


Chapter 7

Experiential Marketing: A Tool to Maximize the Contribution of Natural History Museums to the Bioeconomy

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ABSTRACT

Natural history museums are key stakeholders of the bioeconomy. They contribute to the bioeconomy by increasing the bioecological knowledge of the public. This chapter suggests that their contribution can be maximized if they apply the right marketing practices. In this sense, experiential marketing, which aims to provide individual, enjoyable, and engaging educational experiences to customers, seems to be the best approach. Accordingly, the three most visited natural history museums were examined in order to highlight experiential marketing practices that can help to maximize the contribution of natural history museums to the bioeconomy. The findings revealed six marketing practices: holistic experience design, storytelling boosters, sensory interactive elements, participatory interactive elements, co-creation, and online interactive elements. In the last section, detailed practical suggestions on these practices are presented for natural history museum professionals.

INTRODUCTION

The mission of natural history museums is to increase the public's knowledge of the natural world in order to help preserve it (McClean, 1997). Therefore, they are key stakeholders of the bioeconomy, which seeks to raise public awareness of bioecology conservation (Bugge et al., 2016). Considering that three of the twenty most visited museums are natural history museums (Palicki, 2021), their role is vital to the bioeconomy.

However, not every natural history museum's contribution to the bioeconomy is equal. While some museums are successful at conveying messages about conservation by offering enjoyable and memorable educational experiences to visitors, others fail. So, marketing applications seem to be a significant differentiator among these museums.

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In general, museums have recognized the importance of the marketing field and have been implementing marketing strategies for years. They expect to raise their income through marketing in order to survive the competition in cultural markets (Cole, 2008). However, if they aim to maximize their contribution to the bioeconomy, they must not only rely on traditional marketing principles but also benefit from the experiential marketing.

Experiential marketing is a more powerful differentiator than traditional marketing (Shaw & Ivens, 2002). It seeks to ensure that every touchpoint between the customer and company is meticulously designed (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) in order to provide the customer with an individual and memorable experience (Pine & Gilmore, 1998). The customer experience is staged by making use of its sensory, affective, cognitive, social, and symbolic dimensions (Schmitt, 1999). Also, the optimal mix of education, entertainment, escape and esthetics experiences is sought (Pine & Gilmore, 1998).

Museums are considered both formal and informal education institutions (Ambrose & Paine, 2006). Therefore, specifically education experience matters for museums. However, in most cases, the reason why people visit museums is not just education but recreation or social interaction (Falk & Dierking, 2016). So, if the experiential marketing perspective is to be transferred to the museum context, providing the visitor with an individual, memorable, and enjoyable education experience should be the main consideration of museum managers (Kirezli, 2011). Education experience should be enriched with entertainment, escapist, esthetic, social and symbolic experiences. Such visitor-oriented marketing applications help to provide existing visitors with more satisfactory enjoyment and education experiences while attracting more visitors to the museum (Cole, 2008).

Hence, natural history museums employing experiential marketing strategies are expected to enhance existing visitors' knowledge of the natural world and attract more visitors to educate. It raises public awareness of the conservation of the natural world. Thus, they can contribute to the bioeconomy more than museums that do not employ experiential marketing. Hence, they should employ experiential marketing if they want to maximize their contribution to the bioeconomy.

Accordingly, this study aims to offer practical implications about experiential marketing for natural history museum professionals. For this, the marketing practices of the three most visited natural history museums (i.e., Natural History Museum, London (NHM London), American Museum of Natural History (American MNH), Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (Smithsonian NMNH)) (Palicki, 2021)) were examined.

In the following section, how experiential marketing can enhance natural history museums' contribution to the bioeconomy is discussed. Then, the research methodology and findings are reported. After that, discussion and practical implications are presented. Next, limitations of the present study and future research agenda are argued. Finally, conclusion of the study is presented.

NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUMS AS KEY STAKEHOLDERS OF THE BIOECONOMY

A “participatory governance that engages the general public and key stakeholders in an open and informed dialogue” (McCormick & Kautto, 2013, p. 2589) is required to maintain a powerful and sustainable bioeconomy. Bugge et al.'s (2016) literature review suggests three visions of the bioeconomy: biotechnology, bioresource and bioecology. Of these, the mission of natural history museums is related to the bioecology vision, which “highlights sustainability and ecological processes that optimize the use of

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