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Slater, Alix and Armstrong, Kate (2010) Involvement, Tate and me. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 26 (7-8). pp. 727-748. ISSN 0267-257X

Final accepted version (with author's formatting)

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## **Involvement, Tate and Me**

Alix Slater and Kate Armstrong

### **ABSTRACT**

The involvement construct has been explored in relation to products, services and leisure but not in an art museum context. The purpose of this paper is to address this theoretical gap by drawing on the marketing and leisure literature to understand members' consumption of Tate using the involvement construct. Tate, a portfolio of four art museums in the UK has more than 90,000 members that receive a benefits package in return for a membership fee. Data were collected using an interpretive, qualitative approach. 59 face to face semi-structured interviews were conducted with Tate Members during spring 2008. The narratives expose the complexity in exploring the involvement construct and the analysis revealed six new involvement characteristics: 1) Centrality and Pleasure; 2) Desire to Learn; 3) Escapism: Spirituality and Creativity; 4) Sense of Belonging and Prestige; 5) Physical; and 6) Drivers of Involvement. These are discussed in the context of previous studies into museum consumption, services and leisure involvement literature. The authors discuss how these findings may be transferred to other settings and the managerial implications for marketers and membership managers are considered.

### **KEY WORDS**

Involvement – Tate Members – Qualitative – Motivation –Museum – Consumers

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We should like to thank Susie Dawson, her team at Tate Members and the respondents for helping to make this project possible. We should also like to thank the reviewers for their helpful and insightful comments.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Involvement with products and services, including leisure have been explored extensively within marketing and consumer behaviour disciplines. Although there is no universal definition of the involvement construct, commonality exists amongst researchers who posit that involvement with a product or service comprises personal relevance, interest or importance. Research into the involvement construct is prominent within marketing literature and has been applied in a variety of contexts. Leisure researchers began to explore involvement during the 1990s from both social-psychological and behavioural perspectives and have explored relationships between motivation and enduring involvement (Kyle et al. 2006), involvement, commitment and loyalty (Iwasaki and Havitz 1998), involvement and attitudinal loyalty (Park 1996) and involvement and place attachment (Kyle et al. 2003; Gross and Brown 2008) across a range of leisure settings (for an overview of earlier research see Kim et al. 1997; Kyle and Chick 2002) but to date, involvement has not been explored from a heritage or arts context. Furthermore, Kyle et al. (2007) note that most leisure scholarship focuses on either 'enduring' or 'situational' facets of the involvement construct. They cite Havitz and Mannell's (2005) study that explores both components in tandem, yet Kyle et al. (2007) claim that there is still more to be grasped on how these elements interact, thus suggesting that involvement should be studied holistically, an approach this study has adopted.

There is an established body of literature on the consumption of museums by individuals, children and families (e.g. Falk and Dierking 1992; Hein 1998; Hooper Greenhill 1994; Kirchberg 1996; MORI 2004; Prentice and Beeho 1997; Rentschler and Hede 2007; Slater 2007a; Slater 2007b) and members of art museums (e.g. Glynn et al. 1996; Bhattacharya et al. 1995; Bhattacharya 1998) yet the involvement of museum visitors and members has not been explored. Individuals have multiple motivations for visiting a spectrum of museums that may include learning, escapism and social motives (e.g. Falk and Dierking 1992; Prentice and Beeho 1997; Slater 2007b) and they consume twenty first century art museums in different ways. For example, consumption can mean looking at and reflecting on the art, shopping, having a meal with a friend, drink in a members' bar, attending events and so forth (Slater, 2007a). Furthermore, some visitors may choose to broaden their consumption by joining the membership scheme or 'Friends' group, perhaps indicating a desire to be more involved. Reasons for this initial purchase and retention of membership are multi-faceted and include, but are not confined to: hedonic; altruistic; social; self-identification; status; material; and egoistic motives (Bhattacharya et al. 1995; Burns Sadek Research Ltd 1992; Caldwell and Andereck 1994; Glynn et al. 1996; Lansley 1996; Paswan and Troy 2004; Slater 2003). But do these motives explain the involvement of these individuals with art museums?

What the motives do imply, are that as a group, members lack homogeneity, and exhibit a range of behaviours including volunteering, donating and voting

suggesting that they endorse the organisations' values. A study into the behaviour of Members' of an American art museum concluded that those who perceive their membership to be prestigious consume more benefits, visit frequently and attend more social events (Glynn et al. 1996). Furthermore, members who identify with the organisation (measured by product characteristics such as prestige, affiliation and activity) feel more involved (Bhattachraya et al. 1995). Other membership behaviour indicates passive consumption, whereby purchase of membership is made but surprisingly, benefits are not utilised (Glynn et al. 1996). This may be explained by external factors that pose as obstacles to participation (McDonald and Stavros 2007), or because membership is viewed as a proxy for a donation or a way of keeping in touch. Both routes indicate involvement that is perceptually different from members who visit frequently and are seen to 'be involved' but help us to shed light on the construct in this context. Bhattachraya et al. (1995) and Knoke (1981) maintain that the use of membership communications infer involvement as they keep individuals in touch and for some, are used as a substitute for a visit. These findings indicate that the type of membership organisation and membership benefits can influence levels of involvement via volunteering opportunities and communications that influence attitudes and behaviours. Despite this interest in art museum consumption and studies of membership behaviour, members' consumption from an involvement perspective has not received any attention.

The purpose of this study is to address this gap in the literature and to contribute to theoretical understanding of member's consumption of art museums using the involvement construct, which has previously been grounded in products, leisure (mostly outdoor recreational activities in the USA) and consumer services. We explore whether members of art museums are involved with the organisations to which they belong and if the involvement construct can facilitate understanding of their consumption behaviour. We chose to focus on members rather than non-members as it is often assumed that they are inherently more involved and their behaviour is volitional. That is, they have control over their actions and opt to pay for membership when they can often access benefits such as information and permanent exhibitions for free. Members tend to visit more frequently than non-members indicating *perhaps* that they are more involved.

