving an aesthetic experience means "increased revelation and awareness" (Burnham 1994, 523). By using Instagram, a visitor may be more observant and attentive to detail because they are looking for a moment or experience to capture. Digital photography (Lemon 2010) and reflective writing (Consoli 2014) have both been found to evolve an aesthetic experience. In this study, Instagram-centred activities that led to an evolved aesthetic experience were photography, image editing, writing, reflective thinking, sharing, socialising, posing, increased awareness and observation. In short, visitors use Instagram in the gallery because it complements, aligns, and amplifies their experience of art.

**Sharing experience through Instagram**

The second reason visitors use Instagram at the gallery is that it aligns with their sharing objectives. Visitors want to share their experiences with others or themselves and Instagram provides them with a modern way to do this. Sharing an art experience on Instagram can be a social act (Falk 2011,

2016; Sintas et al. 2014; vom Lehn et al. 2001), and/or a highly personalised journaling or memorialising practice.

In this study, the understanding of sharing on Instagram was framed as a two-way practice; I share images with others for them to view, and I share in the images of others by viewing them. Visitors' Instagram sharing practices can be understood through the imagined audience, structured affinity, and influencing. Imagining an audience is a key practice for gallery Instagram users (Litt 2012). Visitors imagine what their gallery experience would look like to an audience on Instagram. Sharing with an imagined audience invites others into two-way communication and further dialogue both on Instagram and offline.

The content that a visitor shares can be explained as stance-taking (Thurlow and Jaworski 2011) or broadcasting. The visitor is literally or figuratively saying something about themselves and the way they think or signalling authenticity to their chosen identity. The important point is that whomever the user thinks that they are sharing with, however nuanced, shapes the content and reason for sharing.

Another reason why visitors share their gallery experience through Instagram is to structure affinity. The visitor uses Instagram as a channel to communicate affinity for the artworks, artist, and/or gallery. In the case of expressions of affinity for the artist these are para-social acts or forms of bonding. In the literature review, it was identified how Instagram in the music industry was used to imagine para-social relationships between fans and the musical artist (Morris 2014; Salo et al. 2013). Para-sociality in a social media context signifies the existence of an illusory or imagined relationship between two people (Horton and Wohl 1956; Usher 2018). It is similar to the concept of the imagined audience as the user cannot be sure whom they communicating to, or whether their affinity has any effect. It signifies a social practice that some visitors engage with regardless of any outcome. It is a means rather than an ends. Structuring affinity is a sharing practice that is

emotionally loaded and is an important practice for galleries that seek to strengthen and deepen

connections into the community.

Influencing is the final practice that explains why visitors use Instagram to share their

experience. Visitors use Instagram to directly influence others to see the exhibition for themselves

or apply implicit influence by amplifying the imagined positive aspects of their experience. As

mentioned in the literature review, influencing is typically associated with Instagram users who have

larger than average numbers of followers. However, this precondition is arbitrary. Influence can be

practiced regardless of the number of followers and similar to structuring affinity, it may only be

practised as a means to an end; the user having the belief that it will work. Influencing signifies a real

or imagined relationship of trust. The visitor posting the content wants to be seen as an authority

and be trusted for their opinion. There are cues that indicate engagement with the content; likes,

comments, and offline dialogue. However, the visitor may never know if their attempts to influence

others has worked beyond this.

**Instagram and mediating gallery space**

Visitors use Instagram at the gallery as it helps them to move through and mediate gallery space.

The best way to explain this is to refer to spatial theory. In particular, Lewin's (1936) concept of

valence, Gibson's (1977) affordances, and Lefebvre's (1991) triadic model.

Instagram visitors reported looking for opportunities to capture at the exhibition. These

opportunities were not limited to photographs even though every Instagram post contained an

image. Visitors looked for objects, experiences, moments, and spaces that they imagined would be

appropriate for Instagram. In that way, their movement through the gallery space was affected by

valence (Lewin 1936). Whether that was positive valence, being drawn into a space or location seen

as Instagrammable or negative valence, being pushed out or turned away from a space. An example

of this was in the tapestry artworks (Richter 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d). The rich detail and

aesthetic appeal in these objects drew visitors in for a close-up photograph to capture the material

qualities of the artwork; this is what is classified by Budge (2017) as an object-oriented post. As a result of this the gallery had to install some physical barriers to ensure that visitors kept their distance and did not get too close when interacting with the works.

Gibson's (1977) affordances also explain why visitors used Instagram. Affordances inform visitors' movements (Tröndle 2014). The hashtag engagement activity didactic could be described as an Instagram affordance. Visitors that were Instagram users were drawn into the space where the didactic was displayed; the front entrance outside the exhibition space. The reason the didactic was an affordance was that it met a situational need of the visitor to use Instagram (Gibson 1977).

