Digital Traces of Distinction?

Popular Orientation and User-Engagement with Status Hierarchies in TripAdvisor

Reviews of Cultural Organizations *

by

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Abstract

Cultural organizations are categorized by cultural products (high or popular culture) and by organizational form (nonprofit or commercial). In sociology, these classifications are understood predominantly through a Bourdieusian lens, which links cultural consumption to *habitus* and a class-based struggle for distinction. However, people's engagement with institutionalized cultural classifications may be expressed differently on the Internet, where a culture of hierarchy-free equality is (sometimes) idealized. Using digital trace data from a representative sample of 280 user-generated reviews of four London cultural organizations, we find that reviewers are concerned with practical issues over cultural content, displaying a popular orientation to cultural consumption (an "audience-focus" or an "embodied" approach). A very small minority of reviewers claim status honor on a variety of bases, including symbolic mastery of traditional cultural capital. Overall, we find an online space in the cultural sphere in which cultural hierarchies are not relevant.

Introduction

A central issue in new media is the tension between the democratizing potential of the Internet and the reproduction of inequality (e.g. Mansell, 2016). In the (traditional, offline)

cultural arena, high culture is privileged over popular culture, and nonprofit cultural organizations are viewed as loftier than profit-seeking cultural businesses (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993; DiMaggio, 1982, 1992). The "high-art aesthetic" implicit in this privileging stands in contrast to the "popular aesthetic" (Bielby and Bielby, 2004; van Venrooij, 2009; van Venrooij and Schmutz, 2010), in that the former is oriented toward hierarchical distinctions, while the latter is focused on the entertainment value of cultural experiences. Previous work has found that the popular aesthetic is more common in online, peer-produced reviews of cultural products than in professionally authored reviews, but this research has looked only at cultural products more or less in the popular-culture arena, such as music (Hanrahan, 2013) and film (Verboord, 2014). In contrast, our research compares user-generated content in both high culture and popular culture in order to understand user engagement with cultural hierarchies.

This paper uses a representative sample of user-generated reviews of cultural organizations published on TripAdvisor in 2014. Reviewers necessarily draw on their own understandings of cultural classification as they describe and evaluate their experiences of exhibitions, displays or performances; consequently, reviews can be read to understand their authors' engagement with cultural hierarchies as well as their own efforts to display their own status.

TripAdvisor reviews are "digital traces," the data left behind as a by-product of the interactions people have with online platforms. These digital traces are extremely useful data, as they provide unobtrusive measures of people's thoughts at a given point of time. They are accounts of visitors' bodily and cognitive interactions with the symbolic objects, materiality, and spaces of the places they visited, as well as with broader contextual factors of their visit, such as the venue's location, how they got there, and who attended with them. These accounts are provided with the expectation that they will be read by others. Reviews produce

meaning as they describe the experiences of the reviewer, or as Carter (2016: 235) put it, "Reviews, posted on TripAdvisor…constitute narrative appraisals of tourist sites, that is, visitor-authored stories about places." Similarly, Vásquez (2012) analyses TripAdvisor reviews as narratives, specifically as "small stories" about visitors' experiences. As such, user-generated reviews provide evidence on cultural classification and the display of symbolic mastery, and they offer new ways to study cultural experiences.

TripAdvisor reviews of *cultural organizations* appear similar to reviews of cultural products on Amazon.com, IMDb, or Rotten Tomatoes. As with reviews of cultural products, reviews of cultural organizations are embedded in a wider cultural hierarchy. Yet there are important differences. Unlike, for example films or purchased products, people can only experience cultural organizations when they visit. The carefully curated displays and theatrical performances people experience are complemented by the location of the venue, its amenities, environment, and staff, all of which are also part of the experience.

In this way, and very important to note, *experiences of cultural organizations are different from experiences of many types of cultural objects*, such as books, movies, or songs/albums, because these products can be streamed or experienced anywhere. While these products can also be experienced in collective settings, such as book readings, literary festivals, cinemas, and live music performances, they are often experienced alone, on demand. In contrast, consumers must travel to the specific location of a cultural organization, often in the company of friends or family, during opening hours. In other words, TripAdvisor reviews of cultural organizations are *not* product reviews. As we show, the characteristics of a cultural venue matter to reviewers.

