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ENCOURAGING THE RETURN TO MUSEUMS THROUGH ENRICHING THE EXPERIENCE AND THE FEELING OF PRIDE

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Abstract

The aim of the current study is to investigate the effect of museum experiences on visitors' willingness to recommend a museum and desire to return, based on the influence of the perception of coolness and the feeling of authentic pride. A sample of 308 usable questionnaires retrieved from four Lisbon (Portugal) museums provide a good understanding of the drivers of revisit and recommend intentions.

Museum Atmospheric Cues contribute to the perception of Museum Coolness and the feeling of Authentic Pride, which, in turn, influence the intentions to Recommend and Revisit a museum. The perception of Museum Coolness has a stronger influence on both intentions to Revisit and Recommend.

Keywords: *Museum Experiences, Atmospheric Cues, Museum Brand Coolness, Authentic Pride, Revisit, Recommend*

Introduction

Cultural attractions, such as museums, constitute sources of cultural diversity, personal development, and social cohesion, apart from enhancing employment and income (Brida *et al.,* 2011). In 2018 Portugal received 19,494,106 visitors to museums (INE, 2019), of which 9,287,559 were foreigner visitors. Moreover, regarding statistics of DGPC (2018) about monuments, museums, and palaces entrances, 33.3% of the visits were to museums. This evidences the importance of museum management in Portugal since it attracts both locals and foreigners from all over the world.

Statistics show the relevance of museums in the overall economy of Portugal, but what exactly leads people to enjoy a museum, to desire to come back and to recommend it? Several researchers have studied the impact of atmospheric cues (Loureiro, 2019), of perceived authenticity (Carù *et al.*, 2017; Loureiro, 2019) and of satisfactory museum

experiences (Antón *et al.*, 2018) in the willingness of museum visitors to revisit a museum and/or recommend it to others. However, no study has yet assessed the effect of visitors' perceived museum coolness and the authentic pride they feel after a visit in those revisit and recommendation intentions.

By applying the concept of Brand Coolness to the museum context for the very first time, and using the Authentic Pride construct in an innovative way, the present study aims to answer the following research questions: how can the museum experience enhance visitors' perception of coolness and feeling of authentic pride? Can perceived coolness and authentic pride influence visitors' intention to revisit and recommend the museum?

Theoretical Framework

Museum Atmospheric Cues

Loureiro (2019) defines four main factors that can help appraisal inside of a museum. The first is design, which relates to characteristics such as facilities, colors, and permanent exhibitions and the second is lighting, this is, the adequacy of the lighting. Then, learning, which regards to the interest of visitors and the meaning that it has for them. Does the exhibition add to the visitor's knowledge? Does it meet their expectations? Finally, the fourth factor is staff, which considers the people working in the museum and how they present themselves and communicate with the visitors.

Museum (Brand) Coolness

Regarding brand coolness, studies have confirmed that the word "cool" has a positive valence and can be used as a synonym to "I like it" (Belk et al., 2010). Additionally, the coolness literature proves that enhancing visitors' perceived coolness leads to higher levels of tourist satisfaction (Chen and Chou, 2018). Consequently, the probability that the visitor will revisit and recommend the destination increases. According to Warren and Campbell (2014), the concept of coolness is socially constructed, because objects and people are only cool if others consider them so. Also, coolness is subjective and dynamic since it depends on personal experiences and it can vary throughout time.

In the museum context, experiences are created through four atmospheric cues: design; lighting; learning, and staff (Loureiro, 2019). The final goal for museum managers is to provide a space where visitors feel comfortable and happy, having the possibility to enhance their knowledge about specific or diverse themes. Both ambient and design

aspects provide not only a memorable experience, but also boost visitors' inclination to revisit and recommend some cultural attractions (Bonn et al., 2007).

Taking all of this into consideration, the following can be hypothesized:

H1: The Museum Atmospheric Cues are positively associated with the perception of Museum Coolness

Authentic Pride

Researchers in the psychology field have demonstrated that pride is a critical emotion in the psychology context (Tracy and Robins, 2007). Authentic pride is a feeling associated with internal and controllable causes (Loureiro, 2019), success-oriented, related to genuine self-esteem and agreeableness (Kong *et al.*, 2017). This type of pride is connected to hard work, perseverance, and effort (Huang, 2014).

