

Engaging Young Adults in Museums

An Audience Research Study

Emma Shrapnel, 2012, Master of Museum Studies

Preface

I would like to acknowledge and thank David Bock, Lynda Kelly and Chris Lang of the Australian Museum for their cooperation and guidance during this research project. I declare this work is an original piece written by myself, Emma Shrapnel, with any other work referred to being sufficiently referenced.

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Introduction – Reason for research

In recent decades, the role that museums play in society and the museum as a whole has changed significantly.¹ The museum has shifted from being sacred and untouchable to a socially responsive cultural institution open to scrutiny.² Museums are no longer collection-driven institutions, but instead are visitor-centred establishments interested in how to connect with the public and broaden their scope to new audiences.³ They are now recognising their role as part of the leisure industry and their obligations to entertain their visitors, and as a result are altering their policies and practices accordingly.⁴

Studies have shown that there is a significant gap in museum visiting from the time when youths leave school to when they settle down and have children.⁵ It is in the interests of museums to fill this gap and successfully engage the young adult audience.⁶ Internationally throughout the past decade museums have tried, some successfully and some unsuccessfully, to reach this target audience. In order to successfully attract this target audience, their needs and wants in a museum must be thoroughly researched.

This research project will investigate the barriers preventing young adults attending museums; how museums around the world are currently trying to engage this audience; and what the current needs and wants of this audience are in a museum.

¹ Davies, R. 'Overcoming Barriers to Visiting: Raising awareness of, and providing orientation and navigation to, a museum and its collections through new technologies', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, vol.19, no.3, Routledge, Oxon, 2001, pp.283

² Anderson, G. *Reinventing the museum: Historical and contemporary perspectives on the paradigm shift*, Altamira, California, 2004, pp.1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid. pp.4.

⁵ Black, G. *The Engaging Museum: Developing Museums for Visitor Involvement*, Routledge, Oxon, 2005, pp.38.

⁶ Ibid.

Young adults may include those in the early adult transition (17-22 years) and those entering the adult world (22-28 years).⁷ The target market of young adults as defined for this research project includes individuals aged 18 to 26 years.

The result of this research project will be an updated and detailed presentation of the most successful ways to engage young adults in a museum environment based specifically on their current needs, wants and interests.

⁷ Gibson, H. & Yiannakis, A. 'Tourist roles: Needs and the Lifecourse', *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol.19, no.2, Elsevier, Amsterdam, 2002, pp.359.

Literature Review – *Taking down the barriers of museum visiting*

From a wide range of literature, five key barriers preventing young adults attending museums can be identified. These include the stereotypes young adults have of museums, the lack of relevance to their needs and wants, past experiences with museums, lack of expendable money and the lack of a 'comfort zone'. These will be described in detail below.

The stereotypical view that young adults have of museums as being boring and dictating, has been identified as a main barrier preventing young adults attending museums. Korn states that young adults view museums as dictating, uninviting and firmly structured.⁸ Kelly supports this statement, suggesting that they see museum exhibitions as boring, unapproachable and protective.⁹ Bartlett continues that young adults have poor perceptions of museums, seeing them as didactic and preoccupied with the past, whereas this age groups' interest lies in the present and future.¹⁰

A significant barrier preventing young adults attending museums as identified by a variety of scholars is the lack of relevance to their needs and wants. Chung describes this as a huge societal shift in audience behavioural patterns that museums have not yet adapted to.¹¹ With the introduction of social media, the way that young adults receive information and ways to engage them have now changed. With these changes have come new values, needs and wants for young adults.¹² Similarly, McCarthy and Mason claim that museums lack relevance to the identity of young adults, indicating a clash between the culture of museums and the identity of young people.¹³ Chung continues that young adults desire jointly constructed knowledge, instead of the traditional museum

⁸ Korn, R. *Audience Research: Young Adult Study*, Randi & Korn Associates, Boston, 2008, pp.5.

⁹ Kelly, L. *Young People and Museums*, The Australian Museum Audience Research Department, September 2009, accessed 30th of March 2012 <http://australianmuseum.net.au/Young-People-and-Museums>

¹⁰ Bartlett, A. & Kelly, L. *Youth audiences: Research summary*, Australian Museum, Sydney, 2000, pp.1.

¹¹ Denver Art Museum, *Creativity, Community and a Dose of the Unexpected*, Denver Art Museum, Denver, 2011, pp.5.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ McCarthy, C. & Mason, D. 'The feeling of exclusion: young people's perceptions of art galleries', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, 2008, pp.4.

dictating knowledge to them.¹⁴ They want choice and the option of customising their experience.¹⁵ Korn further states that young adults crave an environment which invites them to be social, feel comfortable and to learn and share ideas as a group.¹⁶ In agreement, Kelly claims young people desire social venues where they have the opportunity to meet and learn from like-minded people, ask questions and share ideas, and do not see museums as holding such activities.¹⁷ Bartlett and Gordon also agree that young adults desire exhibitions which cater for group engagement and allow them to share and compare, not just simply read and review.¹⁸ They continue that young adults want exhibition experiences that are contemporary, forward-looking and which tell them about the 'now' and the future.¹⁹ However current museum exhibitions as they see them are retrospective and preoccupied in the past.²⁰ It is agreed by all the mentioned scholars that young adults desire a level of interaction with the exhibition, allowing them to test their skills and engage with the content matter.²¹ However, most interactive activities at museums are aimed at children, and therefore do not suit their age.²² Chung suggests that in order to break down this social barrier turning young adults away from museums, while still holding on to their overall values and mission, museums must adapt to these changing values of young adults.²³ This can be done by providing environments which encourage interaction, collaboration and co-creating within the exhibition and further connecting with this age group through means of social media.²⁴

Past experiences of museum visiting from childhood have been identified as another significant preventative of museum attendance among young adults. Kelly claims that memories of enforced school visits to museums, having to fill out boring worksheets and being unable to pursue their own

¹⁴ Denver Art Museum, pp.5.

¹⁵ Ibid. pp.6.

¹⁶ Korn, pp.5.

¹⁷ Kelly, *Young People and Museums*.

¹⁸ Bartlett, Gordon, & Kelly, *Indigenous Youths and Museums*, Australian Museum, 2002, pp.11.

¹⁹ Bartlett, Gordon, & Kelly, pp.11.

²⁰ Bartlett, Gordon, & Kelly, pp.11..

²¹ Kelly, *Young People and Museums*.

²² Ibid.

²³ Denver Art Museum, pp.6.

²⁴ Ibid.

interests will significantly influence one's decision making about museum visiting later on in life.²⁵

Anderson, Horlock and Jackson support Kelly's remarks, claiming that due to these childhood memories of being forced to fill out boring worksheets at a museum, young adults associate museums simply with education, not entertainment.²⁶ The authors continue by suggesting that these institutions must be 'de-institutionalised' so that young adults may be able to gain a degree 'psychological ownership' over them, and there by eventually accept them as a place relevant to their age group.²⁷ Essentially, museums must find a way to make them appear less as a formal educational institution, and more as a casual, social destination.²⁸ This need for conceptual change in the museum²⁹ is confirmed by many currently writing about museums. Falk and Dierking,³⁰ Bradburne³¹ and Griffin³² all agree that museums need to change themselves from places strictly of education to places inviting casual learning that respond to the needs and interests of varying members of the public.³³ As stated by Leinhardt, Martin and Schauble,³⁴ museums should now encompass a multifaceted, outward looking role as hosts who invite visitors to their venue to wonder, encounter and learn as they choose.³⁵

A lack of expendable money has been confirmed amongst scholars as a significant barrier preventing museum attendance of young adults. As stated by Kelly, most young adults are students, or are just

²⁵ Kelly, *Young People and Museums*

²⁶ Anderson, D., Horlock, N., Jackson, T., *Testing the Water: Young people and galleries*, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2000, pp.17.

²⁷ Ibid. pp.19.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Kelly, L. *Developing a Model for Museum Visiting*, Australian Museum Audience Research Centre, Sydney, 2001, pp.1.

³⁰ Falk, J. & Dierking, L. *Learning from Museums: Visitor Experiences and the Making of Meaning*, AltaMira Press, Walnut Creek, 2000, pp.4.

³¹ Bradburne, J. 'Dinosaurs and White Elephants: the Science Centre in the 21st Century' *Museum Management and Curatorship*, no.17, Routledge, London, 1998, pp.119.

³² Griffin, D. 'Not the Last Hurrah!' *Muse*, no.2/3, Canada Museums Association, Quebec, 1998, pp.13.

³³ Kelly, *Developing a Model for Museum Visiting*, pp.1.

³⁴ Leinhardt, G., Martin, L. Schauble, L. 'A Framework for Organising a Cumulative Research Agenda in Informal Learning Contexts', *Journal of Museum Education*, no.22, Left Coast Press, Walnut Creek, 1998, p.3.

