

The Assessment of Museum Member Motivations: A Case Study

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Introduction

As part of a membership survey conducted by the San Antonio Museum Association (San Antonio, Texas) in 1987, research was conducted that specifically examined the motivations for membership and financial donation of members of the Association. The San Antonio Museum Association (SAMA) is a nonprofit corporation which collectively administers several diverse museums serving the south central Texas region. These museums include the Witte Museum focused on history and natural history, the San Antonio Museum of Art, and at the time of the survey, the Texas Science Center which was focused on transportation history and technology. The study was designed to provide insights to a variety of assumptions upon which the Association's membership management and marketing strategies were based. Central among the questions to be answered were the determination of the motivations expressed by members for joining the Association and forecasting potential changes in member program preference and member attendance patterns.

The methodology employed for the motivation research aspect of the survey consisted of two phases. First, a theoretical framework was developed to provide a foundation for the segmentation of the sample based on the member's motivations for membership. This framework was labeled the "Dimensional Structure of Member Motivations" and provided a unique and theoretically sound paradigm for conceptualizing the motivations for membership in the museum setting. The second phase of the research methodology consisted of the actual segmentation procedure and the interpretation and analysis of the procedure's results.

Theoretical Foundations

Maslow's theory of human motivation provided the theoretical foundation and perspective for this exploratory investigation and identification of museum member motivations. Support for the use of Maslow's theory in nonprofit marketing research is found in marketing and consumer behavior literature (Kotler, 1982; Murphy, 1985; Asseal, 1984). This literature suggests that the needs typology developed by Maslow can provide a useful framework for identifying consumer motivations. It will be recalled that Maslow's hierarchy consists of a typology which embraces five dimensions of human need: self-actualization, esteem, belonging and love, safety, and physiological (Maslow, 1970, pp. 35-38). In three of these dimensions, Maslow also establishes several sub-dimensions which are relevant to the study of motivation in the nonprofit setting. These sub-dimensions include the needs of self-esteem and the esteem of others as sub-dimensions of the esteem dimension, and the aesthetic and cognitive needs as sub-dimensions of the self-actualization dimension. This set of basic needs (Figure 1) served as the broad starting point (i.e., the dimension level, see Figure 2) for the development of a dimensional structure which was intended to serve as a framework from which specific motivations would be measured and identified.

Fleshing out the Dimensional Structure to enable it to serve as a measurement framework required the identification and integration of a descending set of sub-dimensions, attributes, and finally, measurement items for each dimension (Figure 2). This was accomplished via a review of related literature in order to determine the motivations for membership and donation that had been identified in previous research. This review established motivations for participation in a variety of nonprofit organization functions (e.g., fund-raising, museum and park visitation, blood donation, general philanthropy, etc.).

The main motivations identified in the literature review were arranged into a comprehensive listing of "donor motive domains." The original citations were scrutinized to ensure that all the units "assigned" to a particular donor motive domain shared similar Maslovian dimensional concepts. For example, a motive such as "It's a good thing to do" was placed in the altruism domain; motivational factors such as "service to the community" were placed in the community welfare (prosocial) domain. The linkages, i.e., sub-dimensions and attributes, between these self-reported motives and the constructs of the Maslow derived dimensions were then synthesized into the dimensional structure of member motivation. As previously indicated, this structure provided a streamlined framework for examining the question of member motivations in the museum setting.

Methodology

In order to operationalize the dimensional structure, items reflecting the attributes of each dimension were developed to serve as measurement tools. The items developed embraced dimensionally parallel concepts identified in three sources of self-reported membership, donation and/or participation motivations. These sources included the previously mentioned donor motive literature review, statements regarding motivation made by a sample of established museum members in a series of pre-instrument development interviews, and Driver's Recreation Experience Preference (REP) Scale item pool (Driver, 1977). Approaches similar to this have been employed in other motivational assessment based leisure sciences research (Gray, 1981; Mills, 1985).

One hundred and twenty three items were initially developed from these sources. Face validity of the items was considered to be established at this point based on the authors' review of related literature and experience in the museum field. Next, a panel of judges who were experienced in item pool development and familiar with Maslow's needs typology and the objective of this study scrutinized the items in an effort to reduce the number and establish content validity.

The end result of this process was a survey instrument consisting of 40 items designed to measure 16 attributes. The response format consisted of a leading sentence stem ("I am a member of SAMA because . . .") followed by randomized groups of items. The response scale was a 5-point Likert scale with agree/disagree headings.