Finally, Lefebvre's (1991) triadic model of space helps us to understand why visitors use Instagram in the gallery. Even though certain images are recurrent on Instagram due in part to the hermeneutic cycle (Urry 1990), visitors are not necessarily looking to be directed in their Instagram practices. Visitors may appropriate space in order to fulfill their Instagram objectives. An example of this was again the hashtag engagement activity. The gallery staff reported conceptualising the activity with a certain purpose/outcome in mind. Gallery participants reported being surprised at how, despite their engineered learning design, it was the visitors who finally decided who would respond to the activity. This is an example of Lefebvre's (1991) perceived, conceived, and lived experience model in action. What we observe on Instagram are visitors who live in the space of the gallery on their own terms and use it in unique and complex ways.

**Conclusion and key takeaways**

This article has focused on a close examination of visitor and gallery use of Instagram at an art exhibition. Further, it has presented an overview of the research in this area and identified key findings. The discussion presented the foundations of a critical understanding of Instagram use in the museum space. It is recommended that museum management and curators consider the research findings of this study when designing future museum experiences as it has potential to improve visitor experience.

This study has three key takeaways for museum management and curators, that is sharing, aesthetic experience, and the mediation of space. The pro-social sharing dynamic of Instagram offers museums a way to cooperate with visitors to promote and raise awareness of the content and experiences they offer. Experience sharing is a powerful visitor practice and facilitates peer-to-peer influencing and nurtures affinity towards the museum. Instagram use offers curators a way to further understand spatial awareness and visitor mediation of museum spaces. The considered use of sight lines, valence, affordances, atmosphere, and movement may lead to higher visitor engagement on Instagram.

By embedding a pedagogy and understanding visitor Instagram practices a museum can help make the use of space appear less abstract and more meaningful. Instagram use also extends and evolves the aesthetic experience. It may extend an aesthetic experience by making it start earlier and finish later, allowing for periods of reflection. It also may evolve the aesthetic experience by helping the visitor to reveal more about their experience, through increased awareness, imagination, revelation, and reflection. As aesthetic experiences are essential for learning, this is a compelling finding for museums seeking to create more educational value for visitors. Instagramming is a popular practice for many visitors to museums and galleries, staff should be energised by this and look for further creative and meaningful ways to channel its popularity alongside the museum's objectives.

**Acknowledgements**

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**Reviewer(s)' Comments to Author:**
**Thank you for your time in reviewer our paper. It is greatly appreciated. We have addressed all feedback as per below.**

| Reviewer's comments | Author responses |
|---|---|
| Initially, in section 1 and 2, the authors should present a provided related work by using more summative language in order to better clarify the research contributions of the existing literature and what is the research gap that they try to address. | We have added more information about the purpose of this study and the gaps in the research literature throughout the paper. |
| In Section 2, the authors should discuss existing quality of experience approaches that have been introduced in the literature, such as "Quality of Experience-based museum touring: A human in the loop approach." Social Network Analysis and Mining 7.1 (2017): 1-13, in order to quantify the visitors experience in cultural spaces where the social and physical characteristics of the visitors are exploited. | We have added some relevant literature on the QoE research. as our research didn't aim to 'quantify' a visitor's experience we didn't dwell too much of this section of the research paper mentioned. WE have however, added in relevant selections to support the work we present. We hope this is to the reviewer's satisfaction. |
| In section 3, the authors should provide a block diagram of the methodology that has been followed in order to design the proposed research. This will help the reader to easily grasp the main steps that have been followed in this qualitative and quantitative based approach. | We have now placed a table on page 10 that explains the steps taken in the overarching research study. |
| In Section 4, the authors should discuss some research findings in a comparative manner to the state of the art in order to clarify their main contributions and novelty. Finally, the overall manuscript should be checked for typos, syntax, and grammar errors in order to improve the quality of its presentation. | We have added some more discussion in the conclusion outlining the main contributions to knowledge. A final edit has also been carried out. |

**Further positive comments:**

Towards this direction, the authors performed a study within an art gallery by considering the corresponding visitors that they use Instagram in order to share content, experience, and information from the gallery space.

The examined research topic is of great interest to the research literature as very few research works have been introduced that deal with quantifying the visitors experience in cultural spaces.

The provided analysis of the performed study is detailed and the authors have provided all the intermediate steps in order to realize their proposed research. The authors should consider the following suggestions provided by the reviewer in order to improve the scientific depth of their manuscript, as well as they need to address the following comments in order to improve the quality of presentation of their manuscript.

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