The fieldwork was conducted at Tate Britain and Tate Modern in London; these sites comprise two of the Tate gallery portfolio. Tate Modern was the second most visited attraction in London in 2008 after the British Museum and Tate Britain the eleventh, receiving 4.8 million and 1.6 million visits respectively (VisitLondon 2009). Tate's iconic brand has been the subject of previous studies (e.g. Phillips and O'Reilly 2007) yet 'Tate Members', a charity that has just celebrated its fiftieth anniversary with more than 90,000 members has received little attention from academics. Tate Members receive free admission to charging temporary exhibitions, private views, dedicated Members' rooms, communications and discounts in the shop depending on the level of

membership they purchase. These membership fees and Members' ad-hoc donations to fundraising campaigns are an essential source of income for Tate.

Tate was chosen as a field site, due to the sustained growth of the membership base in recent years, reflecting its increasing popularity with the public. The membership package is also similar to other museums in the UK and abroad making it an ideal starting point for exploring members' consumption. We commence our paper by discussing the extant involvement literature, followed by our research design. We then present our research findings and discuss them in the context of the literature and consider their implications for membership managers and arts marketers who may utilise our recommendations to provoke and maintain consumer involvement in the arts. In an era where museums rely on philanthropy, understanding how members are involved with the museum is critical as they are often cultivated by museum fundraisers with the purpose of encouraging them to make donations and become legators.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *Examining the involvement construct*

Reid and Crompton (1993) point out that the concept of involvement was first introduced in social psychology (Sherif and Cantril 1947), then within the consumer behaviour discipline (Krugman 1965 in Zaichkowsky, 1985) and later, in leisure behaviour (Bloch and Bruce 1984; Jacob and Schreyer 1980). Involvement has been explored in relation to product knowledge, involvement

and decision making (Bei and Widdows 1999; Clarke and Belk 1978); customer loyalty in high and low involvement service settings (Bloemer and de Ruyter 1999); consumer involvement and perceived service quality (Csipak et al. 1995); and enduring involvement of recreational activities (Havitz and Howard 1995). Individuals' involvement has also been examined through advertising (Krugman 1962, 1965, 1967, 1977 in Zaichkowsky 1985), leisure (Kyle et al. 2003) and programmes (Anand and Sternthal 1992; Feltham 1994).

Since Gabbott and Hogg's (1999) paper on involvement and services there appears to be a renaissance in the involvement literature, as a group of scholar's bound by their interest in the involvement construct in both leisure and marketing disciplines emerge, as evidenced by Funk et al. (2004); Havitz and Mannell (2005); Kyle et al. (2007); Baker et al. (2009) and Bienstock and Stafford (2006). What is interesting about these studies by (but not limited to) Baker et al. (2009); Bienstock and Stafford (2006) and Gabbott and Hogg (1999) is their explicit segregation of products *from* services, as historically, involvement has largely been researched from a products' perspective, using product-validated scales. Consequently, involvement is typically discussed in terms of 'products *and* services' suggesting that the terms are interchangeable, in spite of the discernible distinction between them, as noted by these studies. Our observation supports the notion that involvement in *services* is distinct from involvement in *products* and our research therefore attempts to contribute to understanding of

this from a qualitative perspective, thus participating in driving service-involvement literature forward in an art museum context.

Involvement has been defined by Rothschild (1984) as '*an unobservable state of motivation, arousal or interest, evoked by a particular stimulus or situation and has drive properties*' (p. 217). Thus, involvement has a motivational component and has been said to reflect the individual's values, self concept and aims (Celsi and Olson 1988; Zaichkowsky 1985). Csipak et al. (1995) surmise that there are four key issues in the involvement literature: 1) types; 2) antecedents and consequences; 3) the temporal nature of involvement; and 4) measurement, suggesting that involvement is multi-faceted and complex. Some scholars discuss different levels of involvement from 'high to low' and 'situational and enduring' (Houston and Rothschild 1978; Laurent and Kapferer 1985; Rothschild 1979). Situational Involvement (SI) refers to specific situations that prompt arousal or interest and Enduring Involvement (EI) points to an ongoing, subjective and enduring relationship with a product (or service or leisure activity) that surpasses situational influences and instead, reflects the view that product (or service) choice reflects centrally held values that have implications for behaviour (Bloch et al. 2009; Rokeach 1973; Zaichkowsky 1985). Concurring, Kapferer and Laurent (1985a) cite Bloch and Bruce (1984) who suggest that EI is similar to product (or service) enthusiasm, also known as 'serious leisure' (Stebbins 1992).

Richins et al. (1992) highlight a lack of consensus in the literature regarding the *interaction* between SI and EI. Houston and Rothschild (1978) argue that they are independent of one another, characterised by their juxtaposition, and derived from different sources, with SI linking externally and EI internally. In the leisure literature, Kyle et al. (2007) view SI as '*dynamic, changeable and transitory...from stimuli most often encountered in the immediate environment*' (p.400) suggesting that price promotions and advertising can act as situational prompts in the involvement process. Conversely, EI alludes to prolonged involvement with an activity (or art museum) through frequent visits and motivation to uphold the values of the organisation as previously discussed. Peter and Olson (1987) challenge the view that EI and SI are separate components and propose that involvement is a function of the *interaction* of both SI and EI, that is, underlying EI *fuses* with the physical and social situation (SI) to provide the impetus for an individual's interest and subsequent involvement, suggesting that there is no meaningful distinction between SI or EI, or conversely, internal or external factors, or, that the distinction is futile, as it is their union that helps in our comprehension of involvement.

In line with the efforts to conceptualise the involvement construct, Kapferer and Laurent (1985a) identify five antecedents within their Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP) including: 1) importance and interest in the product or issue (interest); 2) hedonism, gaining reward (pleasure); 3) identifying oneself with it (sign value); and 4) and 5) two dimensions of perceived risk (risk importance and

risk probability). These facets suggest that involvement is multi-faceted and they have been empirically tested across a range of areas thus enhancing their validity. Progressing this understanding, in the leisure literature, McIntyre (1989) and later McIntyre and Pirgram (1992) have made the most laudable contributions to adapting the CIP scale. They collapsed the 'importance' and 'pleasure' antecedents into one factor: 'attraction' and isolated the 'risk' elements, preferring instead to use 'centrality', which denotes the centrality of the product or service to the individual's lifestyle. However, Gabbot and Hogg (1999) later validated the distinction between pleasure and interest, which they remark often *'merges in practice'* (p.162) suggesting that pleasure has a *'significant role to play as a facet of involvement'* (p.162) thus challenging the division that McIntyre (1989) and McIntyre and Pirgram (1992) made in earlier research.