³⁵ Ibid.

starting their career in the workforce, which translates to very little money and a restriction of expendable cash.³⁶

The final barrier preventing young adults visiting museums as identified by many scholars is the lack of a 'comfort zone' at museums. McCarthy and Mason state that young adults do not feel as if they are a part of museums and they do not 'feel at home'.³⁷ Korn supports this theory, claiming that young adults do not view museums as being comfortable, inviting and relaxing venues.³⁸ This view is also shared by Beeho, Davies and Prentice, who claim that young adults are less likely to visit museums as they feel it is of their 'comfort zone' and do not see it as a relaxing and inviting destination.³⁹ Similarly, Fleming suggests this as a psychological barrier preventing young adults attending museums, claiming that it is caused by the notion of "threshold fear", which dissuades people from entering spaces where they feel uncomfortable.⁴⁰

³⁶ Kelly, *Young People and Museums*.

³⁷ McCarthy, C. & Mason, D. 'The feeling of exclusion: young people's perceptions of art galleries', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, Victoria University of Wellington, Wellington, 2008, pp.4.

³⁸ Korn, pp.5.

³⁹ Beeho, A. Davies, A. & Prentice, R. 'Seeking generic motivations for visiting and not visiting museums and like cultural attractions' *Museum Management and Curatorship*, no.16, Routledge, London, 1997, pp.55.

⁴⁰ Fleming, D. 'A question of perception'. *Museums Journal*, April issue, The Museums Association, London 1999, p.29.

Background Research – *What efforts are museums around the world currently making to attract young adult visitors?*

Internationally, museums are attempting to forge ways in which to better connect with the young adult audience, so they may be accepted as a fun and desirable social destination for this age group.

Mobile museums and outdoor exhibitions in unexpected places are popping up all over the world in a bid to find new ways to meet their patrons and engage young adults. This relatively new trend has been driven by various forms of social media such as Facebook and Twitter⁴¹ which facilitate communications with masses of ‘followers’, combined with long-running traditions of performance art and a variety of cultural fusions in public places.⁴²

The San Francisco Mobile Museum, for example, is a touring exhibition which fits in the back of a car.⁴³ It allows individuals to explore their local communities through personal narratives and then share them with others.⁴⁴ This mobile format displays the museum in a new and exciting way to outsiders and is designed to spark curiosity and interest in museum collections amongst young adults.⁴⁵

The Centre Pompidou in France is another temporary exhibition aimed at attracting young adults and audiences unfamiliar with museums. A variety of items from the collection are presented in a number of orange and blue tents in a Paris suburb, with the setup reminiscent of a circus - light, flexible, cheap and festive.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Junction, *Museums and me: Junction's top tips for engaging young people*, The Guardian Professional, 2012, accessed 20th of March 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2012/mar/13/museums-junction-engage-young-people>

⁴² American Association of Museums, ‘Taking it to the streets’ *Trends Watch 2012*, American Association of Museums, Washington, 2012, pp.11.

⁴³ The San Francisco Mobile Museum, *The San Francisco Mobile Museum – Who We Are*, The SF Mobile Museum Website, accessed on 25th of April 2012, <http://sfmobilemuseum.org/>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ The Centre Pompidou, *Background*, The Centre Pompidou Website, accessed 1st of May 2012 <http://www.centrepompidou.fr/pompidou/Communication.nsf/0/88D31BDB4FE7AB60C1256D970053FA6F?OpenDocument&sessionM=8.1&L=2>

One of the largest pop-up museums of recent times is the Guggenheim BMW Lab in New York City, placed in a busy city park. It is described as a living museum in a state of constant curation involving group activities, panels, games and a kiosk serving organic meals.⁴⁷ This fusion of unexpected and random activities is designed to interest young people in museums and to encourage them to accept museum visiting as a social norm.⁴⁸

In Michigan, the Detroit Institute of Art introduced the Inside/Out Initiative, which consisted of displaying large high-quality, life-size reproductions of famous artworks around the city.⁴⁹ This initiative was aimed at wooing new visitors who wouldn't usually go to art museums, such as young adults, and inspire them to travel to the Detroit Institute of Art to see the original paintings.⁵⁰

In Los Angeles, the Museum of Contemporary Art created a program titled Art in the Streets which focused on street art such as graffiti.⁵¹ Through focusing on art forms popular with young people, they hoped to attract a larger amount of young adult visitors.⁵² This program was a success, drawing large number of visitors and creating a wave of new graffiti art in the neighbourhood outside the museum.⁵³

The Denver Art Museum began running an event named "Untitled" which occurred on the last Friday of every month starting in February 2007 from 6pm-10pm.⁵⁴ It was included with regular museum admission and strived to engage adult visitors with the museum's collections in unconventional, unexpected and unscripted ways.⁵⁵ The exhibitions were entwined with live music, free nibbles, a cash bar and a range of activities that visitors could customise to their liking. All of this combined

⁴⁷ The Guggenheim, *BMW Guggenheim Lab*, The Guggenheim Foundation, accessed 28th April 2012 <http://www.guggenheim.org/guggenheim-foundation/collaborations/bmw-guggenheim>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Detroit Institute of Art, *Inside | Out*, The Detroit Institute of Art Special Events, accessed 2nd of May 2012 <http://www.dia.org/calendar/special-event.aspx?id=2814&iid>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Museum of Contemporary Art, *Announcing Art in the Streets*, The Curve – Museum of Contemporary Art, accessed 5th of May 2012 <http://www.moca.org/audio/blog/?p=1522>

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Denver Art Museum, pp.8.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

created a low-key, social ambiance.⁵⁶ Activities offered ranged from a series of tours given by experts in the fields; neurologists, chefs, cartographers – all from the perspective of their own expertise.⁵⁷ Activities included in the event were all created to have offbeat and unexpected content, so visitors experienced something new on every visit.⁵⁸

The Museum of London is taking an interesting approach to attracting young people to museums. They have recruited young people aged 16-21 to form “The Junction Youth Panel”, who act as consultants and work with the museum to ensure projects, displays and events appeal to young people.⁵⁹ Junction members contribute to all areas of projects, including helping to curate displays and organise public events.⁶⁰ The Museum of London’s approach is quite different: instead of creating programs *for* young people, they have had programs created *by* young people. While the target age group for Junction is not identical to that in the current research project, this unique approach to attracting younger visitors to museums should be noted and considered.

⁵⁶ Denver Art Museum, pp.8.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Museum of London, *Junction - Introducing the Museum of London’s youth panel*, The Museum of London, 2012, accessed 1st of May 2012, <http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/Get-involved/Collaborative-projects/Stories-of-the-World/Junction+youth+panel.htm>

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Case Study – Jurassic Lounge

A model of a successful program

Jurassic Lounge is a seasonal after-hours event run at the Australian Museum in Sydney, NSW, Australia, on Tuesday evenings from 5:30pm-9:30pm.⁶¹ There are two seasons per year, both running for approximately 8 weeks each.⁶² The aim of the event is to get younger “museum-shy” audiences into the museum and engage them in ways that are suitable and appealing to their age group.⁶³ The entire museum is open for visitors to explore, whilst consuming alcohol, with extra activities including live bands, performers, artists, DJs and vintage games.⁶⁴ The event was organised in conjunction with The Festivalists, a company specialising in the creation of art and cultural events.⁶⁵

The Jurassic Lounge event is growing in popularity. When this event first began early in 2011, the event organisers hoped to attract 300 people per night.⁶⁶ By the end of the second season, visitor numbers were averaging 1000 per night and repeat visitations significantly increased from 33% in season one to 50% in season two.⁶⁷ Visitor numbers continued to increase in the third season, with the season finale attracting 2000 visitors. The end of the second season survey, compiled from 100 respondents, found that 80.4% of visitors would attend with friends.⁶⁸ The most common age group was 25-34 (53.5%) and the second most common was 18-24 (30.2%).⁶⁹ Almost all visitors were Australian residents (98.8%) and most had obtained an undergraduate or postgraduate university

⁶¹ The Festivalists, *Jurassic Lounge - About Us*, The Jurassic Lounge Website, 2010, accessed 5th of March 2012 <http://www.jurassiclounge.com/about-us/>

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*, 8th of April, 2012.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Lang, C. *Australian Museum: Jurassic Lounge Season 2 Online Survey Results*, Australian Museum, 2011, pp.2.

⁶⁸ Ibid. pp.4.

⁶⁹ Ibid. pp.12.

degree (86.1%).⁷⁰ Interestingly, the most common place visitors found out about the event was through simple word of mouth.⁷¹

It can be determined that Jurassic Lounge has successfully engaged the young adult market, with 100% of respondents to their survey at the end of the second season stating they would return to Jurassic Lounge, 93.9% stating they would recommend it to a friend⁷² and 87.5% agreeing that it has changed the way they viewed the Australian Museum.⁷³

Interview with David Bock

An interview was conducted with one of the organisers of Jurassic Lounge, David Bock, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the program and how it successfully engages young adults.

David Bock describes Jurassic Lounge as for the 'young, funky crowd'.⁷⁴ It is a way to get this younger, museum-shy audience into the museum, almost without knowing it.⁷⁵ The drawcard of a slightly underground and cutting edge art and music event is used, where visitors can enjoy something unique and different.⁷⁶ Although it is designed for 18-35 year olds, it is skewed more towards the younger student audience.⁷⁷

David Bock claims the drawcard of Jurassic Lounge being trendy and slightly underground is vital to the programs' success.⁷⁸ He continues "*We have been approached by mainstream media to market it, the Sunrise show and Mix FM suggested we could do something together. However if we introduce mainstream sponsors, it may 'water down' our brand as such. The worry is if we become too*

⁷⁰ Lang, C. *Jurassic Lounge Season 2 Online Survey Results*, pp.13.

