Case Study Evaluation of FuturePlan: Medieval and Renaissance Galleries

Executive Summary

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The aim of the V&A's FuturePlan is to revitalise visitor facilities and redisplay the collections, working with highly respected international architects and designers. The V&A commissioned Fusion Research & Analytics to evaluate the Medieval and Renaissance galleries, which were a key part of phase 1 of Futureplan. This executive summary provides an overview of the results of the evaluation.

The results of this research are intended to provide a strategic framework to guide future program development in the Museum, and supply key insight into visitors' expectations and needs.

Key findings: Summarized below are highlights of data captured across the main areas of visitor observations and the gallery experience. *Please note, more detailed findings on each topic are outlined later in the report, starting on page 3.

Visitor profile – mirror general V&A visitor profile; average age of 40, similar to general V&A visitors, however more are likely to live in the UK than general V&A visitors

Motivation - chief is to 'improve their knowledge of art, design', but an average of 3.5 motives for visiting were cited, out of 17

Visitor experience and response to the galleries – visitors use the word 'beautiful' (71%) most frequently to describe their experience, while a majority report viewing 'half' of the Gallery; the vast majority of visitors enjoyed their Gallery visit a great deal (64%) or a fair amount (33%).

Success of gallery themes - Overall, two-thirds of visitors strongly or somewhat agreed that the curator-developed themes represented their Gallery experience.

Gallery design and layout - Noble Living 1350–1500, Gallery 10a had the highest time spent (4:06) of the Galleries observed. All other galleries had at least 2:30 minutes of dwell time.

Interactives - The interactives are well utilized, as 40% of report using a Gallery interactive during their visit. That said, not all interactives were readily visible to visitors.

Mobile technology - When offering information via other media than graphic wall labels, visitors prefer 'searchability' (28%), 'touch screen devices' (20%) and 'video and audio' (19%)

Recommendations

- Clearly highlight and label all Gallery interactives to ensure visibility to visitors.
- Introduce a Medieval and Renaissance Gallery smartphone app that provides a general overview of the Galleries and additional information on key objects or gallery themes.
- Place signage for smartphone apps in key areas of the museum and throughout the Medieval and Renaissance Gallery to maximize awareness and usage. Promotion of the V&A's free wifi should be featured with all smartphone app signage to highlight ease of app downloading and no international roaming charges for foreign visitors.
- Utilize key Medieval and Renaissance Gallery themes to organize the smartphone app content (e.g. People, Everyday Life, etc.).

Visitor profile and motivation

- Medieval and Renaissance Galleries visitors mirror the general V&A visitor profile[1]. Nearly half (44%) were first-time visitors to the V&A and one-third (36%) visited in the last year.
- Medieval and Renaissance Galleries visitors are motivated to visit the V&A for many reasons, chief amongst these are to 'improve their knowledge of art, design', 'to see fascinating things' and 'an enjoyable way to pass the time'. Overall, Gallery visitors cite an average of nearly 3.5 motives for visiting the V&A out of a total choice of 17.
- Personal interest in a 'particular subject', 'wanting to improve their knowledge of art, design and objects' and an 'academic or professional interest' are clear drivers of Medieval and Renaissance Gallery visitors' primary motives for visiting the V&A generally.
- Medieval and Renaissance visitors are similar in age to general V&A visitors with an average age of 40. Where the two groups differ is at opposite ends of the age scale: Medieval and Renaissance visitors are more likely to be 65+ (19% vs. 10%) and general V&A visitors are more likely to be under 16 (9% vs. 2%).
- Medieval and Renaissance visitors are more likely to live in the UK than general V&A visitors: 78% live in the UK compared to 52% of V&A visitors.
- A majority of Medieval and Renaissance visitors visit in groups (71%), the largest group being adult groups (35%). Only 3% of Medieval and Renaissance visitors are Families with children under 16.
- Medieval and Renaissance visitors are most likely to cite having 'come across the Medieval and Renaissance Galleries' during their V&A visit (38%) and 'interest in subject' (35%) as their primary motives for visiting Medieval and Renaissance Galleries. Other important motives include 'professional or academic reasons' (16%), a 'recommendation' (15%) and 'reading about it' (14%).
- A large majority of Medieval and Renaissance visitors have no agenda and are 'just browsing the gallery' (80%).