As Kapferer and Laurent's (1985a) CIP focuses on products, the assumption that it will have little significance for a service context could be made. However, Gabbot and Hogg (1999) found support for the CIP in a consumer service context, suggesting otherwise. Although Gabbot and Hogg's (1999) contribution to understanding the antecedents of the CIP and its relevance for profiling involvement in relation to consumer services is valuable, they begin to use the term 'products' interchangeably with 'services', and as a result their findings become beguiling. Significantly though, they explain that antecedents and consequences are not directly linked, but mediating variables come into play – in

the context of this study however, the intervening facets are not known as the involvement construct has not previously been applied to an art museum context.

Iwasaki and Havitz (1998), drawing on literature from consumer psychology and leisure disciplines, suggest that antecedents to involvement are just twofold and comprise: individual characteristics (such as values, motivations, interests, goals and so on) and social-situational influences, which are vaguely reminiscent of enduring and situational components of involvement [EI and SI] discussed earlier. McQuarrie and Munson (1992) put forward a compelling argument that these antecedents are facets that transform and alter over time suggesting a transient aspect to involvement.

Johnson and Eagly (1989) use different terminology to characterise involvement and make a distinction between 'value-relevant' (VRI) and 'outcome-relevant' (ORI) involvement, suggesting that VRI is linked to personal values and ORI to an individual's goals or outcomes lending further support to the antecedent-involvement-consequence view of involvement. In an art museum context, both VRI and ORI are notable. For example, individuals may have underlying values that motivate them to be involved, for example learning or altruistic motives, a desire or need to be 'arty' or cultured; this is VRI. In contrast, ORI may be manifested by individuals seeking benefits, such as a venue with proximity to work where they can meet with friends, or somewhere with cache, like the Members' Bar at Tate Modern. Conversely, Gabbott and Hogg (1999) argue that

the Antecedents-Involvement-Consequences approach to understanding involvement is inherently flawed as it assumes '*a direct relationship between sources of involvement and consequences*' (p.160) yet this linear structure remains appealing due to its simplicity of application. In spite of this, it is important to be *aware* of the antecedents or origins of involvement (even if they do not remain as such), as it continues to be an intangible construct, that is part motivational, part drive and reflects values, goals and the self concept of an individual. Controversially perhaps, Petty and Cacioppo (1979, 1986, 1990) are hesitant in joining any 'premature' involvement-distinction debates, and propose instead that the construct should be viewed holistically as 'issue involvement'. Concisely, they point to an attitude-relevant involvement construct suggesting that the more relevant a message is to the self, the more likely it is to be involving to the individual (Petty and Cacioppo 1990). In spite of their resistance to differentiate the involvement construct, Petty and Cacioppo (1990) show that they embrace the distinct VRI, as outlined in this review.

Houston and Rothschild (1978) argue that involvement can be understood through three variables: 1) Physical; 2) Personal; and 3) Situational. The latter two reflect and embrace the central tenets of the previous discussion. Bloch and Richins (1983) and later Zaichkowsky (1985) created a third variable by separating out the physical component of involvement. Zaichkowsky (1985: 342) defined the three variables as: 1) Personal: the inherent interests, values or needs that motivate one toward the object; 2) Physical: the characteristics of the

object that cause differentiation and increase interest; and 3) Situational: something that temporarily increases relevance or interest toward the object. This framework for deconstructing involvement has similarities with Falk and Dierking's (1992) '*Interactive Experience Model*' that has three contexts: personal, social and physical that interact and result in an individual's museum experience. The social context relates to who the visit is made with, personal also refers to the individual's interests and the physical context relates to the building, exhibits and labels. These similarities are noteworthy as there is overlap between the scholarship, in spite of it being developed from two different theoretical frameworks and applied to contrasting contexts: museums and products.

Kapferer and Laurent (1985a, 1985b) and Zaichkowsky (1985) remain prominent in discussions regarding the measurement of involvement, due to their significant contributions including the Consumer Involvement Profile (CIP) and Personal Inventory Scale (PII) respectively. These scales have been used, adapted and found to be valid in many research contexts including services and leisure (e.g. Bloch et al. 2009; Csipak et al. 1995; Kim et al. 1997; McIntyre 1989; McIntyre and Pirgrim 1992; Park 1996) but they also have critics who have found them less reliable (e.g. Havitz and Dimanche 1999; Kyle and Chick 2002; Kyle et al. 2006). This may be due to the multi-dimensional nature of involvement and researchers trying to adapt scales to a breadth of products, services and leisure situations. This is possibly why there have been calls for more qualitative studies of involvement (e.g. Havitz and Dimanche 1999; Kyle and Chick 2002) to allow

for new dimensions of involvement to emerge, for example, Kyle and Chick (1992) who found that 'attraction, sign and centrality' (all components of the CIP profile either original or adapted as discussed earlier) had limited support in a study of campers returning year on year to an agricultural fair. They suggest that centrality in this context is divided into facets including: centrality to lifestyle and social context. This is interesting for this study as Falk and Dierking (1992) also identified the social context in their model. In sum, these issues regarding the measurement of involvement reinforce Csipak et al's. (1995) emphasis on the importance of measurement issues within the involvement literature.

What is clear from this review is that involvement and its perceived dimensions, distinctions or apparent relationships between antecedents, consequences and all the arguments for and against that fall in between, lack consensus amongst some scholars. Emerging from recent academic marketing literature in the past decade is an acceptance that services are different from products and as such, research has and should continue to consider them separately to contribute to future knowledge. Our involvement review highlights the importance of cross-fertilisation between leisure and marketing disciplines so that plausible conceptual arguments can be examined. For this study, the current services-involvement research provides a good foundation upon which to contribute to understanding of involvement in an art museum context. The purpose of this study is to use this literature to contribute to current understanding of members' consumption of art museums using the involvement construct by answering the

following questions: Are members of art museums involved with the museums they belong to? Can involvement facilitate understanding of how members consume art museums? What are the characteristics of involvement in an arts museum context? Is involvement in an arts context different to other services? And how can membership managers apply these findings to the development of their membership schemes?

