

1. ABSTRACT

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to consider whether museums could or should monetise the valuable digital assets they are creating when they digitise their collections.

1.2 Methodology

This is an exploratory study which uses secondary data gathered through a survey of literature and other publications, tested against primary qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with digital leaders at 7 major institutions.

1.3 Why is it important?

- Museums are subject to declining public funding and therefore need to diversify revenues.
- GLAMs are less likely to attract younger people (16-24). (Mendoza, N, 2018) While this group may become older and perhaps visit GLAMs more, they also have many more calls upon their leisure time.
- Digital assets are expensive to create and maintain
- More future value may be created in the digital realm only - art, VR tours and digital experiences.
- There is a 2009 study of the financial viability of some digitisation programmes within GLAMs, but there has not been a recent review of the current thinking.

1.4 Findings

Museums invest large sums in creating digital assets to which they generally give free access. Research uncovered many perceived barriers to monetisation of collections, including:

- Free distribution via the internet is seen by museums as a way to fulfil their 'enlightenment mission'.
- The internet is seen a marketing channel to increase footfall and ticket sales to the physical building and is therefore seen as a cost centre.
- The growing concept of Open Access to data leads people within museums to presume a non-monetisation position.
- Museums are the natural territory of curators who come from an academic research tradition which eschews the concept of monetisation.
- Monetisation of a digitised collection may be precluded by a funding body.
- The digital assets produced do not generally present a value proposition to the market.

1.5 Conclusions

By expanding the role of the curator, it should be possible to maintain free online access to collections while building a monetisable digital asset which a global market might value and which would address most of the barriers surfaced during research. The study suggests methods to monetise GLAMs digital assets by putting together existing ideas:

- First, build a digital proposition based on specialist knowledge (Maron et al., 2009) which offers more value than the free online site.

- Sustain interest and build the value of the network by delivering a stream of value using a journalistic approach to digital content. (Staves, 2019a)
- Employ curated user participation as part of a ladder of participation to convert users to payment. (Zalmanson and Oestreicher-Singer, 2016)
- Convert users to payment via subscription or donation rather than membership, making premium content available to a much wider and younger audience. (Michaels, C., 2017) (Tzuo and Weisert, 2018)

The conclusions are illustrated by making specific concept suggestions for Imperial War Museums. (see appendix 13.1)

1.6 Originality/value

This dissertation provides original research on current museum thinking in the use of digital assets. It reveals perceived barriers to monetisation but also finds and examines existing examples. Using a framework, ideas are combined into a possible future business model for consideration by policy makers within museums and funders.