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[1] The Visitor Data Sheet 09-10 was used for reference to the general V&A visitor

Visitor experience

- Visitors selected the word 'beautiful' (71%) most frequently to describe their Medieval and Renaissance Galleries experience followed by 'historic' (60%), 'informative' (49%) and 'stimulating' (49%) out of a list of 20 words including an 'other' specified option where visitors could provide their own word or words.
- Younger visitors (under 35) are more likely to use 'relaxing' (45%) to describe their Galleries visit than older visitors: 35-54 (29%) and 55+ (20%). Older visitors 55+ are more likely to use 'historic' (70%), 'stimulating' (64%), 'informative' (58%), and 'accessible' (56%).
- A majority of Medieval and Renaissance visitors report viewing 'half' of the Gallery (58%) whilst 1-in-5 (17%) reported viewing 'less than 25%'.
- The vast majority of visitors enjoyed their Gallery visit a great deal (64%) or a fair amount (33%).
- Visitors motivated to visit the Medieval and Renaissance Galleries based on a 'particular interest' (76%), 'reading about it' (74%), 'professional or academic' (74%) or 'recommendation' (64%) rate their Gallery experience the highest – whilst those motivated by more passive reasons (e.g. 'Just came across it in the museum': 53%) rated their experience relatively lower.

Gallery themes

- Visitors were presented with 3 primary Gallery themes (developed by the curator) at the completion of their Medieval and Renaissance Galleries visit and were asked to rate their agreement with how each theme represented their experience.
- Overall, two-thirds of Medieval and Renaissance Galleries visitors strongly or somewhat agreed that the themes represented their Gallery experience. Detailed ratings of each of the themes are provided below.
  - 'Provided a framework to view and learn more about the Medieval and Renaissance period' rated the highest, with 51% of visitors strongly and 39% somewhat agreeing that this theme represented their gallery experience.
  - 'Illustrated what the art and objects of the period meant to the people of the time' rated second highest with 34% of visitors strongly and 46% somewhat agreeing that this theme represented their gallery experience.
  - 'Illustrated the interconnectivity between Medieval and Renaissance periods' rated third highest with 32% of visitors strongly and 35% somewhat agreeing that this theme represented their gallery experience.
- Visitor ratings of the three gallery themes correlate with the key themes captured in the Personal Meaning Maps (PMM)[2]. Specifically, the

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[2] PMM is a qualitative research technique that captures a person's pre and post perceptions. Gallery visitors were intercepted before entering the gallery and asked to provide their first impressions of the

PMM themes 'learning' and 'a greater understanding of the period' reflect the highest rated Gallery theme ('Provided a framework to view and learn more about the Medieval and Renaissance period'). Further, the PMM 'emotional and everyday life' theme reflects the second highest rated gallery theme ('Illustrating what the art and objects of the period meant to the people of the time').

Visitor Observations

- Twenty-six percent of Renaissance Art and Ideas 1400–1550, Gallery 64, visitors interacted with one or more of the 8 Gallery interactives. Time spent in this gallery (3:49) ranked second amongst the Galleries observed.
- Devotion and Display 300–1500, Gallery 10 (Discovery Area) possesses the highest interactive engagement rate with 76% of visitors engaging with an interactive. Time spent in this gallery is the lowest amongst the Galleries observed (2:40).
- With 3 Gallery interactives the Donatello and the Making of Art 1400–1500, Gallery 64a has the second highest interactive engagement rate (47%). Time spent in this gallery (3:46) ranked third, just a few seconds behind the Renaissance Art and Ideas 1400–1550, Gallery 64.
- The Renaissance City 1350–1600, Gallery 50 acts for many visitors as the starting or ending point of their Medieval and Renaissance visit. Group visitation is highest in this Gallery and time spent is above average (3:40).
- Noble Living 1350–1500, Gallery 10a has the highest time spent (4:06) of the Galleries observed. This Gallery also has the third highest interactive engagement rate with 40% of visitors engaging in one of the 3 Gallery interactives.

Interactive engagement

- The Medieval and Renaissance Galleries interactives are well utilized as 40% of visitors report using a Gallery interactive during their visit. That said, not all interactives were readily visible to visitors. For example, several Galleries included cabinet interactives that did not provide a clear invitation to open or explore as many were painted in a similar colour to the gallery walls and had limited labelling.
- The effects of the Gallery interactives influences the amount of Gallery content viewed as interactive users report having seen a larger proportion of the Gallery than non-users. It is important to note that visitors in general tend to overestimate the amount of a gallery viewed.
- Visitor age is not an important factor in Gallery Interactive usage – specifically visitors under 35 are nearly as likely to use a Gallery interactive than visitors 55 and over.

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expected gallery content. Upon exiting the gallery these same visitors were ask to provide their post gallery visit perceptions of what they experienced.

- Visitors require the 'basic essentials' of graphic labels when it comes to information provision: 83% rated 'Wall panel or text labels' and 70% 'Non-technology displays that provide basic information' as very important.
- When offering information via other media, visitors prefer 'searchability' (28%), 'touch screen devices' (20%) and 'video and audio' (19%)