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Proceedings of SOCIOINT14- International Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities

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TOWARDS A USER BASED PERSPECTIVE
TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF MUSEUMS

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Abstract

Museums in contemporary societies are expected to be flexible in order for them to be able to implement transformation programs. Such flexibility is required of contemporary organizations that hope to keep pace with the frequently changing needs of those they serve. It is assumed that the ability of museums to transform easily will allow them to remain relevant to the needs of their users and the society at large. The challenge is that there are very few research reported in the literature that provided insights into how museums can transformation sustainably. We have observed that the few insight available in the literature that deal with how museums can transform do not put into cognizance important factors that are embedded in the theoretical streams that emanate from expectation confirmation theory and social cognitive theory. The insights on the social cognitive processes played out among museum users when museum endeavor to transform are far from being adequate. Consequently, this conceptual paper is concerned with filling the gaps in current museum transformation literature in order to provide what we consider new approach to address the challenges of museum transformation. We combined theoretical streams in the expectation confirmation theory and social cognitive theory to explain how museums can transform in ways that will allow them to appropriately meet users' expectations. We developed a museum transformation model which explains how the museum community can approach museum transformation as a socio-cognitive process. We concluded that the need for museology scholars to adopt the new conceptual framework for interrogating museum transformation has become imperative.

Keywords: Museum transformation, museum users, museums, museum transformation model.

1   INTRODUCTION

The history of museums dates back to the 17th century when the term was used to describe Ole Worm's collections of materials that were at that time described as collection of curiosities in Copenhagen (Lewis 2011). Over the years however, museums have been responding to the needs of the society as they have transformed to dependable sources of historical and socio-cultural information. Owing to the increase in the value of information contemporary society, Washburn (1984) posited that contemporary society's emphasis of museums' work should be put on information rather than on objects. Pearce (1986), on the other hand, provides two ways to ensure that museums transform effectively. First, he called for a shift to relevant research paradigms in museology. Second, he noted that the importance laid on museum objects should be re-assessed and made to reflect their informational value. In order words, museums should be reinvented to play more roles in the development of education, cultural integration, and identity re-invention, by developing service strategies that will help lay emphasis on the informational values of their collections of historic objects. Weil (1990) therefore advised that museums should try to transform from being about something to being for somebody. Waidacher, (1993) opined that there is need for museums to move from being a memory place to being institutions that facilitate increase in the creation and diffusion of knowledge. Waidacher advised that, apart from offering recreation and inspiration, museums should include as part of their objectives, the need to provide valuable learning experiences to people.

The persisting concern for museum transformation made Peter (1999) to call for a radical re-assessment of the roles of museums in contemporary societies. His advice is similar to that given by Baniotopoulou

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(2001), when he opined that museums should add educational services to its recreational and relaxational services. Walsh (2002) on his own also provides what seems to be a new conception of museums. He argued that the role of museum should be to facilitate the comprehension of cultural identity. Museum artifacts collectors were therefore advised to pay attention to collecting artifacts that can provide information that are useful for creating and re-creating cultural identity. Walsh's conception places museums in the fore of education, cultural integration, and identity re-invention. A more recent call was made by Black (2012) when he called for rapid changes in the definition and public practice of the art and science of museums. Graham submitted that museums in contemporary societies will be more beneficial to users if they transform from being a cultural treasure house to: leisure and tourist attraction, sources of local pride, resources for informal and structural learning, income generator, and agents of physical, economic, cultural and social regeneration.

However, despite what seems to be notable transformation of museums over the years, stakeholders' expectations that museums should continue to evolve in order to remain relevant and fit into contemporary society's needs are still far from being accomplished (Anziske, (2010). We observed that, although the call for museum transformation has been persisting in the discipline, there has not been any major scholarly work that is dedicated to defining the length and breadth of desired transformation. The modalities the desired transformation, particularly as it relates to both research and practice of museology, has also not been spelt out. The challenge the discipline currently face is that of systematically providing ways and means through which meaningful transformation can be achieved by scholars and practitioners in the discipline. For instance, since Pearce (1986) talked about the need to develop new research paradigm for museology, there has not been any significant development in this regards. One will agree that the museology discipline faces a great danger if its research paradigms are not reviewed with the aim of making them conform to the demands of museum practices in contemporary time.