A pre-test of the motivational scales was conducted on a randomly selected sample of SAMA members. Cronbach's alpha test was employed to verify the internal consistency reliability of the items. All scales produced acceptable alpha coefficients.

The final stage of instrument development consisted of incorporating a series of questions relating to the type and length of membership, member use patterns, benefits sought from the membership, and demographics. These questions were included to provide additional variables for analysis and to provide information desired by the museum staff. The final instrument consisted of a 12 page questionnaire designed along the guidelines suggested by Dillman (1977). Data was collected via a mail survey administered to a random sample of 2000 of the 6800 members carried on the Association's mailing list. A 37% response rate was achieved using a survey method which entailed an initial mailing and two follow-up mailings to non-respondents. A telephone survey was conducted on a random sample of the non-respondents to check for possible non-response bias. An 87% response rate was obtained and analysis indicated that no significant differences existed between the non-respondents and the respondents to the original survey.

Data Analysis

After the data had been collected, cluster analysis was employed to segment the sample on the basis of the sub-dimension level of the dimensional structure. This was done to establish a motivational profile for the groups that emerged from the sample. This procedure led to the identification of four distinct motivational profiles within the population.

The cluster analysis procedure was selected because it requires the a priori use of *theory* to guide the selection of clustering variables and to provide a structure for interpreting the resulting classification. This is because the technique is designed to "produce" groupings and, if a sufficient number of variables are included, seemingly "structured" results will be produced (Aldenderfer and Blashfield, 1984, p. 20). Hence, a strong, a priori theoretical basis is necessary to interpret the results. For this reason and the focus of this study on Maslow's theory as a basis for identifying member motivations, cluster analysis was considered to be an appropriate tool for the segmentation task.

After the establishment of the segments, two tests were conducted to investigate and verify the differences between the variables (i.e., sub-dimensions). First, Duncan's Multiple Range test was employed to test the differences of the means of each variable *between the segments*. Duncan's procedure is a test of significance for making multiple comparisons among means and has been suggested for use in situations where no a priori hypotheses are stated as to the differences expected to be found (Edwards, 1972, pp. 130-131). This testing procedure indicated that, on an overall basis, each of the four segments were significantly different from each other at the .05 level.

Secondly, the correlated groups t-test was employed to test the differences of the means of each scale within the segments. This test is cited as appropriate for use when the independent variables (in this case, six of the seven scales) are correlated (Jaccard, 1983). Through this testing procedure, a clear picture of the motivational profiles of each segment (based on the rank order and differences of the means for each scale) was established. Given the derivation of the scales from Maslow's theory, a profile of the basic needs operative in different segments which were fulfilled through museum membership could be identified.

Findings

In looking at the segments on an individual basis, the findings of the correlated groups t-test provided support for the development of names for each segment based on the characteristics of the motivational profile exhibited in each. For example, as can be seen in the first segment (Table 1), the mean scores for the *family belonging* and *cognitive* sub-dimensions ranked first and second within the segment and were found to be not

significantly different from each other. Given the apparent high priority placed on fulfilling needs in the *family belonging* and *cognitive* sub-dimensions, the respondents in this segment have been labeled **Family/Education Motivated**. This grouping was followed in the rank order by significantly different levels of motivation (as indicated by the mean scores) to fulfill needs in the *prosocial* and *altruism* sub-dimensions. In this segment it appears, from the rank order and intensity of the mean scores, that there are minimal levels of motivation to fulfill basic needs related to the *intimate group belonging*, *self-esteem* and *esteem of others* sub-dimensions.

The **Super-Motivated** segment contained 22.8% of the sample (N = 481). Analysis of the second segment revealed that it contained the highest mean responses recorded across the study for all the variables except the *family belonging* variable. This finding suggested that the respondents contained in this segment were those who consistently give high responses to all questions and/or exhibit high levels of unfulfilled needs in each of the sub-dimensions. Findings also revealed that the highest scores were for the *cognitive* and *prosocial* variables, however, these scores were not significantly different. This seems to indicate a high level of motivation to fulfill needs in both the *cognitive* and *prosocial* sub-dimensions. This grouping was followed by a somewhat lower level of motivation to fulfill needs in the *altruism* sub-dimension. Closely following the *altruism* need were not significantly different levels of need in the *family belonging*, *self-esteem*, and *intimate group belonging* sub-dimensions. The *esteem of others* sub-dimension appears to exert minimal levels of motivation due to its low mean score and distal position in the rank order. Given the pattern of high overall need in all the sub-dimensions indicated by the high mean response, the museum members in this segment were labeled **Super-Motivated Members**.