Authentic Pride is linked to perceived authenticity, which is a motivational factor for museum visitors (Knudsen *et al.*, 2016; Loureiro, 2019). If visitors believe that a museum is genuine and trustworthy, they are more prone to feel they have achieved something with the visit, and also more willing to share their experience (Loureiro, 2019). According to the literature, an experience designed by museum managers can be crucial in the perception of authenticity and the materialization of a brand identity in the consumer's mind (Carù *et al.*, 2017).

Therefore, the second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: The Museum Atmospheric Cues are positively associated with the feeling of Authentic Pride

Intention to Recommend

According to Holbrook and Gardner (1993) and Antón *et al.* (2018), the recommendation of a museum after its visit can be translated into content generation, which refers to visitors sharing their experiences with others in the online world. For this purpose, they can publish reviews and comments on social networks and travel websites, which are seen as reliable by others (Presi, *et al.*, 2013; Antón *et al.*, 2018).

When talking about a recommendation, another dominant concept is word-of-mouth (WOM), which is information shared by past consumers with potential consumers, based on their past experiences (Wang *et al.*, 2016). WOM is a powerful tool for purchase decisions because it consists in information communicated by people who are considered trustworthy (Wang *et al.*, 2016; Day, 1971) rather than being communicated from the brand itself. Nowadays, with the

Internet, traditional WOM has gained the electronic element which can constitute an influential social interaction and can have very wide dissemination (King *et al.*, 2014).

Antón *et al.* (2018) have concluded that content generation mainly happens when the visitor is satisfied with the visit. On the other hand, engaging in word-of-mouth interactions can occur whether the experience is positive or negative (King *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, the perception of coolness in the museum context is deeply relevant, since the probability of the visitor recommending the cultural attraction increases once the level of perceived coolness is high (Chen and Chou, 2018). Hence, another hypothesis is:

H3: The perception of Museum Coolness is positively associated with the Intention to Recommend the museum

Revisit Intention

Although the perception of coolness is subjective and dynamic, it is agreed upon the literature that something that is cool is seen as positive (Warren and Campbell, 2014; Belk *et al.*, 2010). Additionally, people tend to evaluate a high quality and innovative product as cool (Sundar *et al.*, 2014). This can also be applied to the museum context, where when visitors regard the museum as being different, unique, and valuable, it is suggested they consider it a cool museum.

A growing body of literature has established the importance of creating the perception of coolness in museum visitors. By generating that perception, museum marketers hope to encourage behaviors from visitors that will enlarge their experience. One of those behaviors is intensification, the intention to extend the museum experience by, for instance, participating in the museum's extra activities and buying items from the museum shop (Holbrook and Gardner, 1993; Antón *et al.*, 2018).

The visitor's intention to enhance the museum experience relates to the willingness to revisit it. According to Batra *et al.* (2012), when someone is passionate about a brand, he/she will invest time and money in interactions with it. Loureiro and Ferreira (2018) apply this to museum context, confirming that when visitors identify themselves with the museum and are absorbed in it, the passionate desire to revisit it can emerge.

Moreover, the literature proves that when visitors perceive museums as cool, their link to the museum will increase (Loureiro and Ferreira, 2018) and thus the probability they will return to revisit it also increases (Chen and Chou, 2018). For all the above reasons, the following hypothesis is:

H4: The perception of Museum Coolness is positively associated with the Intention to Revisit the museum

Loureiro (2019) claims that the feeling of authentic pride can be a predictor of word of mouth, as visitors who feel that the museum is trustworthy and genuine will be more encouraged to communicate their experiences and advocate the museum. Similarly, if the visitor considers the visit useful and meaningful, he is more prone to speak about it with others. As stated above, the recommendation by the visitor can be done either through content generation or word-of-mouth.