Consequently, this conceptual paper aims at making two moderate theoretical contributions. First, we try expectation-confirmation theory and social cognitive theory. We follow this approach with the aim of making the combination of the two theories to provide the basis for highlighting what we consider as new social dynamics that have been overlooked in the museology literature. Our assumption is that the new social dynamics are also important to explaining museum transformation. Our motivation is based on our conjecture that any meaningful transformation in the discipline must be based on the development of appropriate theoretical frameworks. Our approach was therefore based on appraising expectation confirmation theory and social cognitive theory in order to use the theoretical framework that emanated from the appraisal to provide new explanations about museum transformation. Our second contribution, which will be reported in another paper, is to use the museum transformation model derived from this conceptual study to drive empirical investigations in three museums located in Nigeria as a way of validating our theoretical claims.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to McTavish (2003) museums in contemporary societies are declining. This necessitates the need for a dramatic shift in the museological paradigm in order to remedy the deficiencies eminent in museum practices in the contemporary times (Anziske, 2010). In dealing with the sustainable transformation of museums in contemporary society, some researchers opined that museums should be about its users and not just their collections (Weil, 1990). The importance of museum collections had been questioned in favor of the importance of the informational values of collections provided by museum. There had also been suggestion that the emphasis of museum work should be place on information rather than on objects (Pearce, 1986; Washburn, 1984).

Some research published in the literature on museum transformation had paid attention to transformations museums experienced as a result of the introduction of information technology as tools for managing them (Hung, Shin-Yuan, *et al*, 2013; Werner, 1998). Some studies also evaluated the impact of museums on its users and community at large (Graeme, Johnson &Williams, 2002). The efficiency and performance of museums had also been evaluated and measured using parameters such as number of visitors, visitors' satisfaction, consumer benefits, decision making efficiency, output, etc (Basso & Stefania, 2004; Paulus, 2003). Scholars had explored the shift of museums focus from objects to people (Black, 2012; Goodnow and Akman, 2008; Goodnow, Lohman and Bredekamp, 2006; Black, 2005; Weil, 1999; Bennett and Robert, 1988). Research had also been done concerning the transformation of museum through teens' invitation (Schwartz, 2005), interactive exhibition (Orhun, 2012) and the promotion of cultural values using museums (Eberle, 2008).

Other studies had paid attention to visitors' satisfaction in relation to perceived quality (Radder and Xiliang, 2013) and cultural policies and inclusion in museums (Young, 2002). Some scholars had also

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explored representations in, and representational power of museum (Mpumlwana, *et al*, 2002; Davison 2001). Since Paulus (2003) and Basso & Stefania (2004) listed visitors' satisfaction as a weak synthesis in the measurement of museums performance, focus has continuously shifted to developing empirical understanding of factors that could help museums transform through user-oriented approaches Black, (2012, Radder & Xiliang, 2013). (Black, 2012) talked about developing museums through visitors' involvement, meeting users' needs and developing the obligation towards coming up with appropriate approaches to meet these needs. We observed that like other scholars, Graham did not spell out the approaches that could be adopted for the changes he proposed. This therefore shows that much is still to be done when it comes to determining the appropriate approaches to deploy when initiating museum transformation from users perspective.

Also, despite the fact that museology scholars find market museum to users central to its transformation, we observed that they have not paid enough attention to the insight available in the marketing. We are concerned because the tenets upon which the principles of marketing are based require that producers should develop services and products based on their understanding of customers' needs. Although authors such as Weil (1990; 1999) and Black, (2005) among others had called for the consideration of museum users as the primary driver of its transformation, their studies are far from meeting the theoretical requirements that could facilitate the definition and conceptualization of how an adequate understanding museum users' role in the drive to transform museum can be actualized. We have a deep feeling that a social cognitive explanation of museum users' expectation and satisfaction dynamics are likely to be crucial to the development of museums transformation.