⁷¹ Ibid. pp.8.

⁷² Ibid. pp.7.

⁷³ Ibid. pp.11.

⁷⁴ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

mainstream, we might spoil the effect – you might sell out every night but it might ‘lose its coolness’. That’s also why we only do it in seasons, so it keeps it a special thing.”⁷⁹

In addition to this, David Bock states *“We change the bands and their genre’s quite often. The silent disco has been a core activity, the inclusion of artists has also been core. However, we are always getting new artists in. We are constantly reinventing it. If you went to Jurassic Lounge one week, then went the next week, you would see a lot of very different performances and a very different experience.”⁸⁰*

These statements highlight some central points to consider in future programs. Young adults enjoy the unique, underground and unexpected. In order to successfully engage them in museums, you must ‘keep them on their toes’ so to speak. Museum organisers must focus on maintaining the ‘specialness’ of an event through only offering the program in seasonal blocks and not promoting it through mainstream advertising. Furthermore, the content of these events must constantly be changing – whether it is with new musician acts, artists, displaying of different sciences and varying performances of all types. The notion of ongoing reinvention of the program is central to keeping the young adult audience interested and the overall program’s ongoing success.

David Bock also comments that the ability to consume alcohol at Jurassic Lounge is also one of the most pinnacle points to the success of the program.⁸¹ He continues that the issue of alcohol consumption at museum events is a topic which is feared by many museums worldwide.⁸² With alcohol consumption come the connotations of drunken fights, objects getting broken and general antisocial behaviour.⁸³ However, David Bock explains the museum has never had any problems with bad behaviour, antisocial behaviour towards each other or the museum during Jurassic Lounge

⁷⁹ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

events.⁸⁴ In fact, he states that the museum gets less damaged at these events on Tuesday nights than it will during the school holidays.⁸⁵ He adds, *“The night starts at 5:30 and ends at 9:30. People aren’t coming in pissed... they are actually coming out for an intelligent evening.”*⁸⁶ He states that it is all about the context *“if you’re in a bar, you’re there to drink and meet new friends. At Jurassic Lounge, there are bars here, but you’re here to see everything and enjoy the evening.... Everyone is enjoying themselves but everyone is really respectful of each other and the museum.”*⁸⁷

Of course, portion control is a factor controlling this. The free drink that is offered with entry to Jurassic Lounge is equivalent to 1 standard drink, unlike some alcoholic beverages offered at pubs which may equal to 1.5 or 2 standard drinks. David Bock adds *“They drink responsibly and they act responsible – you treat them like adults and they behave like adults. It’s a Current Affair fear ‘everyone is getting drunk and beating each other up on the streets of Sydney’– but, 99% of the population probably doesn’t act like that, and 100% of the visitations (to Jurassic Lounge) do not behave like that, so it’s again not about drinking buckets of alcohol.”*⁸⁸

These comments suggest that the connotations of alcohol consumption and violent, antisocial behaviour are inappropriate, and it is the context which alcohol is consumed that will eventually determine the behavioural outcomes of patrons. Unlike in a bar or pub, the focus of the evening is not on alcohol, it is instead all the fascinating activities at the museum. Alcohol in this context is a complimenting addition, not a central focus.

David Bock states that another key reason why Jurassic Lounge is so popular is because it is a ‘safe’ environment - a casual, social place you can go out to with your friends, with the opportunity to interact with others and the exhibitions, or sit back and observe.⁸⁹ Nothing is forced and everything

⁸⁴ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

is optional. The lack of museum branding adds to this feeling of a 'safe' environment.⁹⁰ David Bock states *"Have you noticed the advertising for Jurassic Lounge doesn't have the Australian Museum logo on it? The Australian Museum is purposely not putting branding on this. There is a perception out there, and we see it as well, of museums as this old dusty musty institution. So while the museum itself might not be the drawcard, it might be the thing that brings them back and impresses them when they're here. A lot of visitors say to me that they haven't been to the museum since they were in school, and then say 'wow, I had a really good night! I wasn't expecting that!'"*⁹¹

David Bock agrees with other scholars that young adults may not attend museums due to childhood memories of forced, educational museum visits and boring worksheets.⁹² As Bock says, this leaves them with the impression that museums are dull, boring and plainly educational, making them want to not go back there.⁹³ Most of them won't go back until they have children of their own, and, as Bock says, they may only then realise that museums are in fact quite interesting.⁹⁴

Overall, there are several points that should be taken from David Bock's comments and considered when creating new museum programs to attract young adults. Firstly, the notion of an underground, edgy and special event is a vital drawcard. Due to this, advertising through mainstream media should be avoided. Instead, lesser known media outlets which are popular among the young adult target market should be used for advertising the event. To further maintain the 'specialness' of the program, it should only be offered in seasonal blocks. To maintain the target market's interest in the program and increase the likelihood of returning visits, the program must constantly reinvent itself, offering different activities each week. These activities should include the sciences and attractions of the museum along with artists, musical performances and other unexpected forms of pop culture.

As David Bock says, *"I think it's all about variety and the unexpected. It's about presenting the*

⁹⁰ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Kelly, *Young People and Museums*.

⁹³ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*

⁹⁴ Ibid.

*museum to this audience in a different light, in a different way to what they remember from childhood visits to museums.*⁹⁵

Observation study

As the author of this research paper is in the target age range of this study, an observation study has been completed on a visit to Jurassic Lounge. This will provide an inside look at the features of the event as well as the range of people it attracts.

Whilst waiting in line for Jurassic Lounge, it was quite evident that a large portion of visitors were in their 20s and come from the 'arty' and 'alternative' subcultures. However, there was also a wide variety of other people here, some in their 30s also. The atmosphere of the event was created through a variety of means. Popular House music was being played by a DJ throughout the museum. The lights were dimmed and there were projectors playing abstract ambient images across the walls. On other walls there were scenes from old cult-favourite movies playing. In each room, visitors walk into a completely different experience. In one room visitors may find jelly wrestling dinosaurs amongst the permanent dinosaur exhibit. In another room there may be burlesque dancers entertaining the crowd. An artist created an artwork whilst visitors watched in one room, and in the next visitors were invited to help create an artwork together. In all rooms around the museum, a large portion of visitors were paying most of their attention not to the temporary attractions, but to the exhibitions themselves. It appears that the notion that young adults find museum exhibitions boring may be an inaccurate stereotype. The entire event gave visitors the opportunity to engage and participate, or sit back and observe the surroundings.

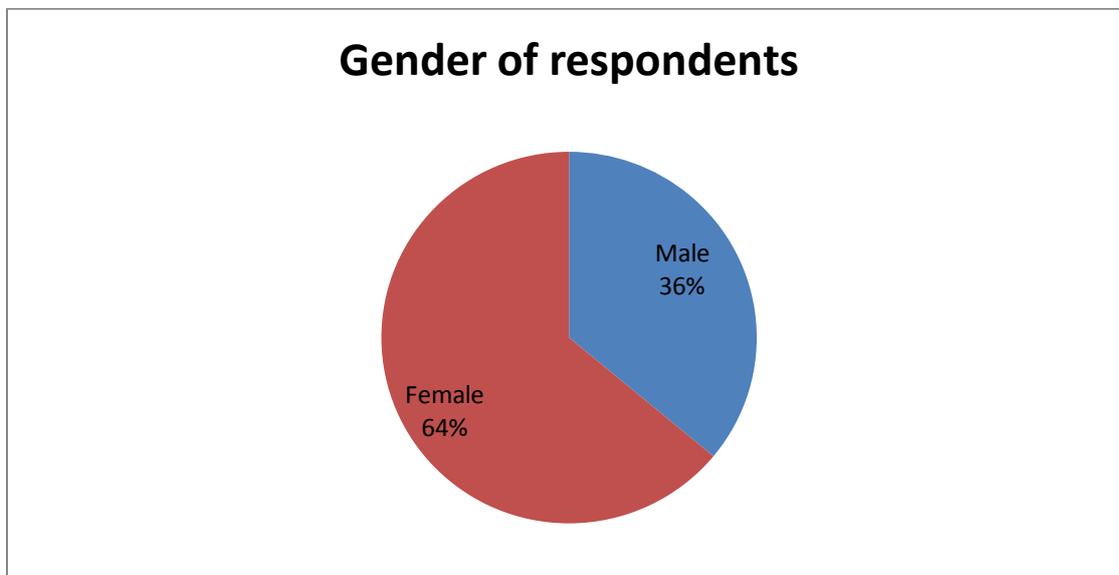
⁹⁵ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*.