Art-in-action (Acord and DeNora 2008) seeks to understand how audiences interact with the cultural objects such that the receiver and the object can be said to "co-produce" aesthetic experience. Drawing on this approach, we consider how people interact not just

with the affordances of cultural objects *per se* (works of art, displays, performances), but also with the affordances of the cultural organization as a venue. That is, we examine the reported interaction of the audience members with the cultural organization as a "whole package." This whole package includes the cultural objects performed or displayed, *and also* the building, its location, facilities and staff, and other observable aspects of the experience of attending the cultural organization.

Cultural Classification

Symbolic boundaries and classification systems are evident in the realm of culture, most notably, in the crude but powerful distinction between high culture and popular culture. DiMaggio (1982, 1992) argues that, in the late nineteenth century, high status "cultural entrepreneurs" separated certain forms of cultural production (high culture) from other forms (popular culture). High culture was accorded higher status, through a process of "sacralization" (Levine, 1988; Weber, 2008; Wolff and Seed, 1988). A concomitant division occurred in the division of cultural distribution systems clearly into commercial and nonprofit. The consecration of high culture allowed cultural entrepreneurs to claim that producing high culture provided a public good (DiMaggio, 1987b). Thus, the nonprofit form was captured by elites to promote their own "high" culture (DiMaggio 1992). This understanding fits snugly with Bourdieu's (1993) understanding the separation of cultural production into commercial and nonprofit fields, with symbolic rewards greater in the latter. Although further work is needed, there is evidence that organizational form (commercial or nonprofit) matters for contemporary audiences of cultural organizations. McDonnell and Tepper (2014), for example, find that public discourse on the closing of cultural organizations differs for commercial and nonprofit organizations in both high- and popular-culture settings.

Bourdieu's work describes distinctions across types of art, types of people, fields of production, and time and space, providing the basis for the dominant sociological approach to cultural classification. Significant literature has questioned Bourdieu's (1984) specific findings, along a number of lines (e.g. Bennett, *et al*, 2009; Lamont, 1992; Lizardo and Skiles, 2012). One question relates to the relevance of cultural hierarchies to non-elites. For instance, Lamont and Lareau (1988: 158) write, "dominated groups have their own standards and sets of norms which can be relatively autonomous from the dominant ones." Similarly, Griswold (1991) suggests that it is an "empirical question" whether "the cultural authority of elites was ever quite as great as represented at the starting point of DiMaggio's account" or if "the claims of the social elite were plausible in the eyes of others" (p. 157).

Moreover, contemporary society appears to be in a period of cultural declassification (DiMaggio, 1987a). Wider changes in society may contribute to a reduced relevance of cultural categories in cultural organizations, as similar declassificatory trends have been theorized as being part of the "postmodern condition" (Lyotard, 1984). Especially relevant to our concerns is the contemporary "experience economy," which induces people to seek and to consume entertaining (often purchased) experiences (Pine and Gilmore; 2011; Rifkin, 2000). Pine and Gilmore (2011) suggest that businesses should aim for customers to have *meaningful* experiences, and they suggest that the easiest (but most undesirable) way to create a meaningful experience is to provide a bad one, "a memorable encounter of the most unpleasant kind" (p. 107). Cultural organizations, whether popular or high, have been swept up in an experience-economy vision of cultural attendance as "edutainment" (Kotler, 2001; McPherson, 2006; Silverstone, 1988, but see Hanquinet and Savage, 2012), as they become subjected to "the tourist gaze" (Urry and Larsen, 2011), competing not only with other cultural attractions but also the wider leisure sector. As Featherstone (2007: 69) suggests for museums, high-culture organizations "seek to cater for larger audiences and discard their

exclusively high-culture labels to become sites for spectacles, sensation, illusion and montage; places where one has an experience, rather than where knowledge of the canon and established symbolic hierarchies are inculcated." Despite such trends, the conventional view that culture is somehow divided into high and popular has not been discarded (DiMaggio, 1987a; Lamont, 1992; Bennett et al, 2009).

The Popular Aesthetic in the Digital Age

Internet reviews of culture are currently understudied (see Blank, 2007), but emerging literature shows that online reviews tend toward a popular aesthetic over a high-culture one, at least with respect to cultural products. For instance, Hanrahan (2013: 78) finds that, in contrast to professionally authored reviews, online music reviews, on blogs, social media, or music-review and fan sites, are more likely to cover the "social experience of music" than its aesthetic aspects. Verboord (2014) examines popular versus high-art discourses in film reviews, comparing traditional print reviews and peer-produced criticism. He finds that online, user-generated reviews rely more on popular discourses, such as a "user orientation," references to the reviewer's "own watching experiences…or expectations" and to "offer practical advice and remarks" (p. 927).