However, for one to talk about users satisfaction one is oblige to talk about product expectation and how such expectation is confirmed or disconfirmed. There is no doubt that there are expectations prior to the use of any museum, yet all the attempts made to assess museum users' satisfaction did not put into consideration their expectations and how it can be met or has been met (Radder & Xiliang, 2013). We therefore find it limiting for Radder & Xiliang's to assume that it is difficult to formulate pre-visit expectation of museums and that attention should be paid on actual experience alone to determine user satisfaction. Though actual experience is a determinant of satisfaction, the measurement of satisfaction is likely to be more accurate if actual experience is measured against pre-visit expectations. Therefore, if the views put forward by Oliver (1981 and Halstead (1999) is anything to go by; it then becomes obvious that available theoretical knowledge on transformation of museums may not be able to facilitate the improvement of available understanding of museum transformation from users' perspective. We propose that new theories of museum transformation that will put into cognizance pre-visit expectations, confirmation and disconfirmation of pre-visit expectations should be developed.

2.1 Theoretical Background

Expectation confirmation theory (ECT) which was propounded by Oliver (1980) has over the years become the most widely applied theoretical model on consumer satisfaction (Oh & Parks, 1997). Expectations-confirmation theory posits that expectations, coupled with perceived performance, determine if post-purchase satisfaction will be negative or positive. This effect is mediated through positive or negative (dis)confirmation between expectations and performance (Oliver, 1980; Spreng *et al*. 1996). Expectations serve as the comparison standard in ECT – what consumers use to evaluate performance and form a disconfirmation judgment (Halstead, 1999). The theory had been used in most investigations in marketing research. It has also been used by information system researchers too. Expectation confirmation theory had been used to study online and internet marketing (Yue-Yang, *et al* 2010), museums visitors' satisfaction (Mano & Oliver, 1993) and also information system satisfaction (Brown, Venkatesh & Goyal, 2012; Hou, 2010; Khalifa & Liu, 2004; Bhattacherjee B 2001).

In expectation-confirmation theory Oliver (1980) explains that satisfaction steams from the match between prior performance expectation of a product or service and actual performance of products or services. In order words, users have a prior pre-conceived expectation of products and services before patronizing it. He further explains that users assess the performance of the product or services vis-a-vis their pre-conceived expectation in order to be able to determine the extent to which their expectations has been confirmed or disconfirmed. Oliver concluded that based on users expectation and confirmation or disconfirmation level, users form satisfaction. The standard against which products and services are compared is users' expectation, which is an individual's belief of what a product should be. Satisfaction is the instrument to assess products and services performance (Oliver, 1980; Bramwell, 1998).

Studies such as those carried out by Oliver (1981); Churchill & Surprenant (1982); Bhattacherjee (2001) and Yue-Yang, *et al,* (2010) have projected similar positions with regards to users expectation confirmation, disconfirmation and satisfaction of products and services. The implication of ECT on museum scholarship is

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profound. For instance, available studies do not presume that if museums are to transform, they need to develop ways through which they can surface and address museum users' expectation. This has become imperative because our assumption is that a meaningful museum transformation should be based on providing museum services exactly as users would want them. For instance, studies carried out by Black (2012); Goodnow, Lohman & Bredekamp (2008); Burchenal and Michelle (2007); Black (2005); Schwartz, (2005); Weil (1999); and Bennett & Robert (1988); primarily addressed the ways museums can develop services that will meet users' needs, but however, did not raise any arguments concerning expectation and how they can be satisfied. They only elicit factors such as incorporating new technology and teens perspectives, easing the disciplinary boundaries of museology, assisting users in developing skills, presenting user oriented exhibition, and active visitor engagement. The assumptions formed in these studies seem to have brushed aside the fact that expectations are innate socio-psychologically developed state of being.