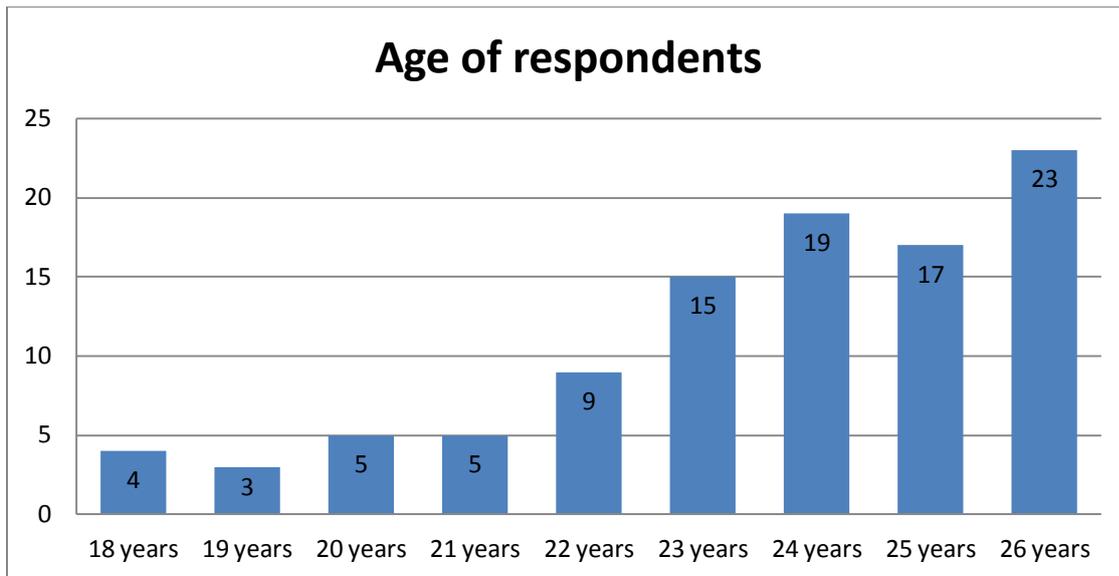
Survey

An online survey was created using the website "SurveyMonkey". The survey was designed to be quick and easy to comprehend, being only 10 questions in length and using plain English. It consisted of a range of multiple choice questions with the option to leave additional comments at the end of several questions. The survey was distributed via social media websites such as Facebook, Twitter and online forums and the sample consisted of 100 young adults aged 18-26 years. The aim of the survey was to better understand what attracts young adults to attend museums, what deters them from attending museums and what new aspects they would like to see incorporated into exhibitions.

Demographics

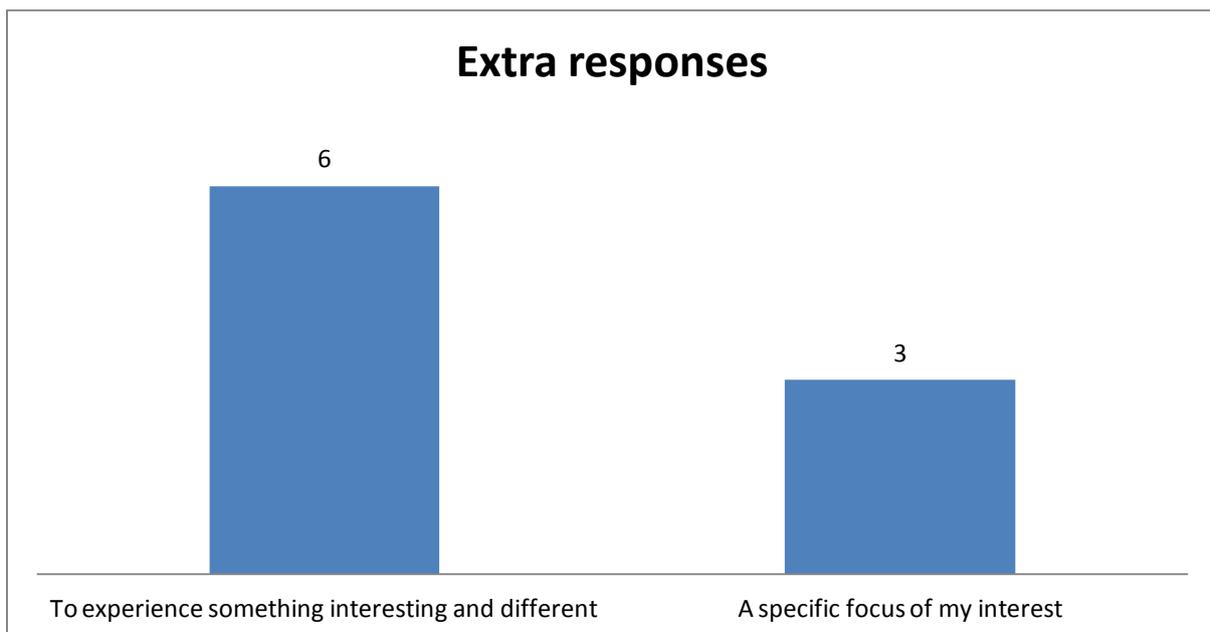
Of the 100 respondents, 36% were male and 64% female. There were respondents of all ages from the 18-26 years group, with the majority being in the 23-26 years of age bracket (23%).





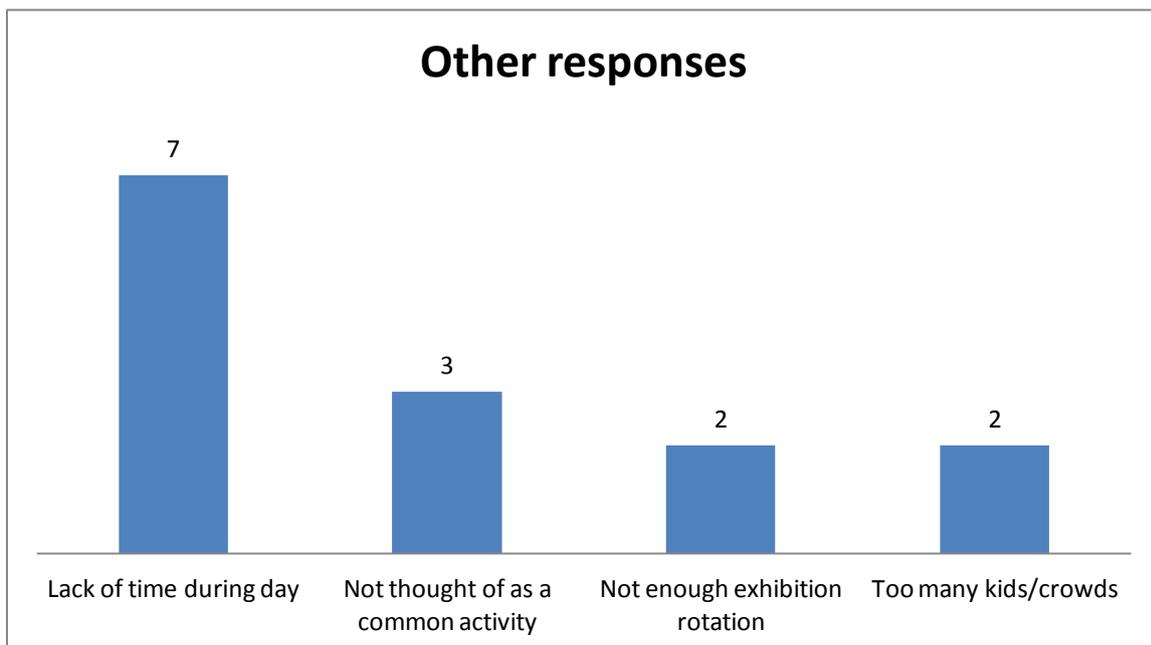
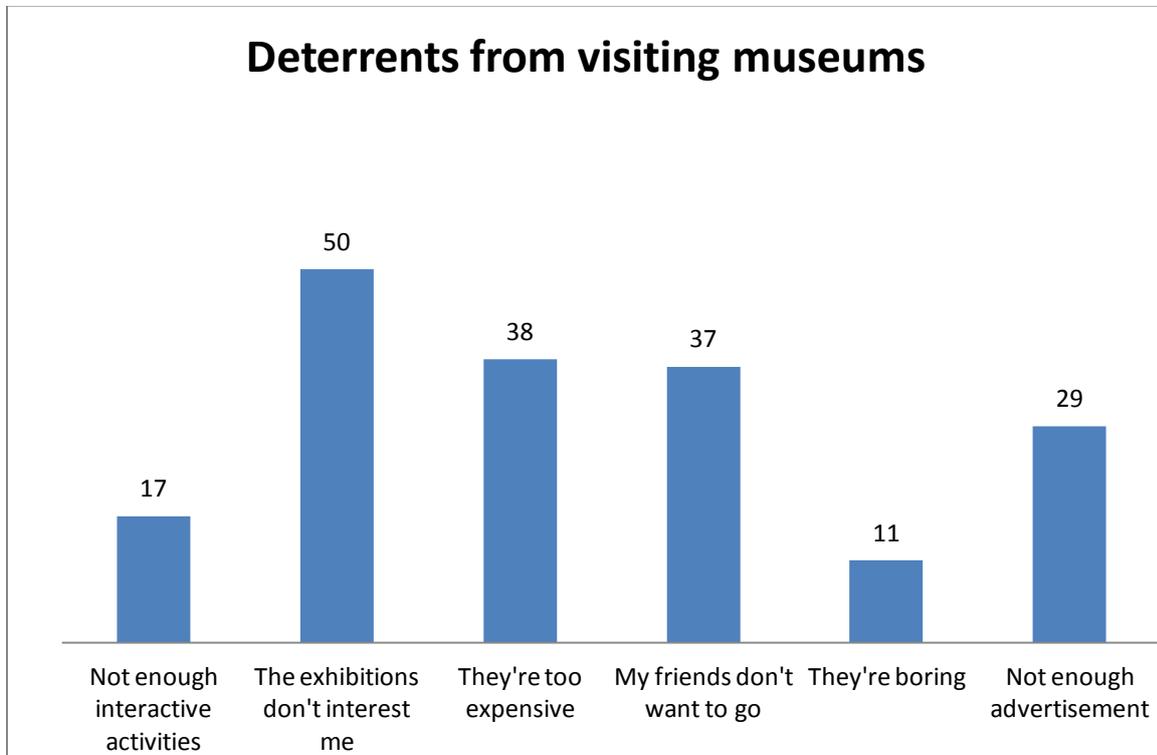
Qualitative results