The third segment contained 33.5% of the sample (N = 481) and was the largest of the four segments. The findings suggested a motivational profile characterized by a high degree of need in both the *prosocial* and *cognitive* sub-dimensions which were not significantly different. This grouping was followed by a somewhat lower level of need in the *altruism* sub-dimension which was closely followed by yet a lower level of need in the *intimate group belonging* sub-dimension. The *self-esteem*, *esteem of others*, and *family belonging* variables occupied the last three positions in the ranking and their relatively low mean scores suggests low needs in these areas. Given the pattern of moderate to low level of needs in all the sub-dimensions, the museum members in this segment were labeled **Moderately Motivated**.

The fourth segment contained 23.3% of the sample and was the second largest of the four segments. This segment contained the lowest mean responses recorded across the study for all the variables. This finding suggests that the respondents contained in this segment were those who

consistently gave low responses to all questions and/or who generally exhibited low levels of unfulfilled needs in each of the sub-dimensions. The findings suggest a motivational profile characterized first by the consistently high degree (relative to the other scores within the segment) of needs in both the *prosocial* and *cognitive* sub-dimensions. This grouping was followed by a somewhat lower level of need in the *altruism* and *intimate group belonging* sub-dimensions. These were followed by a grouping of mean responses for the *self-esteem*, *family belonging*, and *esteem of others* variables which were not significantly different from each other. The low mean responses for these variables suggested that they had very little or no influence on the membership decision process. Likewise, the highest ranked variables also had relatively low mean responses (i.e., 3 represented the *slightly agree* response on the measurement scale) which suggested minimal levels of need in those sub-dimensions. Given this pattern of apparently low overall motivation, the museum members in this segment were labeled **Passive Members**.

Table 1

**Relative Importance of Motivational
Sub-dimensions Within Member Segments**

<u>Family/Education Motivated (N=98)</u>		<u>Super-Motivated (N=110)</u>	
<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Family Belonging	4.02*	Cognitive	4.34*
Cognitive	3.97*	Prosocial	4.33*
Prosocial	3.49	Altruism	4.05
Altruism	3.29	Family Belonging	3.96*
Int. Grp. Belong.	2.60*	Self-Esteem	3.95*
Self-Esteem	2.57*	Int. Grp. Belong.	3.84*
Esteem of Others	1.91	Esteem of Others	3.03
<u>Moderately Motivated (N=161)</u>		<u>Passive Members (N=112)</u>	
<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Variable</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Prosocial	3.99*	Cognitive	3.25*
Cognitive	3.96*	Prosocial	3.17*
Altruism	3.80	Altruism	2.70
Int. Grp. Belong.	3.13	Int. Grp. Belong.	2.29
Self-Esteem	2.68	Self-Esteem	1.76*
Esteem of Others	2.28	Esteem of Others	1.71*
Family Belonging	2.12	Family Belonging	1.69*

*Linked variables do not differ significantly per Correlated Groups t-test ($p < .05$).

Discussion and Conclusions

Through the cluster analysis, four distinct market segments were identified in the sample. However, in delineating the motivational profiles of the segments based on the sub-dimension level of the Dimensional Structure, it was found that the four segments could be characterized as having two basic patterns of motivation. First, as evidenced by its name, the Family/Educations Motivated segment appeared to be predominately motivated by needs in the family belonging and cognitive sub-dimensions. The second overall pattern to emerge encompassed the remaining three segments. These segments shared similar rank orders of needs and appeared to differ from each other mainly in respect to the level or intensity of need as expressed by the responses. This difference is evidenced in the names assigned to them which focus on the levels of motivation. The Super-Motivated segment exhibited high levels of need in all the sub-dimensions; the Moderately-Motivated segment exhibited moderate to low levels of need in all the sub-dimensions; the Passive Member segment exhibited low levels of need in all the sub-dimensions.

In addition to this Family/Education—Intensity of Need dichotomy is the predominant motivation from the self-actualization dimension (i.e., the altruism, prosocial, and cognitive sub-dimensions) exhibited in each segment.