## **PROCEDURE**

Data were collected using a qualitative, interpretive approach, as the purpose of the research is to contribute to current understanding of members' consumption of art museums using the involvement construct. As discussed earlier, research into services and involvement is on the increase, but arts 'services' still have some way to go. This study aims to address this gap by driving knowledge forward through understanding involvement in an art museum context using a qualitative research design. The review of the literature led to the research questions outlined in the previous section.

The interview guide was developed in consultation with the Head of Tate Members. A sample of the areas explored include: general art and leisure consumption experiences; reasons for membership acquisition and retention; consumption of Tate; perceived value and benefits of membership; and current and future perceptions of involvement with Tate. A purposeful sampling

approach was used and semi-structured interviews were executed with Tate members at Tate Modern (n = 28) and Tate Britain (n = 31) during February and March 2008. Interviews were conducted across the week (n = 30) including weekends (n = 12) and evenings (n = 17) to ensure that a broad cross-section of Tate Members were targeted and the range of behaviours and experiences were captured. Members were recruited in the Members Rooms at Tate Britain and Tate Modern.

In line with the qualitative tradition and our interpretive approach, we let the narratives inform the codes which then formed the themes that we have used as a structure for the results and analysis. All of the interviews were transcribed and analysed using Nvivo 8, which simplified the interaction between the transcripts and the analysis procedure facilitating a more holistic approach to code generation. The coding process was 'blind'; the researchers sent samples of transcripts to each other for 'check coding' a process endorsed by Miles and Huberman (1994) to uphold validity. The coding was compared and discussed for consistency but there were no significant differences.

#### *Characteristics of the sample*

The sample comprised slightly more females (n = 34) than males (n = 25) reflecting the membership base at Tate. Occupations of the sample reflect socio-economic classifications ABC1 and C2, including many that were students, retiree's, 'white collar workers', teachers, those employed in the cultural and

creative industries and artists. The sample was mainly from London with a third from other parts of the UK and an emigrant visiting from the U.S.A. A quarter had been members for less than a year and another quarter for 1 to 3 years. A fifth had been a member for at least 10 years whilst the others had been members 'off and on'. 41 of the respondents said they had 'Membership Plus Guest', although they were often unclear as to which membership category they had, and typically described it as *"the one where I can bring in a friend"*.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings use the respondents' experiences to contribute to understanding of members' consumption of art museums using the involvement construct. Direct respondent quotes are used as evidence to support the research findings and are coded by: site, gender and when the visit occurred. This section is structured according to the six themes that were generated as a result of the Nvivo 8 analysis and include: 1) Centrality and Pleasure; 2) Desire to Learn; 3) Escapism: Spirituality and Creativity; 4) Sense of Belonging and Prestige; 5) Physical; and 6) Drivers of Involvement. These themes represent the characteristics of involvement in this context, as the narratives suggest that Members' involvement is signified by their motivations that are underpinned by a shared value of the importance of art in their lives which is more central to some than others.

### *Centrality and Pleasure*

There are Members who take enjoyment from visiting galleries and exhibitions. They have visited Tate for many years, some since they were a child and there is an element of nostalgia embroiled within this. For example, one person said, “*I’ve known it forever*” [Tate Britain, Female, Evening] whilst another surmised her enduring connection with Tate:

*Well it’s an emotional link. I grew up over the years here....in my dotage I will still be coming here. I’ll never not come here ... it will see me out this building* [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday].

Art is part of their life, they are interested in it and “*want to see paintings*” [Tate Modern, Female, Weekday], to “*drop in*” and “*go to the exhibitions*” [Tate Britain, Female, Weekend]. It is integral to their lives and their behaviour reflects these core values and they cannot foresee this relationship ending:

*It is a life time type of relationship it’s not just I’ll pop in now and that will be it. You know this is not just a whim in my thirties you know it will continue* [Tate Britain, Female, Weekend].

Membership facilitates involvement by giving individual Members freedom and flexibility to visit on their terms. For some of these Members, their need to engage with art is fulfilled by Tate membership, but for others, they need more variety and visit other galleries, with the exhibitions acting as the drivers:

*We both like painting and art. We like to go to many, many of the exhibitions in London. There are lots of wonderful ones, so Tate fits in, no more and no less, than the Royal Academy or other places, or the Courtauld or...wherever there's a good exhibition, we go [Tate Britain, Male, Weekend].*

There were Members who demonstrated shared values with this previous group but the narratives suggest a more fanatical involvement with art that they partly fulfil through Tate Membership. For example, one Member described himself as *“an art addict”* [Tate Britain, Male, Weekday], and another explained: *“my main interest is art so I am always here”* [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday].

### *Desire to Learn*

In contrast to Members that demonstrate enduring involvement with art, there are also Members who we recognise as ‘art novices’. Novices have a desire to learn more about art but typically are at the beginning of this ‘journey’. These Members are creative and curious and describe Tate as a *“good learning experience”*, *“enlightening”* and *“accessible”*, which encourages them to see new things in what they perceive to be a non-threatening and relaxing environment. They see Tate as a way into this world that they aspire to be part of and use their membership as a facilitator to this involvement. They also like the freedom and

flexibility membership gives them believing that it is instrumental in their understanding of art:

*You sort of feel....that you can learn by coming.... I've never studied it [art]....and it's kind of aspirational I suppose a little bit. Wishing that I did know more about paintings and things.... It's the fact you can get into these exhibitions and the exhibitions teach you a lot.... just learning about things we don't know about. Learning about paintings getting things into some sort of context [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday].*

One might expect Members that are artists to be very different from 'art novices', however they share these sentiments. Artists that are Members are, not surprisingly, interested in art and also uphold a 'Desire to Learn' but it is evident in a different way. They use Tate not only for knowledge but also as inspiration:

*It is a source for me.....I'm looking at which artists I connect with and because I'm painting, there are certain artists that I relate to more because they are where I've been or where I'm going, or where I think I might be going, they give something to me. So in a sense it is a professional thing, a source of inspiration for my work [Tate Britain, Male, Weekday].*

*Escapism: Spirituality and Creativity.*

Inherent to the theme Escapism: Spirituality and Creativity is that Members' involvement is embodied in their need to escape from either personal or work life. They use Tate's Members' Rooms (particularly Tate Modern) and the galleries (mostly at Tate Britain) as places to escape, as sanctuaries, to fulfil creative or spiritual needs or simply to relax and read the paper, for example, "*[it is] a journey into my imagination*" [Tate Modern, Female, Weekday] and for this couple somewhere they come to escape when they are in London "*we love to come in here [the Members' Room] and relax because we're away from home and we can come and sit here on a sofa and read the paper and have a cup of tea*" [Tate Britain, Couple, Weekend ]. The need to escape is not restricted by gender or time and their visit is an individual pursuit that often reflects their need to be alone:

*It's a retreat, it's somewhere I can go to relax and somewhere I can take my sketchbook and have something to draw and it's somewhere quiet, privileged is almost a dirty word but yes, that's what it is* [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday].

Thus, membership is a powerful facilitator that enables Members' to achieve the fulfillment that they are seeking beyond any satisfaction they can achieve from their working life:

*Unquestionably [it is] an escape but it's more than an escape ...it sounds a really silly thing to say but it is a mental sustenance that I don't get from my work life....it gives another dimension to my life and it's the escapism and the kind of inspiration from seeing the world in a different way. It doesn't make me...when I leave the galleries it's not like 'oh I've done that tick' self improvement I don't feel like that about it, and I don't go and talk about the work to other people afterwards and show off, going ooh I know something about art...[it] reflects me as a person... no it's the escapism. It's another side of me that nobody knows about so it doesn't reflect me it adds something, it brings me something [Tate Britain, Female, Weekend].*

One female explains her involvement via escapism that leads to fulfilment: *"[I go to Tate to] feed that part of me"* [Tate Britain, Female, Evening]. Other Members discuss escapism as a route to being able to manifest their creative needs:

*It stimulates my mind. It keeps me focused. It locates me. I feel located, grounded.... It's inspired me and it's inspired a whole course in my life ... you are more inclined to access your creative side... it encourages you to be creative and have a space to go to [Tate Britain, Male, Weekday].*

*My relationship with it is to do with giving me a different take on life and other things that I wouldn't otherwise get to think about. It presents stuff to me that keeps my mind working in a different way. I work in a very*

*practical environment; I work on a scientific subject so this takes me completely out of my domestic situation, out of my work situation and makes my mind work in a completely different way* [Tate Britain, Female, Weekend].

Tate is also described as a place to escape in an aspirational sense. Members use the Church as an analogy to describe the physicality and religious connotation of Tate Britain and Tate Modern. Some Members see Tate as a sanctuary that has replaced the Church as somewhere open and quiet. A female Member talked about Tate Britain as a “*spiritual bolt hole*” and “*a spiritual home*” [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday] a place that energises, renews and is “*spirituality uplifting*” (Tate Britain, Male, Weekday). Comparatively, this is not the case for everybody. One Member talked about how they use galleries and museums as a personal space ‘*to meditate and to appreciate art*’ [Tate Britain, Female, Evening] but this is becoming less easy due to the increased popularity of art museums resulting in overcrowding. The theme of Escapism illustrates the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of involvement and the inter-relationship between escapism, spirituality and creativity.

### *A Sense of Belonging and Prestige*

The previous characteristics of involvement focus on the individual’s pursuit of satisfaction for the self. In contrast, ‘A Sense of Belonging’ is about being part of, or surrounded by other people that Members’ can identify with, a cultural group or

club that leads to a feeling of involvement, connection and acceptance, a 'community':

*I feel part of the community you know it communicates with me I communicate with it, I interact with it, I contribute to it and it enriches my social life [Tate Modern, Female, Evening].*

However, a sense of belonging is more than connecting with others. It is described as a two-way relationship rather than a transaction, whereby Members not only have a sense of belonging, but that Tate also belongs to them:

*I feel it is part of my culture and so I do have this loyalty. With Tate and the National Gallery and the Royal Academy, these places I have become a friend and feel that it's part of my past, present and future. I feel involved. It's a sort of ownership in a way I think, we pay our taxes, this is one of my benefits. I suppose as I come in here it's like a club, having somewhere just to go and sit down, it's quite relaxing...I feel because I've been involved in the art world I feel at home and I feel relaxed [Tate Britain, Male, Weekday].*

A 'Sense of Belonging' is also identified with a strong notion of prestige that embraces pride and satisfaction that is emulated through involvement with Tate:

*To become a Member of the Tate was really like a knighthood for me.....Because I feel so honored. I feel like a Tate knight [Tate Britain, Male, Evening].*

For others, the Tate membership card symbolizes a desire to be part of the arts-community signifying them as cultured and knowledgeable:

*You feel that it's a good thing to have in your purse to show that you're cultured....That you're educated enough to like that sort of thing [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday].*

The attraction of Tate membership for some individuals is being involved in, and belonging to a perceived private, exclusive club:

*Look at this room I love bringing friends here, I do feel quite proud being a member.... I think Tate membership gives me so much it gives me a nice exclusive Members room to use, it gives me access to exhibitions, it gives me my Member's magazine so it's like subscribing to a magazine, it's a private members club in a way, it's a gallery, it's philanthropy, it's so much [Tate Modern, Male, Evening].*

However, there are also Members who repel this idea *"there is part of me that doesn't believe in it being exclusive and elite"* [Tate Britain, Female, Evening].

### *Physical*

The narratives suggest that there is a physical characteristic of involvement. Physicality in this art museum context was shown to be multi-faceted spanning the iconic architectural design and features of Tate's buildings, interior spaces, temporary exhibitions, permanent displays, the atmosphere and overall sensory and visual experience.