When asked what attracts them to go to a museum, 39% of respondents stated that they would go to attend a specific exhibition; 28% claimed they would go to a museum to learn more about different cultures and societies, while only 15% indicated they would attend a museum to learn more about their own culture and society. 18% cited they would go for a social outing with friends. Some additional responses were included in the “Other – please specify” option. The majority of responses here stated that they wanted to simply experience something interesting and different to what they have experienced before, or an exhibition relating to a specific interest of theirs, such as science.

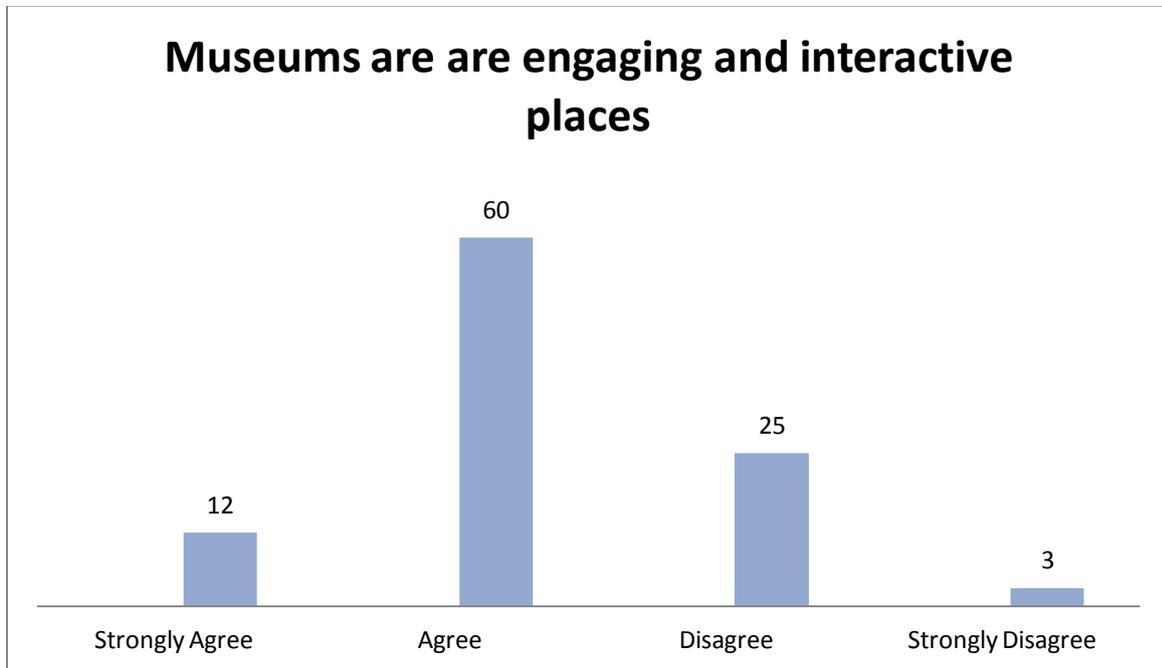


When asked what deterred them from attending museums, 27% stated that the exhibitions did not interest them; 21% claimed that museums were too expensive and 20% stated that their friends did not want to go with them. 16% indicated that there was not enough advertisement of exhibitions and 9% claimed that there were not enough interactive activities. Lastly, 6% of respondents stated quite simply, that they thought museums were boring. Some additional responses were also included in the “Other – please specify” option. The majority of responses in this section stated that

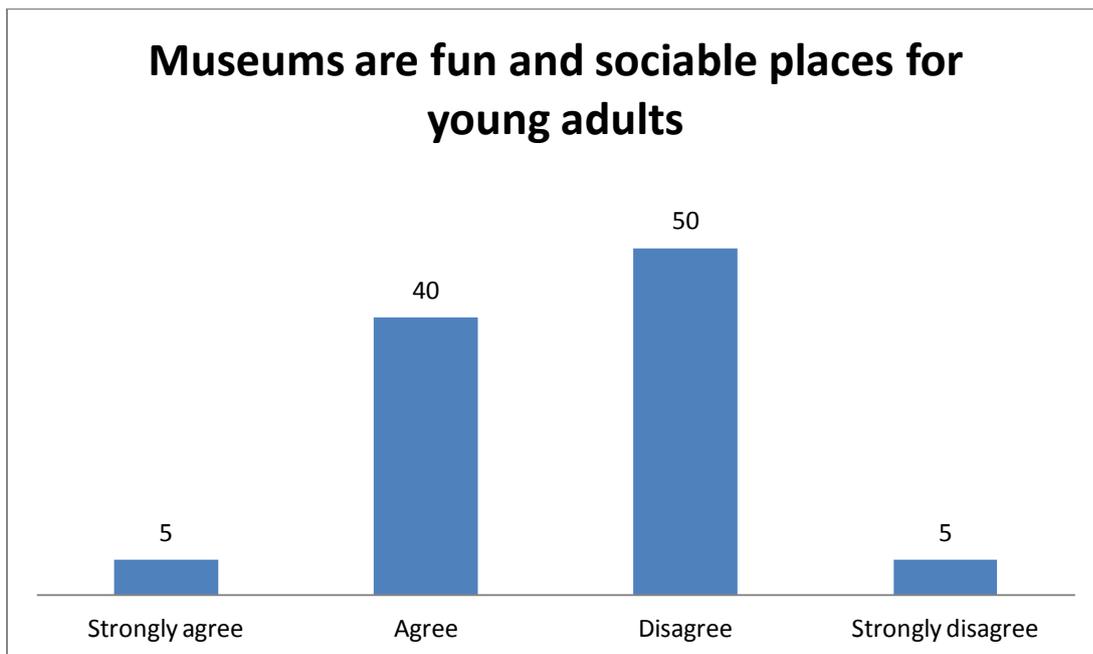
they did not have enough time to visit museums. However some also cited that museum visiting was not recognized as a regular social destination and they disliked the amount of babies and children at museums.



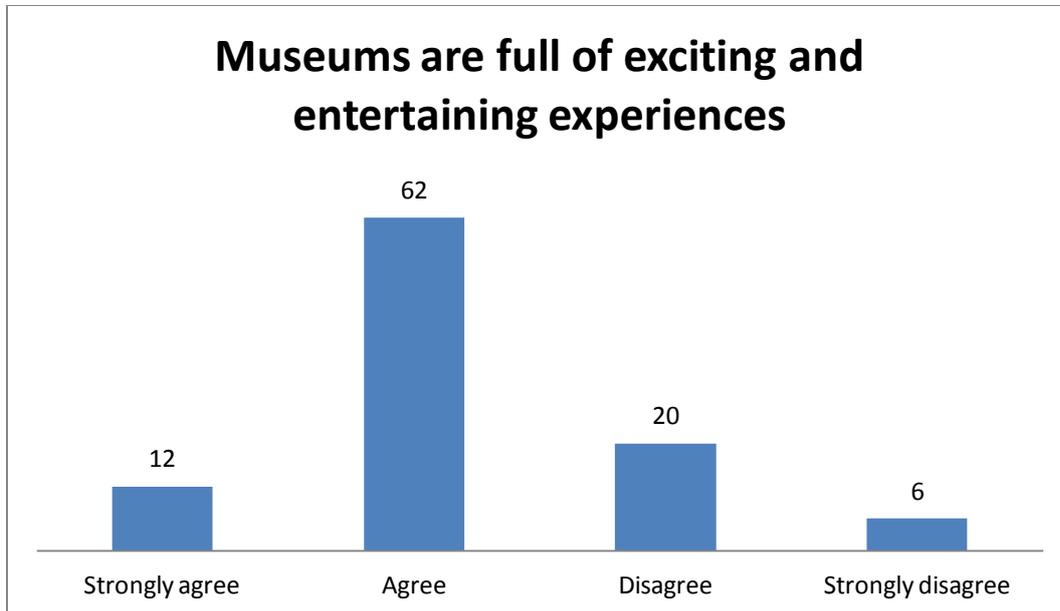
Only 12% strongly agreed that museums were engaging and interactive places for young adults, however another 60% listed that they agreed with this statement. 25% stated they disagreed and only 3% stated that they strongly disagreed.