Literature also suggests that if the visitor has a feeling of authentic pride, he/she will want to participate in further activities of the museum, give advice to the managers and follow the museum's social media pages (Holbrook and Gardner, 1993; Antón *et al.*, 2018). Likewise, this feeling can lead visitors to have a true desire to return to the museum and visit its exhibitions once more (Loureiro and Ferreira, 2018). Thus, having this in consideration, the last two hypotheses are:

H5: The feeling of Authentic Pride is positively associated with the Intention to Recommend the museum

H6: The feeling of Authentic Pride is positively associated with the Intention to Revisit the museum

Methodology

The questionnaire was designed online, but it was mostly distributed offline, near the four selected museums: the National Coach Museum; the Museum of Art, Architecture, and Technology (MAAT); the National Tile Museum, and the Orient Museum. Data was collected for two months, from mid-January to mid-March 2020. The constructs and items used in the questionnaire were based on the literature review and measured with a 7-point Likert-type scale. Museum Atmospheric Cues were measured based on Loureiro (2019), Museum Coolness based on Warren *et al.* (2019) and Authentic Pride based on Loureiro (2019) and Loureiro and Ferreira (2018). Revisit Intention was measured with a scale adapted from Bonn *et al.* (2007) and Kottasz (2006), a scale from Loureiro (2019) and another from Antón *et al.* (2018). Finally, Recommend Intention dimensions were measured with scales from Antón *et al.* (2018), Loureiro and Ferreira (2018) and Loureiro and Kastenholz (2011). A sample of 308 participants was obtained, of which 71.1% are

female and 28.9% male. Most of the respondents belong to the 18-24 age group (35.7%), followed by the 25-34 age group (21.8%).

Results

After obtaining 308 questionnaire responses, data was adapted to fit the chosen statistical program – IBM SPSS Statistics 26. Once the variables were computed appropriately, it was possible to conduct several analyses. First, to ensure the internal consistency of the measurements, the Reliability Analysis was conducted, testing the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients (see Table 1). All of these values were above 0.8, which represents good consistency of the items in each scale (George and Mallery, 2003).

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha
Atmospheric Cues	.910
Museum Coolness	.949
Authentic Pride	.947
Revisit Intention	.849
Intention to Recommend	.816
Sum Total	.876

Table 1 - Reliability Analysis

Then, the software was used to execute Frequencies and Descriptive Statistics, as well as Simple and Multiple Linear Regression Analysis. To test the six hypotheses of the model, this is, considering the different independent variables, Multiple Linear Regression was conducted. As observed in Table 2, all hypotheses of the theoretical framework were supported, being possible to highlight the independent variable with higher effect in the dependent variable for each hypothesis. For the last four hypotheses, regarding the

Hypotheses	Strongest X Variable	Beta	P Values
H1: Museum Atmospheric Cues > Museum Coolness	Design	0.434	0.000
H2: Museum Atmospheric Cues > Authentic Pride	Learning	0.330	0.000
H3: Museum Coolness > Intention to Recommend	Useful	0.327	0.000
H4: Museum Coolness > Intention to Revisit		0.346	0.000
H5: Authentic Pride > Intention to Recommend	Achievement	0.320	0.000
H6: Authentic Pride > Intention to Revisit		0.460	0.000