However, for the ECT to be able to serve as background theory for evolving new insights into museum transformation, it limitations will need to be addressed. The limitation of the theory steams from the fact that it is devoid of social considerations. In other words, it represents expectation not as socio-psychological phenomenon but as psychological phenomena. Since ECT is a rational-cognitivist-based theory; it neglects the fundamental claims about the social nature of cognitive frame development in human beings and ignores the fact that expectation is a function of social and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986).

2.1.1 Emergent User Based Perspective

The satisfaction of museum users comprises of the confirmation or disconfirmation of their expectations of museums (Radder and Xiliang, 2013). There is no doubt about the fact that an understanding of how museum users' expectations evolve will assist in providing knowledge on how to transform museum services. Our premonition is that, new insight can evolve from the following theoretical streams (Khang, Han, & Ki, 2014; Yue- Yang *et al*, 2010; Lin, Tsai, and Chiu, 2009; Bhattacherjee, 2001; Compeau, Higgins, and Huff, 1999) which have their roots in Oliver's (1980) claim that expectation is a function of one's emotions and Bandura's (1986) claim that people acquire knowledge by observing others and phenomena within the social contexts they operate. In other words, museum users can develop their expectations of museums based on their cognitive frames, which evolve based on their interaction with other people and their observation of what other people do within the social space where they operate (Wood & Bandura, 1989; Khang, Han, and Ki, 2014). While we try to concatenate views from both disciplines, we recognize that the tension to be dosed here is related to the nature of knowledge. Can we say that expectation is a form of knowledge? If we agree with the notions developed over the years about knowledge being in tacit and explicit forms (Polanyi, 1966; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Patriotta, 2003), we would easily agree that expectation is a form of knowledge.

If this were to be so, then we will agree that social interactions facilitate what constitute museum users' expectation. We will also agree that people may develop expectations without any formal program set for the purpose (Huber, 1991). In other words, people can unconsciously develop expectation of museums based on some social experience they have internalized over time (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Nadelson's (2007) argument that individuals acquire knowledge from social environments that are characterized by social norms, codes of conduct, possible sanction, and social interaction point to the role social space where social actors operate can play with regards to expectation development. Social cognitive theoretical stream developed by Weick (1995), Weick (1995) and Thomas, Clark and Gioia (1993) shares some common factors with social constructivism by pointing out how social actors construct meaning out of the events and actions taken around them into sensible structures. Hence, it is not out of context to say that expectations evolve based on certain social forces that are embedded within the social space where they exist. The social space and environment comprise of people, in our case museum actual and potential users, culture and technology.

Our assumption is that the consideration of museum users' social experience and the effect of this on their personality will give a more useful insight into how museum users' expectations evolve. If our assumption is validated, such an endeavor will not only reveal that the satisfaction museum users derive from the services museums render are socially constructed, but will also surface the social dynamics that determine how museum users develop their expectation. It therefore follows that an understanding of how museum users generate their expectations of museums and their judgment of the extent to which they are satisfied is a social process that is built over time. Hence, the need to concatenate theoretical streams that are based on the notions projected in the expectation-confirmation theory and social cognitive theory has become inevitable. This will lead to the evolution of a new theoretical explanation of the process through which museum users develop and confirm their expectations. We have a strong assumption that this

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explanation will provide new insight into how museums can transform and become more useful to users. We therefore developed a conceptual model that we consider useful to set off a social analysis of the processes that the transformation of museums could follow. This is primarily from the perspective of understanding the social processes through which users develop expectations and how they use their expectations to draw up inferences on the level of satisfaction they derive from services museums render. The model depicts that expectation stems from one's social space (Nadelson, 2007). It highlights expectations as perceived or anticipated actual museum performance, which when positively confirmed, leads to satisfaction (Yue-Yang, *et al* 2010)**.** Our motivation was derived from our anticipation that the museology community can develop reliable machinery through which they can predict museum users' expectations from the conceptual model developed in this study. The model also provides the possibility for the museology community to develop museum services that will match museum users' expectations and through this satisfy their yearning.