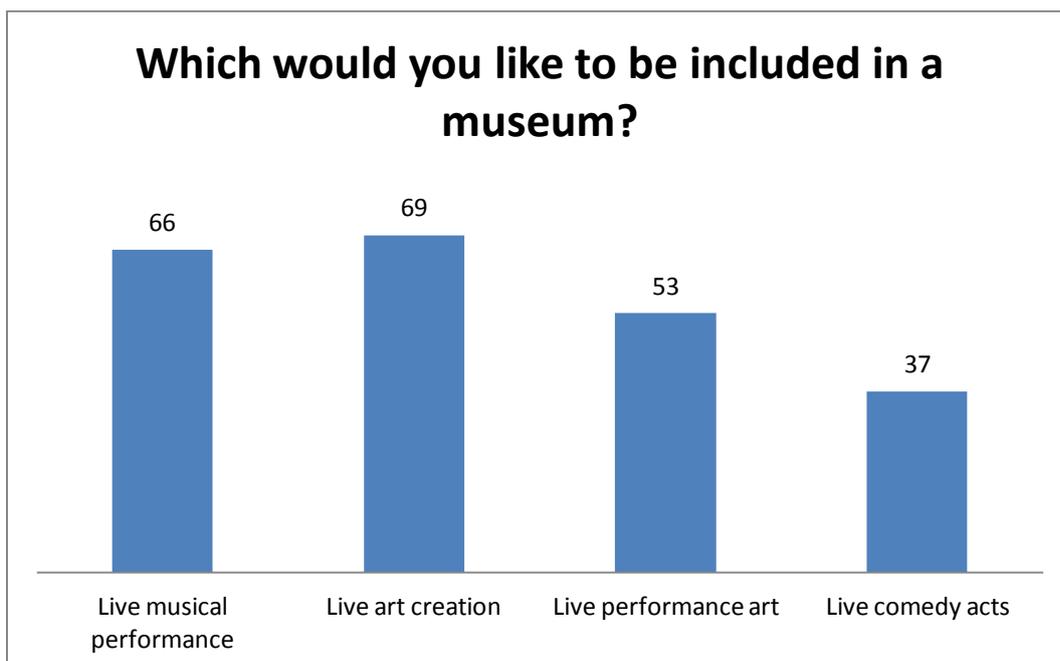
When asked if they thought museums were fun and sociable places for young adults, only 5% strongly agreed, 40% agreed, 50% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed.



In response to the statement that museums are places full of exciting and entertaining experiences, 12% strongly agreed, 62% agreed, 20% disagreed and only 6% strongly disagreed.



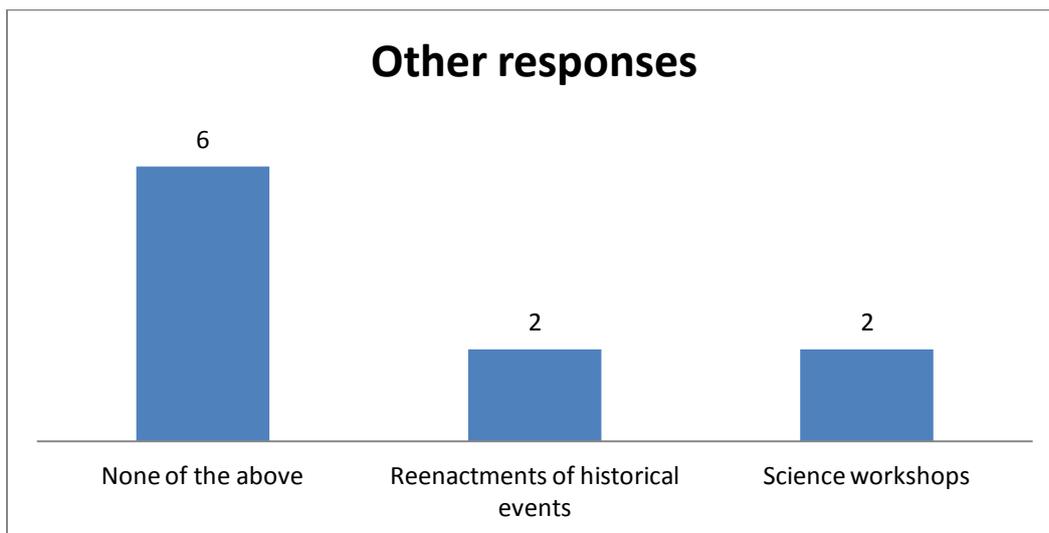
The next question asked respondents what aspects of pop culture they would like to see included in museum visiting. 30% of respondents indicated they would like to see live art creation, 29% stated they would enjoy live musical performances, 24% said they would like to see live performance art and 16% indicated they would enjoy live comedy acts.



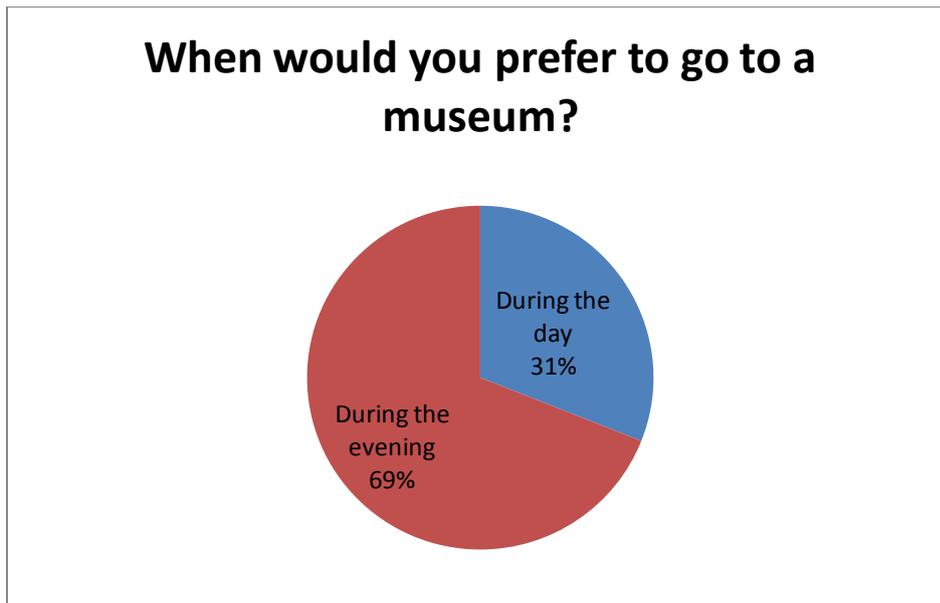
Some additional responses were also included in the “Other – please specify” option. Several respondents stated they would not like any aspects of pop culture incorporated into museum visiting to make it more relevant to young adults, noting that it would make it too crowded with ideas and that museums are places for history and learning.

“(None was not an option.) Museums are places of history and learning, I don't think pop culture is particularly relevant. Some modern art might have once been thought of as pop culture (Warhol e.g.) but this isn't true anymore in my opinion” As another respondent stated *“None, as fun as Jurassic Lounge was, it was too crowded BECAUSE of the pop culture.”*

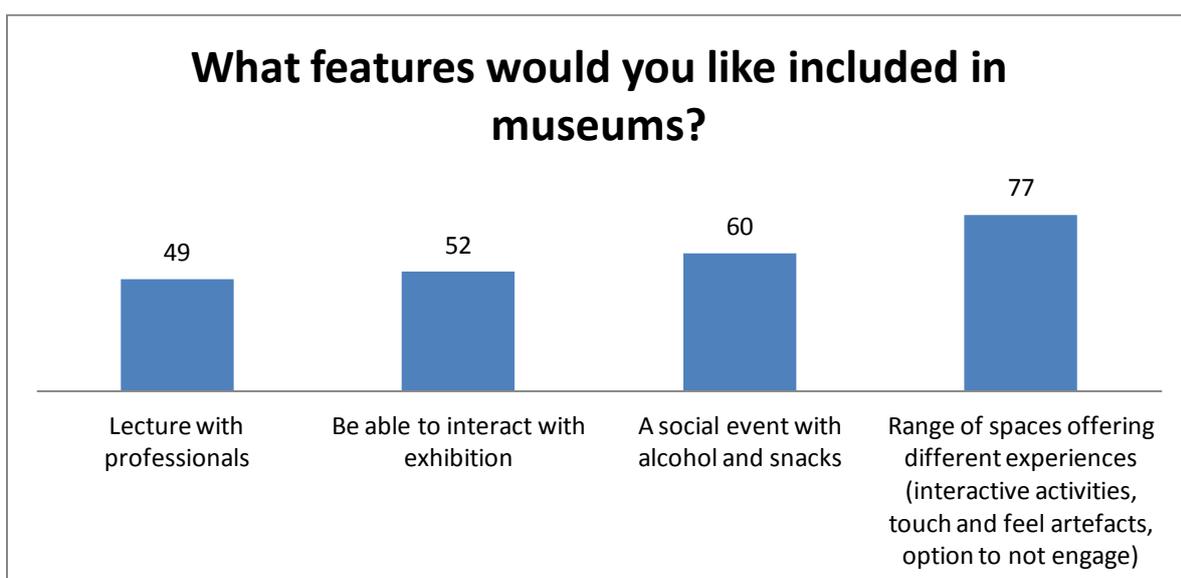
Some respondents also suggested they would enjoy live re-enactments of historical events and science workshops.