Members like both Tate Britain and Tate Modern, but often have a favourite site. Tate Britain is described as smaller, more intimate, less crowded, calming and comfortable, rather like a favourite old sofa:

*I find I can relate better to the size and to the kind of imagery that they've got....I don't want to go to Tate Modern because it's too big ....I have been to Tate Modern but I don't really enjoy going it's just too noisy. It's like a circus for me and I can't concentrate. I like to go where it's peaceful and I can concentrate [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday].*

Comparatively, Tate Modern is rated for the atmosphere, architecture, scale of the building and views. It is seen as fun, modern and comfortable, particularly the Member's Room:

*The building is more spectacular. I mean this is very beautiful, but the Tate Modern is an experience, just being in that extraordinary site and having those views across the River, it's very exciting [Tate Britain, Couple, Weekend].*

Each Member's Room has its own distinct atmosphere. At Tate Britain it is described as “*sweet*” and “*small and sparse*” compared to the fun atmosphere at Tate Modern, where respondents talked about the great views and smaller details such as the “*squishy chairs*”. The narratives reflect Members' familiarity and involvement with these spaces, which they see as an extension of their own living rooms and for some, a ‘third place’ (Oldenburg 1999) a space where people can relax, “*drop in*” and “*hang out*”:

*This idea of having a third space so you have home and you have work and you have a third place where you are really happy and that for me was the Tate. I just loved it...I remember asking ‘when will the Tate Modern open?’ .....it was almost like coming home [Tate Modern, Male, Evening].*

### *Drivers of Involvement*

The characteristics of involvement that have been discussed so far denote Members' motivations, values and goals and the physical environment. Drivers of involvement are: exhibitions and lectures; cafes; shops; paper and electronic

communications; and the Membership itself. These drivers underpin Members' consumption of this art museum by serving as an impetus or situational reminder leading to enduring involvement.

Drivers of involvement remind Members about temporary exhibitions and displays and events at all four Tate galleries, which Members say encourage them to visit:

*I came here because I read in the Tate brochure that there was going to be an exhibition of Edward Burra's pictures and I don't really know much about him really [Tate Britain, Male, Weekday].*

For those Members who cannot visit the Galleries, the communications involve them in Tate. Members like the freedom that membership brings and appreciate the convenience of making one payment, not pre-booking or having to queue for exhibitions. Members talk about being able to pop in spontaneously, being "*able to come and go*", and not having to stay too long to "*get their money's worth*". Membership enables them to visit, reflect and re-visit temporary exhibitions, which may otherwise be financially prohibitive. Thus, membership reflects enduring involvement but it also acts as a driver, led by cues, such as communications about lectures and temporary exhibitions, which ultimately encourage greater involvement with Tate. Members also said they had become increasingly interested and more "*involved by coming to things*" [Tate Britain,

Male, Weekday], suggesting that continued consumption leads to greater involvement and vice versa.

For some Members, Membership is initiated for fiscal reasons:

*[If I didn't have membership] I definitely wouldn't visit the exhibitions. I'd come to the Tates without the membership but I wouldn't pay to go to the exhibitions because I couldn't afford it. It gives me a chance just to wander in and out and to have a quick look and to learn a bit more about things I wouldn't otherwise see. It's a bit of a treat just to be able to stride in... Sometimes you just want to poke your nose in and look at one thing and go out again and come back the next day [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday].*

And for others the end goal is to become more involved:

*I went three times and I paid three times before I had the membership....I thought, well, I probably would have gone to see the Louise Bourgeois more than three times actually, if I had the membership, because it was such an important exhibition for me. But, yes, that kind of really inspired me to get the membership because, I quite often miss out on exhibitions just because I'm really busy with work and just don't take enough time out to do that.....that was the reason for the membership, because I'd be more*

*informed about what's going on, and get emails to remind me [Tate Britain, Female, Weekend].*

As evidenced by the previous quotes, Membership encourages individuals to visit more thus reducing associated 'risk' as the process is easier, more convenient and good value for money:

*If you don't understand it you can go again and again or you can come out if you don't like it..... I thought it would be a good opportunity to make sure I went to more exhibitions rather than thinking I might go. I thought if I had Tate membership it would encourage me to go.... you are encouraged to spend short periods here rather than think oh its like a big thing [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday].*

Members also keep in touch and view content on the website - Tate Online. One Member talked about how they had seen sculptures online and decided to pop to Tate to see them. Another explained how they use the website as an information resource to keep in touch with the arts:

*Yeah the Tate magazine's brilliant and also I do a lot of things online with the Tate. I saw the interview with Doig online before I came....all sorts of background things you can do....I keep up really on the internet because it's very hard to find a way of keeping an interface with modern artists or*

*with contemporary artists and it's just a good way of seeing people talk about their work and seeing what they're doing [Tate Britain, Female, Weekday].*

However, as the following quote illustrates, this is not true for everybody:

*I could be more involved. I get the magazine when it comes I always see there's like lectures on and this that and the other and I always think oh yeah and I never get to any of them [Tate Modern, Female, Weekday].*

The next section discusses these findings in light of the involvement and museum consumption literature.

## **DISCUSSION**

We set out to contribute to current understanding of members' consumption of art museums using the involvement construct. What transpired from this process was the identification of six characteristics of involvement in an art museum context that demonstrate how members are involved with Tate: 1) Centrality and Pleasure; 2) Desire to Learn; 3) Escapism: Spirituality and Creativity; 4) Sense of Belonging and Prestige; 5) Physical; and 6) Drivers of Involvement. Our analysis, inferred through Members' narratives, indicates that the six involvement characteristics embrace the shared motivations, goals, values and drivers, but,

ultimately, involvement is personal. This is an important contribution to the involvement literature that has resulted from our qualitative approach. If we had adapted tested items typically used in previous scales these characteristics may not have emerged and been as revealing. Although Kapferer and Laurent's (1985a) CIP and McIntyre's (1989) advanced CIP have been valuable for understanding involvement through their broad facets our findings have moved beyond this.