One element of how people engage with culture relates to the "orientation" people display in reviews. In his classic work on taste cultures, Gans (1974) distinguishes between *audience-orientation* (what Verboord called "user orientation") and *creator-orientation* in the consumption of culture. He suggests that the fine arts tend to be received with the purpose of intellectual stimulation and the popular arts with the goal of entertainment. An audience orientation suggests that the consumer is primary, and cultural organizations should adapt to audience desires, whereas creator orientation suggests that the artist is primary, and audience members should adapt themselves to the constraints set by the creator. We propose to revive

Gans's orientation concept, which suggests that cultural classification emerges from the relationship of viewers to cultural organizations; that is, orientation is a property of visitors, rather than attractions.

Atkinson (2011), drawing on Bourdieu (1984), provides another useful discussion of orientations towards culture. With reference to privileged people who are "distant from necessity" due to sufficient economic capital, Atkinson writes:

> [As] Bourdieu notes, distance from necessity tends to produce a taste for form over function, mind over body and so on because it gives the dominant the time, the freedom and the taste for abstraction…whilst the dominated, living in proximity to necessity, tend to "make a virtue of a necessity" and opt for the functional, the practical and the substantial. (p. 170)

In this way, elites may focus on *form* (content), by employing an "aesthetic disposition" (Bourdieu, 1984: 3) that involves abstract, aesthetic discourse in their evaluation of cultural experiences. In contrast, those less rich in cultural capital may focus on *function* in their evaluation, such as asking what is the purpose of cultural objects. Objects may be valued if they are entertaining ("fun") or if they display what is seen as an obvious, practical skill (such as draftsmanship), and may be considered with respect to an embodied reaction, rather than an intellectual one, as Atkinson shows in empirical work.

Atkinson's and Gans' research suggests that as we seek to understand the engagement with cultural classification in reviews of cultural organizations we should look for elements of symbolic mastery (discussions of aesthetic criteria, knowledge of artists and the art form, links and comparisons to other cultural products, etc.) and elements of embodiment (being entertained, having fun, physical movement or experience, etc.) and relatedly, for audience/creator orientations.

TripAdvisor

TripAdvisor calls itself the "world's largest travel website," and in 2014, it logged 315 million unique monthly visitors and contained more than 200 million reviews of more than 4.5 million accommodations, restaurants and attractions in 45 countries worldwide (TripAdvisor, 2014). Research on TripAdvisor largely comprises atheoretical studies of hotel reviews published in the tourism literature (e.g. Stringam and Gerdes, 2010; O'Connor, 2010, but see Carter, 2016; Owens, 2010 on heritage attractions). However, scholarly studies of TripAdvisor demonstrate how the site has reconfigured expertise and the accountability of organizations to their consumers (Jeacle and Carter, 2011; Scott and Orlikowski, 2012).

Methods

We are interested in the distinctions among *cultural organizations* (high and popular), and distinctions among *organizational form* (commercial versus nonprofit organizations). Our research goals are:

- to ascertain the extent to which the categories of cultural status (high, popular) and organizational form (commercial, nonprofit) are relevant to reviewers in their accounts of cultural experiences, and

- to understand how the reviewers of these different categories display cultural capital.

The classic Bourdiusian approach suggests that strong differences in reviews across organizational type should be found, but various developments in contemporary society, along with characteristics of social media, suggests such differences might be attenuated.

We conducted a content analysis on a random sample of 70 reviews each from four cultural organizations (total N=280 reviews), posted on TripAdvisor in 2014. This is a true random sample (not an accidental or convenience sample) of *all* 2014 TripAdvisor reviews of these London cultural organizations, drawn from a data set we created (see Hale, Blank and

Alexander, 2017). In this way, we seek to combine the breadth of large-scale computational techniques with the depth of qualitative analysis. These four were chosen because they were typical of cultural organizations in four categories, as determined by prior research (Alexander, Blank, and Hale, 2017). They include: The *Tate Modern* (high-culture/nonprofit), which displays contemporary art from 1900 to the present in the former Bankside Power Station, *ZSL London Zoo* (popular-culture/nonprofit), the world's oldest scientific zoo, run by the Zoological Society of London, *Shakespeare's Globe* (high-culture/commercial), a theatre complex specializing in Shakespearian drama, and *Madame Tussauds* (popular-culture/commercial), a wax museum with effigies of sport, politics and popular entertainment personalities.[1] The 70 reviews represent, approximately, a 10 percent sample for the first three attractions, and about a 4 percent sample of Madame Tussauds.