Table 2 – Hypotheses Testing

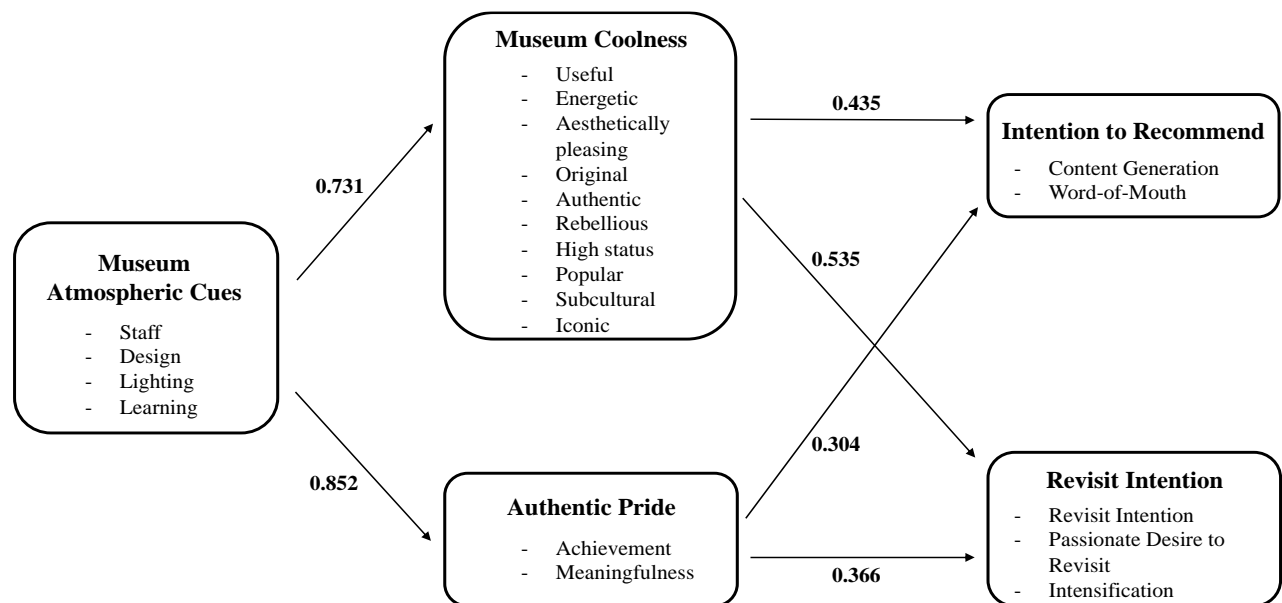constructs as a whole, both Simple and Multiple Linear Regression were used to take conclusions (see Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Theoretical Framework with Beta values

Conclusions

From the results there is evidence that Design is the variable from Museum Atmospheric Cues that more highly affects the perception of Museum Coolness. Regarding the feeling of Authentic Pride, this is specially influenced by the Learning variable of Museum Atmospheric Cues, in concordance with Loureiro (2019). From the several variables that constitute Museum Coolness, Useful is the one that is more highly associated with both intentions to Revisit and Recommend a museum. Finally, considering the Authentic Pride construct, Achievement is the dimension that has a stronger effect on both intentions to return to the museum and to suggest the visit to others.

The final four analyses allow to state that all the constructs are positively related among themselves. Museum Atmospheric Cues have a higher association with the perception of Museum Coolness than with Authentic Pride. Moreover, results show that if museum visitors' percept a museum as cool and develop a feeling of accomplishment with the visit they become more willing to return to the museum, rather than recommend it. The perception of Museum Coolness influences more strongly both intentions to Recommend and Revisit than Authentic Pride.

Regarding managerial Implications, it was uncovered in this study that museum managers must focus on keeping the décor and display of exhibitions up-to-date and try to renovate, when possible, the display of the permanent exhibition. Furthermore, the museum experience should be enhanced with the use of games and quizzes throughout the visit, as well as on an online platform. Managers would, therefore, respond to the visitors' necessity learning, while building a relationship with them. Moreover, there should be online workshops, Q&A and tours to engage with visitors while they are quarantined or simply cannot go to the museum.

Some limitations were found in this research, as expected, and they should be interpreted as future research opportunities. First, one of the limitations concerns the fact that the sample is mostly characterized for younger people. Similarly, female respondents represent more than half of the sample (71.1%). Furthermore, as the study was conducted in Portugal, the vast majority of the participants were Portuguese (82.8%). Thus, future research could consist in a more culturally diverse sample that is balanced between the different age groups and genders. Additionally, future studies could use the theoretical framework and apply it to different countries and cultural attractions.

For the first time in the tourism literature the concept of Brand Coolness was studied, more specifically in the museum context. Although the constructs of Atmospheric Cues and Authentic Pride are retrieved from previous studies (Loureiro and Ferreira, 2018; Loureiro, 2019), the relationships investigated between them are innovative.

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