When asked if they would prefer to go to the museum during the day or in the evening, 69% stated they would prefer to go during the evening and only 31% indicated they would prefer to go during the day.

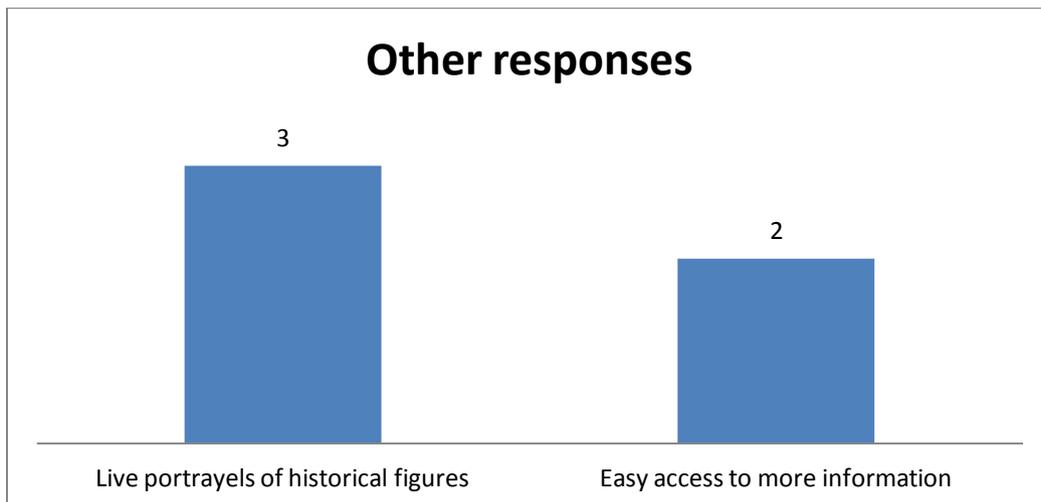


Respondents were asked what features they would like to see included in museum visiting. 32% noted they would enjoy a range of spaces offering different experiences such as interactive activities, opportunity to touch and feel artefacts and other museum items and the option of being able to sit back, observe and reflect. 25% indicated they would like museum visiting to be more of a social event, with the opportunity to drink alcohol and consume snacks, 22% stated they would like the opportunity to interact in and take part in exhibitions instead of simply observing them and 21% stated they would enjoy lectures given by professionals in a specified field.



Some additional responses were also included in the “Other – please specify” option. Several respondents noted again that they would enjoy seeing live portrayals of historical figures, *“historical re-enactment’s or live portrayals of great historical figures. Example: Al Capone, Marilyn Monroe, Nikola Tesla, Sir John Monash, Malcolm X, Georges Méliès, etc.”*

A number of respondents noted they would like easier access to more information. As one respondent stated *“More information! A large group of people go to museums to learn, and to discover new things. Museums would be better if they made this not only easier, but made it BETTER by allowing interested visitors easy (searchable, e.g. with a familiar not-scary Google-like interface) and efficient access to the information they *want* to read.”*



Conclusions

The results of the independent survey have shown that young adults aged 18 to 26 years do think that museums are full of fun and exciting experiences, with 74% agreeing. However, there are several deterrents stopping them from attending museums. From the survey results, as well as the other qualitative research conducted, an updated list of the needs and wants of young adults in museums is listed below.

1. Young adults want a night-time museum event

Lack of time during daytime visiting hours of museums has been indicated as a significant problem. Accordingly, this age group are more likely to attend a museum event that takes place in the evening, opposed to during the day. There is a clear desire to avoid sharing the space with families and small children.

2. Young adults want to see and experience something new, unique and entertaining

This age group is more interested in learning more about other cultures and societies than their own. They are also likely to attend a museum for a specific exhibition, indicating that in order to capture this audience, museums should consider running events aimed at young adults during the evenings when popular exhibitions are running at the specific museum.

Young adults like 'underground', edgy and unique events.⁹⁶ Therefore it is important to maintain a 'special' and 'cool' image of the event through only providing it in seasonal blocks, avoiding advertising through mainstream media and avoiding branding it with the specific museums' name.

It is important to include an assortment of activities at specialised museum events that are popular with young adults. Live art creation, musical performances and performance art are three key activities that young adults want included in these museum events. To uphold the unique,

⁹⁶ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*.

unexpected and exciting image of the event, it is essential that the program is constantly reinvented.⁹⁷ This means that there should be a constant rotation of musicians, artists, and additional activities each week.

A portion of respondents indicated that museum exhibitions did not interest them – however as Jurassic Lounge has shown, if you display the museum in a different light with an assortment of different activities throughout the exhibitions, it is possible to change the perception this age group has of the museum.⁹⁸ Perhaps the respondents who stated that exhibitions did not interest them have, as some scholars suggest, imprinted ideas of museums as boring, old and plainly educational institutions from forced school visits as a child.⁹⁹ If museums are displayed to them in a different light, would this change their opinion?

Central to museums overcoming these barriers is the necessity to present them in a different light: as unique, exciting, cutting-edge, social destinations. Young adults desire a museum setting consisting of different spaces that offer a variety of experiences. While increased interaction with the exhibition is a clear desire, the key to all these spaces is options. Young adults want the option of interacting and leaving their mark on a place, but also the option of sitting back, observing and reflecting. Nothing should be forced and everything should be optional.

3. Young adults want a low-cost event

Cost is another significant issue deterring this age group from attending museums. Therefore, it should be ensured that an evening event for young adults has an affordable, low cost entry fee.

4. Young adults want museums to be more sociable

The results of the independent survey found that young adults do not view museums as being a sociable venue, nor is it considered to be a place where their friends would attend. Therefore, it is

⁹⁷ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Kelly, *Young People and Museums*.

critically important that museums find ways to market their events for this age group as being fun and enjoyable social destinations to attend with friends. This could be through including sociable activities at their evening events such as hosting musicians, comedy acts, 2 for 1 entry and advertising the event as an after-work destination to attend with colleagues, similar to Jurassic Lounge.

The option to consume alcohol is also important to this age group. This survey has shown that young adults want museums to be more social venues, and they would like the option of being able to enjoy an alcoholic beverage. As David Bock has suggested, this doesn't necessarily have to be such a scary thing for museum officials.¹⁰⁰ He states that if you treat them like adults, they of course, will act like adults.¹⁰¹ It is all about the context; if you provide alcohol in a scenario where it is a complimentary addition to the evening, and getting drunk is not the focus, such as a museum event with an abundance of exciting and unique experiences, it will not be a problem.¹⁰² This has evidentially been displayed in the Jurassic Lounge event at the Australian Museum.

Final comments

Research has shown that young adults do find the content of museums interesting. However the main problems are firstly getting them into the museum as well as making it an environment relevant to their social needs. Once museums accept and adapt to the social needs of young adults, they may be seen in a different light; no longer as old, boring, dusty institutions, but instead fascinating destinations that are widely accepted social destinations.

¹⁰⁰ Bock, D. *Face to Face Interview*.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

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Appendices

1. Appendix A – David Bock interview questions and answers

What is your involvement with Jurassic Lounge?

I'm an Events Coordinator at the Australian Museum and work in public programs. Usually I do a lot of the internal events; school holidays and public programs. I'm very much in the 'museum base'. We have some people who work with events for members involving adults in the evening (members coordinator) and another events coordinator doing private events in the museum (venues coordinator). So essentially we have 3 people working on events in different areas. When Jurassic Lounge started, it began with the Events Manager for venues (venues coordinator). In the second season, it then moved to the Events Manager for members, and then it was decided that as it was a public program, the Events Manager for public programs would handle it, being me!

How would you describe the Jurassic Lounge event?

It's an evening event designed for the 18-35 age group usually without children, shortcuted it's for the 'young, funky crowd'. It's a way to get people almost without knowing it into the museum but using the draw card of a slightly underground and cutting edge art and music event, just a bit of a fun and somewhere very unique and different. It is skewed a bit more to the younger student audience, however you do also get the 'after city crowd', and through word of mouth. From this, you get a very effective communication and a fairly high return rate, for example out of a group, one may return again, and bring a new group of friends.

On average, how many visitors would you get per week?

The last Jurassic Lounge of the Summer Season of 2012 attracted 2000 visitors.

Second season – averaged 1000 per week

Third season (most recent) we are well over that now. It's definitely getting more popular.

It's definitely growing. When we started out in the first season we thought if we got 300 people that would be a great success. We had to move our goalposts very fast as it became much more successful than we first expected.

How long has Jurassic Lounge been running for?