To illustrate, our 'Centrality and Pleasure' component reflects Kapferer and Laurent's (1985a) 'Interest' and 'Hedonism' facets that were later encapsulated by McIntyre's (1989) 'Attraction' factor in a leisure context. The characteristic 'Centrality' embraces the Members' interest as it denotes a 'full interest and involvement in art' and Tate specifically and their membership is one expression of this involvement. However, we recognise this may not be true of all of Tate's audiences, as membership may be procured as a gift from a third party, thus the involvement is not personal (it is situational), but it may become personally relevant with prolonged consumption (leading to enduring involvement). Our 'Escapism: Spirituality and Creativity' and 'Sense of Belonging and Prestige' involvement characteristics are not directly embraced within the original or adapted CIP but are reflective of the 'Sign' facet, which refers to the identification of the individual with the product or in this case, the Tate (service).

Our characteristics deconstruct 'Sign Value' thus moving beyond previous understanding offered by the CIP in this art museum context. This process revealed the elements of 'Sign Value' as significant values, goals or needs of the individuals, suggesting that 'A Desire to Learn' 'Escapism: Spirituality and Creativity', and 'A Sense of Belonging and Prestige' are the tenets that form the individual's self concept in this context. The characteristics signify the elements or touch points of the individuals' involvement with Tate, that is, Tate embodies these factors and facilitates involvement that is both enduring and situational. Kyle et al. (2007) remark on the continuing debate into involvement dimensions and their salience, and our research reinforces this quandary. This begs the question, which of our involvement characteristics are more dominant? Our findings indicate that they are upheld to a greater or lesser degree by the members but further quantitative research would be required to test their strength in relation to each other.

The 'Risk Importance' and 'Risk Probability' of the CIP were not revealed as important facets of involvement in our study, However, if one examines the leisure literature this is not entirely surprising as the CIP has also been used and adapted in other leisure contexts and risk has been found to be less central to more generic leisure consumption (e.g. Kyle and Chick 2002). Risk is alleviated for Members' at the point of purchase of membership, not at the point of consumption, although this may differ for visitors who pay for exhibitions. But the narratives revealed that for some, careful consideration and multiple visits are

carried out to 'test' the perceived value of the membership prior to committing to actual purchase. Thus, 'Risk' is levied at point of purchase but only after careful deliberation.

Involvement debates have centred on enduring vs. situational; high vs. low; antecedents vs. consequences; value relevant involvement [VRI] vs. outcome relevant involvement [ORI] and the notion that involvement spans three variables: personal, situational and physical (Bloch and Richins 1983; Houston and Rothschild 1978). As the narratives reveal, the physical characteristic of involvement is important in Members' consumption of Tate. This may not be as important in other service contexts, but the iconic building, Members' rooms and atmosphere draw individual's back to both Tate Modern and Tate Britain, resulting in enduring involvement. Some Members view Tate as a 'third space' (Oldenburg 1999) that renews them both spiritually and creatively. Although Falk and Dierking (1992) identify the physical component as central to the visitor's experience their discussion is limited to the holding power of exhibits and orientation within the museum to address the age old issue of 'museum fatigue' and they approach consumption from a visitor studies' perspective, unaware that their facets signify the involvement construct. Adopting a qualitative approach, using the multi-dimensional involvement construct we have consequently gained a holistic and deeper understanding of art museum consumption resulting in new insights, particularly the 'Physical' and 'Escapism' characteristics.

The characteristics of involvement that we identify show that it is difficult to identify whether they are antecedents or consequences as they appear to be deeply ingrained in the participants' experiences, making it difficult to judge which came prior to involvement (antecedents) and what the outcomes (consequences) are. That is, which came first? This confusion reflects debates within the involvement literature put forward by Gabbott and Hogg (1999) and others who suggest that a direct relationship between involvement and consequences is questionable. Indeed, it seems that involvement in this context is a 'chicken and egg scenario'. To illustrate, certain involvement characteristics, such as a general interest in the arts, escapism and desire to learn provide the impetus to becoming involved in Tate. Prolonged consumption leads to more ingrained involvement through the satisfaction of these personal values and goals (value relevant involvement or VRI as put forward by Johnson and Eagly 1989) which then transpire to become the *consequences* of the involvement as they become embedded in the consumption journey. That is, the individual continues to be involved because they feel satisfied that their need to escape, desire to learn and belong and so on is being met through their interactions with Tate. Thus, do the antecedents *become* the consequences and vice versa, or is it a spiral where one leads to another in an ongoing journey, until something happens to break the pattern? Accordingly, it is difficult to state categorically which comes first: is it the antecedents? (The Chicken) and what are the consequences of this involvement? (The Egg). Thus, it is hard to clarify a clear distinction between

antecedents and consequences with any conviction in this art museum context as the division is not so obvious.

Kapferer and Laurent (1985a) and Gabbott and Hogg (1999) argue that antecedents and consequences are not directly linked, yet call for an inclusion of 'mediating variables' to help explain this relationship. In this study the 'involvement drivers' we identified as a characteristic have a strong impact on whether a member continues to be involved or not (e.g. membership, exhibitions, lectures and communications) thus acting as mediators in the enduring involvement relationship. In fact, we go further and based on the narratives, we suggest that if the 'Centrality and Pleasure', 'Physical' and 'Drivers of Involvement' characteristics are not upheld, enduring involvement will cease. Leading on from involvement drivers, it is important to discuss this notion of SI and EI.

As previously discussed, in leisure, EI and SI have predominately been explored as separate constructs (Kyle et al. 2007). However, Peter and Olson's (1987) position seems congruent with Tate, which is perceived as a voluntary service or leisure experience. To illustrate, at Tate, SI may result from an individual visiting an exhibition following exposure to a promotional banner exhibited on the exterior of the Tate building. Similarly, once inside Tate Britain or Tate Modern, a visitor may be prompted to buy membership via situational prompts, for instance, membership literature that highlights benefits such as 'fast-track entry', 'special

viewing opportunities' and 'free entry to all Tate exhibitions' (Tate, 2009). Over time, other situational factors such as temporary exhibitions may encourage repeat visitors, however, SI is not independent in this context, as Tate must also have personal relevance (EI) to an individual, thus EI 'fuses' with SI. The acts of purchasing membership suggest that Tate has personal relevance to individuals, that these members have shared values and want to belong to, and be part of Tate.