However, in the past, most scholars who used ECT as the theoretical framework for their study combined it with other theories. This arises because of the need to make the theory better suit their research purposes. Most phenomena related to satisfaction have significant social dimensions that require theories that can provide social oriented framework. For instance, Lin *et al.* (2009) integrated ECT with self-determination theory to model consumer loyalty. Lin *et al* (2009) integrated ECT using self-determination theory (SDT) which claims that expectation has indirect impact on satisfaction. Lin *et al* did not evaluate how expectations are formulated. The outcome of their study was also limited by the fact that expectation confirmation theory and self determination theory are rational-cognitive-based theories which neglect the fundamental claims about the social nature of social actors' cognitive frame. In another instance, Chou et al (2009) extended expectation confirmation theory using a continuance model so as to be able to understand how participants' continuance intention of knowledge creation and satisfaction are affected by their perceived identity verification (PIV) and performance expectancy in an online community. Chou *et al* (2009) extended expectation confirmation theory using a continuance model by focusing on ex post expectations. They argued that they needed to expand the theory because expectation confirmation theory only examined the effect of pre-consumption expectations but not post-consumption expectations. Though Chou and his colleagues' work on ex post expectations is commendable, they failed to come up with a detailed explanation of the sources of pre-consumption expectations and its effects on the formulation of post-consumption expectation. They also assumed that post-consumption expectation comes only from previous consumption. No doubt experience from previous consumption has an influence on ex and post expectation, but it is also important to note that the consumers in question must have had social interactions after the previous consumption. It is the social interactions that most likely yield ex post expectation.

In a study where ECT was used as a sole theoretical framework, Radder and Han (2013) investigated the relationships between perceived quality, satisfaction and conative loyalty to museums. The limitation inherent in ECT fueled their assumption about what they claimed to be the difficult to formulate pre-visit expectations. This in turn hindered them from giving consideration to how museum users develop their expectations of museums. Expectation confirmation theory had been used to explain how people behave based on their cognition. Its tenets, good as it is, did not consider how people socially develop their cognitions. In other words, ECT presents cognition as abstracts that exist in individuals without any form of interaction or interference from the world outside the individual (Oliver, 1980; Haim & Oliver, 1993). The limitation of this approach to studying people's behavior with regards to how they develop their expectations of products and services is that it sees people as living in isolation of social events happening around them. This is considered as inappropriate way of evaluating how people develop their expectations as depicted in social cognitive theory. It is important to know that people get their expectations of products and services based on their ability to make sense of past social experience, learning and knowledge developed socially over time (Weick, 1995; Weick, 1988). We feel that this, together with cognitive structures explicated in expectation confirmation theory will provide a better ground for explaining how people develop their expectations and how they confirm and disconfirm these expectations.

The concatenation of ECT and social cognitive theory is not entirely new. Yue- Yang *et al* (2010) concatenated ECT and social cognitive theory, to determine customer's intention of using e-commerce websites. Yue-Yang and his colleagues adopted social cognitive theory as the theoretical basis to analyze after initial usage based on outcome expectation and self-efficacy. They raised the question in their study because of their suspicion that initial usage is a social process. In this study, we concatenated theoretical streams in the ECT and social cognitive theory in order to come up with a model that will help provide the basis for explaining the social process through which museum users develop the expectations they use to determine their satisfaction of museum services. We agree with the notion that expectation confirmation produces satisfaction (Oliver, 1980). However, we are adding the notion that expectation are socially constructed and therefore influenced by social forces (Patriotta, 2003; Huber, 1991; Berger and Luckmann,