We just finished the third season in April (2012) for 10 weeks. We did 2 seasons last year, the first one was 12 weeks, and the second was 8 weeks in length. The next session will start in August and will run for 10 weeks.

How did Jurassic Lounge start?

There were lots of internal conversations within the museum for a very long time in terms of who comes to the museum, who doesn't come to the museum, which audiences are we getting – often it is the young family audience (50% of visitations), a portion of school visitations, single adults and also tourists.

How was it marketed and advertised?

We employed The Festivalists (a non-profit company specialising in the production of film festivals and cultural events) to do a lot of the developmental programming. We also employed a group called Kabuku Public Relations to do a lot of the marketing. I guess the issue for the museum is everyone is busy doing their job. We had the decision of either changing the marketing team's job completely, or employing someone else to do it. So we use these external groups for advertising and marketing. Kabuku used a lot of street press through their contacts with Drum Media and magazines like that, they also got write ups and that in 'gigs of the week'. They got FBI Radio on board who also organised the programming for one of the nights so it was 'their' night, so they marketed that themselves also. FBI is more of an 'underground' radio station, so it built that sense of Jurassic Lounge being an 'underground' and 'edgy' event, off the mainstream.

We have been approached by mainstream media to market it, the Sunrise show and Mix FM suggested we could do something together. However if our program is seen as trendy, and then we introduce mainstream sponsors, do we then 'water down' our brand as such, and go for the mainstream audience. It's a total audience change if we do that. Also the museum has a capacity, 1000 visitors is a great number, 2000 was getting close to the top of that capacity. The worry is if we become too mainstream, we might spoil the effect – you might sell out every night but it might 'lose its coolness'. That's also why we only do it in seasons, so it keeps it a special thing.

Why did you choose to include the specific features and activities of Jurassic Lounge?

In these internal conversations I mentioned previously, we got talking about how do you get this youth audience in? We have been successful a few times in the past, such as with the Punk Culture photographic exhibition, a body art exhibition. But we put a lot of money, time and effort into putting on an exhibition, and that particular audience comes and then they go again.

We then thought about doing an evening event – the art gallery across the road does a Wednesday night event, with an art focus. Our staff came up with a few ideas in these discussions. A silent disco, turn off gallery lights and find their way around with torches in the dark. We then collaborated with the Festivalists our ideas, who then snowballed them into what we had first season, plus up and coming bands, DJs, VJs, etc, it became – here's a building, what can we fill it with?

What do you think the most popular features of Jurassic Lounge are and why?

It's usually the programs we run in the atrium, as it's quite a large space it attracts a large crowd. On the last night, we had burlesque dancers on stage at the atrium, which is way out there in terms of programming ideas at a museum. But, it was hugely popular, if you change contexts you change everything. While some may assume burlesque dancing is degrading to women, if you ask these dancers they will say it is all about empowerment, I was quite surprised by the large number of

females enjoying the burlesque show! I think the space an event is in directly effects how popular it will be.

Do you change the activities around quite often or keep them the same?

We change the bands and their genre's quite often. The silent disco has been a core activity, the inclusion of artists has also been core – however, we are always getting new artists in. We are constantly reinventing it. If you went to Jurassic Lounge one week, then went the next week, you would see a lot of very different performances and a very different experience.

How do you find alcohol consumption affects the evening? Does it cause any problems?

That's probably the most pinnacle point to the success of the program in the sense that a lot of other museums around Sydney, Australia and now internationally are asking me questions. They are trying to get this audience and alcohol is their biggest fear. The night starts at 5:30 and ends at 9:30. People aren't coming in pissed over pissed drinking, they are actually coming out for an intelligent evening. Again, it's the context. If you're in a bar, you're there to drink and meet new friends. You're here, there are bars but you're here to see everything and enjoy the evening. So by the end of the night, by 9:30 no one has gone rolling out of here drunk. I haven't seen anyone showing any signs of bad behaviour, antisocial behaviour towards each other or the museum. When I've been talking to a number of people from different cultural institutions they were throwing all these sorts of questions at me about alcohol, and I said – the museum gets less damaged (probably only a few broken glasses and spilt drinks) on a Tuesday night than it will during, for example, the school holidays. The kids will be all over the place and the parents that don't restrain their kids from climbing over collections – I've seen it! I've seen kids climb things, break things, pull feathers out of bird displays they were allowed to touch and their parents aren't stopping them. So – there is our core audience, and they are doing more damage to the museum than, what may be perceived on paper to be this really scary 'drunken audience'. At Jurassic Lounge, everyone is enjoying themselves but everyone is really

respectful of each other and they're checking out the museum at the same time, they're looking at the skeletons, the birds, the insects, the dinosaurs... They're actually saying "Oh! Look at this!" exploring it all.

I've noticed the alcohol you do provide is standards drinks – none of those 7% Smirnoff black drinks for example that have a higher alcohol content. Was this purposely to reduce how drunk patrons get?

What we did was get alcohol sponsorship. The alcohol companies gave us a limited amount of free drinks – say we got 6000 free drinks but we gave away 1500 free drinks, we have to pay for the remaining drinks. That then becomes a cost for us to run the night. The free drink may or may not be a deal-breaker for visiting. Going back to people's fear of alcohol at the moment, most people are really responsible. They drink responsibly and they act responsible – you treat them like adults and they behave like adults. It's a sort of Current Affair fear 'everyone is getting drunk and beating each other up on the streets of Sydney and its really dangerous' – but, 99% of the population probably doesn't act like that, and 100% of the visitations (to Jurassic Lounge) do not behave like that, so it's again not about drinking buckets of alcohol.

Why do you think Jurassic Lounge is so popular with young adults?

I think it is really quite a safe environment, in the sense that it is very social. People are bumping into each other and chatting to each other, it is quite a social thing. It's not a nightclub forced 'pick-up' place. It's a place where you're going out with your friends, but you're there looking at a dinosaur, and people are starting to interact with each other around the museum with the performances and the objects. So there is quite a nice social aspect, people leave the night thinking I'll come back again and I'll bring more people.

The live animals have also been hugely popular, also the museum scientists showing off their science has been very popular. The most popular was when we had the taxidermists demonstrating how to

do it. We had people asking them questions all night, I will definitely be doing that again at the next season.

Back to the question, I think it is the interesting acts, performances, the museum itself and the sort of social setting and the perception of it being “cool” is definitely a drawcard. Have you noticed the advertising for Jurassic Lounge doesn’t have the Australian Museum logo on it? The Australian Museum is purposely not putting branding on this. There is a perception out there, and we see it as well, of the Australian Museum and museums in general as this old dusty musty institution. So while the museum itself might not be the drawcard, it might be the thing that brings them back and impresses them when they’re here. A lot of visitors say to me that they haven’t been to the museum since they were in school, and then say ‘wow, I had a really good night! I wasn’t expecting that!’

Why do you think young adults are less likely to visit museums on a day to day basis?

I think it was the fact that they were taken to museums as kids and made to do really boring worksheets, it’s almost like a punishment. They’re then left with that feeling of museums are dull, boring and educational and I wouldn’t go back there. Most might not come back till they have kids of their own and then realise that museums are in fact quite interesting!

From your time with the Australian Museum and with involvement in Jurassic Lounge, what do you think are the best ways to engage the young adult audience?

I think it can be a double-edged sword in the sense that if you put all your effort into growing a specific audience, you could alienate other audiences and not even get the audience you are going for. So I think it’s a matter of perhaps, setting your goals really low, and then seeing how you can grow that from there.

I think it’s all about variety and the unexpected. It’s about presenting the museum to this audience in a different light, in a different way to what they remember from childhood visits to museums.

2. Appendix B – Survey questions

1. Are you male or female?
2. How old are you?
3. What attracts you to go to a museum? (Tick all that apply)
 - A specific exhibition
 - A social outing with friends
 - Learning about different cultures and societies
 - Learning more about my own culture and society
 - Other (please specify)
4. What deters you from going to a museum? (Tick all that apply)
 - Not enough interactive activities
 - The exhibitions don't interest me
 - They're too expensive
 - My friends don't want to go to them
 - I don't find they are an appealing location for my age group/they're boring!
 - Not enough advertisements
 - Other (please specify)
5. I think museums are an engaging and interactive place for young adults
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
6. I think museums are a fun and sociable place for young adults
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree

- Strongly Disagree
7. I think museums are places full of exciting and entertaining experiences
- Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
8. What aspects of pop culture would you be interested in seeing in a museum?
- Live musical performances
 - Live art creation
 - Live performance art
 - Comedy acts
 - Other (please specify)
9. Would you prefer to go to a museum during the day with the general public, or a special event night in the evening?
- During the day with the general public
 - During the evening, at a special event
10. What features would you like to see included in museum visiting? Please tick all that apply
- Lectures with professionals in the field on specific topics of interest
 - The opportunity to interact in and take part in exhibitions, instead of simply observing them
 - To make museum visiting more of a social event, with the opportunity to drink alcohol and consume snacks
 - A range of spaces offering different experiences such as interactive activities, opportunity to touch and feel artefacts and other museum items and the option of being able to sit back, observe and reflect.
 - Other (please specify)