We looked for evidence of status claims, embodied or symbolic mastery, audience- or creator-focus, and displays of high cultural capital in an initial pre-code review of the data. We formally hand-coded the reviews for attributes that are drawn explicitly from Atkinson (2011), Gans (1974), and Verboord (2014):

- *Embodied-audience focused.* An embodied approach was indicated by descriptions of physical actions, such as taking photos, a description of a physical reaction to the organization or the exhibition/performance, such as being moved to tears or laughing, or an assertion that the experience was "fun". An audience-focused approach was indicated by offering advice to imagined readers of the reviews. Although embodied and audience-focused approaches are analytically distinct, they have been collapsed into one category reflecting a popular orientation because, in practice, the two approaches were intermixed in most reviews.

- *Status claim*, in which reviewers place themselves in a category which suggests superiority, or claim authority by placing themselves in a knowledgeable position:

"As an aspiring writer" (Shakespeare's Globe) or "as a true animal lover" (ZSL London Zoo).

- *Aversion claim*, in which a reviewer claims a dislike of a cultural form: "I wouldn't say I'm a big Shakespeare fanatic or anything" (Shakespeare's Globe), "I do not understand modern art" (Tate Modern), or "We weren't sure this was our 'cup of tea'" (Madame Tussauds).

- *Symbolic mastery*, in which reviewers engage in sophisticated use of language to display a deep knowledge of a cultural form or which shows high cultural capital, such as displaying detailed or specialist knowledge of the art form, or making comparisons across objects or events.

The first category is evidence of a popular aesthetic and the last three are all varieties of status games reviewers might play. (We did not formally code for creator orientation, as a pre-code analysis showed no evidence for it.) We coded all reviews in the sample into these four categories. Each review was put into only one category. We set the bar very low for evidence of distinction and cultural capital, such that we coded simple status claims in the midst of an otherwise embodied-audience focused review or ineffective attempts at symbolic mastery as "status-claim" or "symbolic-mastery." Similarly, we coded as status claims any identity claims ("as a true animal lover") or mild claims to expertise ("as an aspiring writer"), as long as they were used to claim an authoritative basis for the review. Aversion claims are coded separately, because by stating that a type of culture was not for them, reviewers implicitly engage with cultural classification. Few reviews mixed across the status, aversion and symbolic mastery claims, a total of three reviews out of 280. In these three cases, status trumped aversion (two reviews) and symbolic mastery trumped status claims (one review).

The TripAdvisor site, while useful, poses some limitations. We have very little information about TripAdvisor reviewers. This is a common problem with digital trace or

social media data (Golder and Macy, 2014). We argue that online reviews are nevertheless very useful because they are accounts in which reviewers describe experience in their own words. Although there is evidence that Internet reviewers have relatively high occupational prestige and income (Dutton and Blank, 2013), we do not make claims about reviewer characteristics, such as social class, but focus instead on questions we can answer with the evidence to hand. A second characteristic of our research site is that it is foremost a travel site with reviews of hotels and restaurants. TripAdvisor is not an elite publication, despite its reliance on "self-styled cosmopolitans" (Jeacle and Carter, 2011: 300). As a large, successful site, it is located toward the inclusive, democratic end of the Internet (Hale, 2016). It is therefore an appropriate location in which to examine the tension between egalitarian and elitist aspects of the Internet, by examining the status games that are played by reviewers in their interaction with cultural hierarchies.

Results

We report on the content analysis, which examines audience orientation and status games evident in the reviews, then discuss the reviewers' accounts in detail, examining themes evident in the reviews, and lastly, turn to the question of organizational form: commercial or nonprofit. In quoting reviews, we included the title in italics. We indicated that we elided a review for length with ellipses within square brackets, "[…]"; other ellipses are original to the review. We preserved spelling, capitalization, and punctuation from the original review and have *not* used "*sic*" to indicate errors.

Content Analysis

The content analysis showed an overwhelming presence of a popular orientation, suggesting that cultural classification was not relevant to most reviewers. Displays of distinction were rarely evident (see Table 1).