McQuarrie and Munson (1992) argue that involvement facets transform and alter over time; the more somebody learns, the more pleasure they get, and the more likely they are to buy into the values of Tate and to increase their involvement. However, further, longitudinal research would be needed to explore this suggestion further as this insight is only inferred from the respondents' narratives. Overall, although complex, these findings support the notion that involvement is linked with the pursuit of enhancing self concept (Celsi and Olson 1988; Zaichkowsky 1985) and that the characteristics of involvement are the same for all individuals to a greater or lesser degree in this context.

By examining Members' consumption of art museums we have not limited ourselves to one or other of these involvement debates, but rather have focused on the involvement construct holistically and as a consequence of a qualitative framework, new understanding of involvement in a service, and specifically an art museum context has emerged. As discussed earlier in this paper, products and

services are often used interchangeably but more recently research into involvement has motioned for them to be considered as separate entities so that the implications may be explored (e.g. Baker et al. 2009; Bienstock and Stafford 2006) a notion that this study upheld. Furthermore, we have advanced understanding regarding the ilk of services explored via involvement, by examining this construct within a cultural industries arena, specifically, an art museum. This is significant, as previous research has focussed on consumer-centric services such as hairdressing and maid services (e.g Bienstock and Stafford 2006; Gabott and Hogg 1999), so our results may advance further understanding of involvement in new scenarios.

### **Managerial implications**

On a practical level, we consider how Tate and other organisations in the cultural industries, services and leisure sectors can learn from these findings to inform future marketing communications, recruitment, fundraising campaigns and membership retention strategies. Visitor numbers, the continuing popularity and growth of Tate's membership scheme and the narratives in this study reflect the remarkable success of the Tate brand. Tate's Membership team recognise that this facilitates their marketing efforts, more easily perhaps in comparison to other organisations. Tate's challenge is to continue to retain current membership levels and prompt new acquisitions and our involvement characteristics may assist in this process. For example, through the identification of the involvement facets put forward in our paper, communications and events that address the 'Desire to

Learn' should be considered a priority. The Members' Rooms have been shown to be valued as a sanctuary and retreat for individuals; the quality and atmosphere of the rooms should therefore be maintained to prolong enduring involvement. The 'Sense of Belonging' and 'Prestige' characteristics are currently well captured with Tate's unique membership cards that have become collectors' items for many and are an outward sign of belonging to the Tate community that was shown to be so important for many of the Members that were interviewed. Although Tate is an exemplar of involvement, it is still useful to identify and deconstruct what it means to be involved in this context so that the membership continues to thrive.

What is interesting about our findings is their repercussions for other cultural organisations that may not have the kudos or facilities that Tate possess. This study reinforces the importance of strong brand equity and the implications of this for promoting enduring involvement. Membership managers should consider how they can communicate with a variety of audiences if they wish to diversify their membership base and collate a membership offer that reflects existing and potential members' underlying motivations, needs, goals and values that make up their involvement. Our findings can contribute to this process. The core collection, exhibitions and events programmes are critical for involvement as they underpin the 'Centrality and Pleasure' and 'Desire to Learn' characteristics. Membership drives involvement and mediates risk once the membership has been purchased (until renewal). The 'Physical' component of involvement should

not be underestimated either. The authors recognise that not all cultural organisations have such iconic buildings, however space that can be dedicated for members should be considered. Furthermore, the overall environment and the physical space and how it impacts on the visitor experience all combine as important facets to involvement in the art museum context.

For some organisations, particularly in busy cities, a Members' area or room can be promoted as a quiet and exclusive destination in its' own right. The involvement characteristic 'Escapism' was not only inherent to our research findings but also entwined with 'Physical Space'. Visual images and messages can build on the idea of escapism - the notion that the space is for escaping – whether this be public galleries, outdoor space such as a garden in which the art museum is situated, or a Members' room all of which can become a 'sanctuary' for unwinding and revitalising.

As the narratives suggest, there is prestige and exclusivity attached to being a Tate member, (albeit ironically, as there are nearly 100,000 Members). Other organisations may wish to consider how they can make membership more desirable by building on the 'Sense of Belonging' and 'Prestige' involvement characteristics. This might be through membership communications, the visual appeal of the membership card, external messages about their members to third parties and membership benefits, exclusive events, postcard ranges and limited edition prints and so on.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Tate membership creates more opportunities to become involved with Tate and the characteristics of involvement that we identify transpire as shared values that Tate embodies, thus allowing members to engage with Tate on their own terms. That is, Tate facilitates their involvement through the values that lead to enhanced self concept. The involvement construct is characterised by its complexity in identification and application and using a qualitative paradigm led to the emergence of new characteristics. This has advanced understanding of involvement in an art museum context and contributes more broadly to the marketing, leisure and cultural industries disciplines. This cross-sectoral approach gives credence to current understanding and is important to move the involvement debates forward. This should also be helpful to not only arts marketers and managers but those wishing to understand involvement further.

Involvement in a service and specifically an arts context has similarities to products, but is also different. This study has re-emphasized the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the involvement construct and shows that in this art museum context, it is more than a cognitive blend of motivations, needs, goals and values as the literature suggests. Consequently, we recognise the significance of the intangible and tangible elements of the physical space and 'involvement drivers' such as the permanent and temporary exhibitions and other elements of the service, including members' communications and the membership card. We show that involvement needs to be explored in a holistic

way that allows the importance of individual variables and the inter-relationships between them to surface.

Drawing on the services and leisure literature for examining the involvement construct helps us understand art museum consumption more holistically than if using singular perspectives [e.g. attitudes, motives, goals and preferences]. The need to justify involvement from a service perspective as with other studies seems warranted, perhaps more so in an art museum context as it is a different beast to more consumer-related services, such as hairdressing, maid services and dentists. The findings here however could be useful for understanding involvement in other similar services such as education. For example, the 'Desire to Learn' a 'Sense of Belonging and Prestige' characteristics may be manifested from being within a pedagogic community. More research into these characteristics within other services or industries could be executed to examine these propositions further to explore their validity.

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