An overall assessment from this perspective (i.e., self-actualization) reveals several patterns of motivation (Table 1). First, we see that the altruism, prosocial, cognitive sub-dimensions had the highest rated priority in each segment. An exception to this generalization is the Family/Education segment where "altruism" was ranked fourth and "family belonging" ranked first. The analysis also suggests that the "cognitive" and "prosocial" sub-dimensions were consistently more important motivators than the "altruism" sub-dimension. In addition, the "prosocial" and "cognitive" sub-dimensions were not significantly different from each other within three of the four segments. Given this pattern, museum members may be tentatively termed "low level" self-actualizers in their relationships with the museum because they indicate strong motivations to fulfill needs at the lower end of the self-actualization needs spectrum (i.e., cognitive and prosocial).

Also evident from an overall assessment is the consistently low level of need in the "esteem of others" sub-dimension. In three of the segments, "esteem of others" ranked last, while in the Moderately Motivated segment it was second to last. This suggests that joining the museum association to secure the esteem of others has little influence on the membership decision process. This is interesting because it was suspected that social recognition would be a powerful motivator for museum membership.

The use of Maslow's theory as a foundation for this study provides several avenues for a fuller understanding of some commonly held beliefs

regarding the motivations for museum membership, museum attendance, and the public's association with nonprofit organizations in general.

Pursuant to Maslow's original thoughts on the concept of self-actualization, the findings of this research suggest that many museum members are motivated from the self-actualization level of need. The practical implication of this finding is that a viable market segment for membership in museums may be found in people who have well-fulfilled lower-order needs and who are searching for self-actualizing prosocial and cognitive oriented experiences. While this is probably not an earth-shattering revelation to those in the museum field, it does serve as a theoretically based confirmation of the commonly recognized reality that museum affiliation is, in general, more prone to be sought by those in society whose means can support a self-actualizing lifestyle.

In contrast to the self-actualizers, the findings also revealed a strong motivation to fulfill a combined Family Belonging and Education need in one segment of the population. This finding may serve as a heartening confirmation of (or, at least, lend support to) the commonly held belief within the profession that museums can and do serve as excellent opportunities for meaningful educational and family growth. A direct implication of this finding is that this segment offers a potential target market for which a great variety of innovative programs can be developed to fulfill these needs and induce membership.

A final interesting and perhaps perplexing avenue of study offered by Maslow's theory lies in the area of the overall low level of motivation reported by the sample to fulfill needs in the "esteem of others" sub-dimension. Again, a commonly held criticism of museums in general, and membership programs specifically, concerns their "elitist" nature (or reality) – the idea that museums are generally the playgrounds of those whom Veblen (1899) termed the "leisure class" and that museum membership may well be a form of "conspicuous consumption." Recent well-founded scholarly work also supports the notion of museums as elitist status symbols (Kelly, 1991). The "esteem of others" related findings of this study contrast to those notions and this contrast poses questions concerning the validity of responses and the difficulty of measuring such intangible motivations and needs. Clearly this is an area that requires further thought and study.

In summary, this study demonstrated that Maslow's typology of basic needs and the Dimensional Structure of Member Motivations derived from it can serve as useful tools in measuring the motivations for nonprofit organization membership. Measures of this nature may lend a more precise identification of the needs members are seeking to fulfill and the products or services that may fulfill those and thereby provide important insights for nonprofit organizations marketing decisions.

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Figure 1

Basic Needs Delineated by Maslow

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Sub-Dimension</u>
Self-actualization	Aesthetic Cognitive
Esteem	Self-esteem Esteem of Others
Belonging & Love	Family Belonging Intimate Group Belonging
Safety	
Physiological	

Figure 2

**DIMENSIONAL STRUCTURE
OF MEMBER MOTIVATIONS**

<u>Dimension</u>	<u>Sub-Dimension</u>	<u>Attribute</u>
Self-actualization	Altruism Prosocial	Empathic Concern
		Community Welfare
	Cognitive	Obligation
		Preservation
		Education
Esteem	Self-Esteem	Curiosity of Experience
		Aesthetics
	Esteem of Others	Achievement
		Reinforcing Self-image
		Status
		Attention
		Peer Group
Belonging & Love	Family Belonging Intimate Grp. Belonging	Power
		Family Togetherness
		Intimate Grp Togetherness
		Need to Belong