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1966). Understanding the social process through which expectation are developed is required if museums are to transform to organizations that are able to understand users needs and therefore provide satisfactory services to them. The model developed in the study is presented below. It provides basis for articulating these notions both theoretical and practically.
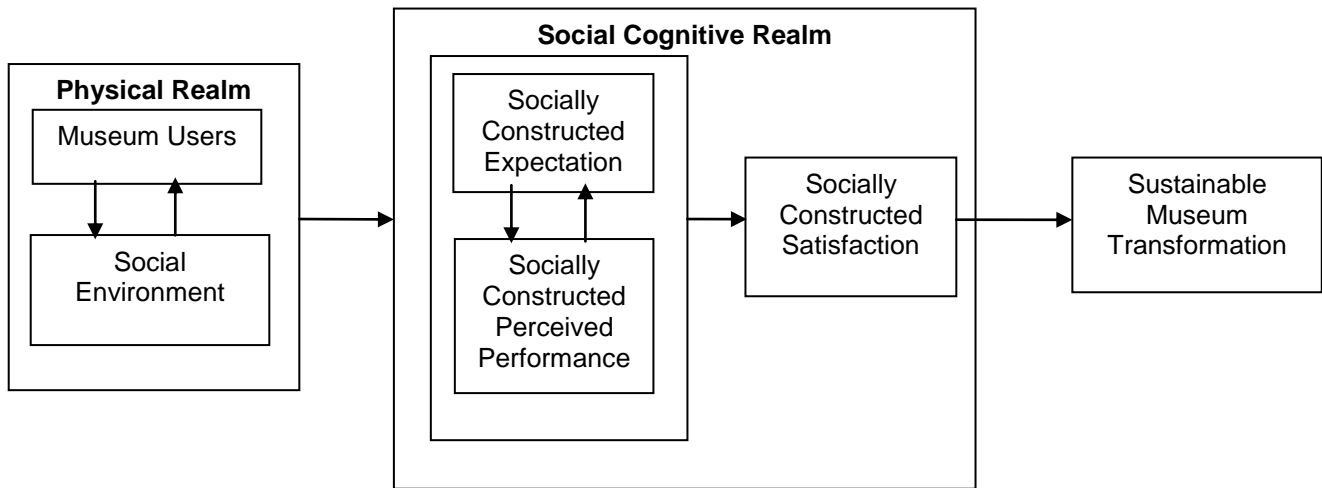

Figure 1: Museum Transformation Model

The museum transformation model (MTM) comprises four independent variables: people-actual and prospective museum users, social environment, socially constructed expectation, socially constructed perceived performance and socially constructed satisfaction. The model depicts a sociological theory of museum transformation. We say this because it agrees with existing notion that says that people are the creators and victims of the social environments where they operate (Unger, 1987; Ciborra and Lanzara, 1992). The model believes that people that go through similar socialization processes are likely to reason in the same way (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Hence, if museum transformation is to be pushed through from users' perspective, the need therefore arises for the museum community to understand the nature of museum expectation and perceived museum performance that is prevalent in diverse social contexts. This is also the case with the prevalent satisfaction that is dominating the cognitive frames of museum users within a context. The consequence of this model is that it decentralizes the notion of museum transformation. It pushes it into the realm of contextual transformation. In other words, the museology community must understand that the community must strive to understand the social tensions within each community for it to be able to project new frontiers for its services to users. Hence, sustainable transformation of museum is likely to occur when the museology community strives to understand current demands from museum users. We present sustainability as means possessing dynamic ability to constantly trace and make meaning of the dynamic demands of museum users.

3. CONCLUSION

The consideration of how museum users generate expectation and perceive museums' actual performance by scholars and museum practitioners will assist museum scholars in developing users based framework for museums and help museum practitioners to develop museum services that will meet or exceed users' expectations. Obviously, if users expectations and perceived performance are surfaced and known, it will become easier for museums to transform into user satisfying entities.

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