Table 1 about here

Reviews of Madame Tussauds were almost entirely *embodied-audience focused*. The three reviews making aversion claims for this attraction all started by stating that waxworks or popular tourist traps were not their thing, but then reported a pleasant experience that came as a surprise; therefore, these three reviews mixed an aversion claim with an otherwise embodied-audience review. Similarly, eight of the nine status claims by reviewers of ZSL London Zoo claimed authority though an identity marker: being an animal lover, a frequent attender of zoos, or (once) a scientist. Reviewers used this authority to return both positive and negative reviews that focused on personal experiences and recommendations for other visitors. The ninth Zoo reviewer who made status claims also made aversion claims as part of a negative review, first by claiming not to like zoos, and then claiming status honor as a world traveler who visits Africa at least once a year. Interestingly, no one felt it necessary to claim any special authority for reviewing Madame Tussauds. No reviewers of ZSL London Zoo or Madame Tussauds, the popular-culture organizations, displayed symbolic mastery in the reviews, even though it is perfectly possible to talk about animals or waxworks/celebrities in a manner that shows sophisticated abstract thought or analytic/synthetic ability.

Evidence for symbolic mastery appeared in the high-culture organizations, though rarely:

The Play is the Thing

The tour of the theatre and a trip through the attached museum and gift shop is

certainly interesting (you can buy a Lady Macbeth tea towel that says "Out, Damn

Spot […] I saw Julius Caesar, and it was wonderful […]

(Shakespeare's Globe, 5 stars)

We classified this review as *symbolic mastery* due to two gentle references to Shakespearian

lines. It is typical of the symbolic mastery reviews for the level of mastery it displays. For the

most part, these reviews might be described as "symbolic mastery lite" as there is little

evidence of art- or literary-critical engagement with the works nor a display of deep

knowledge. Most reviews coded under symbolic mastery included personal narrative, such

as:

As Julius Caesar lay in a pool of blood a baby grizzled—beware, this is theme park

Shakespeare!

[…] We saw Julius Caesar and although the play was performed with some spirit, it

offered no new interpretation […] At the end of the show, the assembled cast

performed a spirited dance which seemed to be completely out of character with the

downbeat, blood begets blood, message of the play. We had paid £39 per seat and I

consider this very poor value. The night before, we had been to a Prom and paid £30

per seat for better seats and an infinitely better artistic experience. […]

(Shakespeare's Globe, 2 stars)

This reviewer—whose full review told amusingly about baby who cried at an unfortunate

moment, uncomfortable benches ("even if you rent a cushion"), a mug of beer spilling from

an upper tier of seats, and a queue of "bursting" men waiting for insufficient toilet facilities (a

change from long lines at the women's rest room)—mixed a few art-critical observations on

the play and a superficial comparison to another art form (classical music at the Proms) with a long narrative of personal experience.

Status claims in Globe reviews included a declaration of authority based (somewhat unconvincingly, due to missing capitalization) on being a student of "english," another on "living abroad" and a third, on being an Elizabethan re-enactor (who tried to rent cushions for two pence, the sixteenth-century rate). The two status claims in Tate Modern reviews included one reviewer who self-classified as a "Tate member" and another who claimed status based on taste in tea:

Don't eat the English breakfast

[…] Pots of tea arrived and we were thrilled to find they used loose leaf. It was very good. Then came the breakfast. […]

(Tate Modern, 2 star)

The entire review, in which the reviewer also claimed the status of being from Cumbria as authority for judging "a 'Cumberland' sausage," focused on the restaurant and the unsatisfying meal had there. It is not clear from the evidence whether this reviewer is a foodie (Johnston and Baumann, 2015) or simply a curmudgeon.

Symbolic mastery reviews of Tate Modern displayed snippets of knowledge or cultural capital, but like reviews of the Globe, they only provided hints of a possible higher status:

COMPLACENCY SHOWS

That Tate Modern has a world class collection of modern painting is not in doubt. What is in doubt is the museum's ability to show it at its best. […] One recalls how dramatic or lovely some of these paintings looked in their old Millbank setting – Picasso's Three Dancers, for example […]

(Tate Modern, 3 stars)

The main difference between popular-culture and high-culture reviews was the presence of symbolic mastery in a small minority of the latter (less than six percent, on the most generous estimate), though such mastery was deployed sparingly. Another difference is the larger presence of aversion claims among the high-culture reviews, especially at Tate Modern. Aversion reviews of the Globe functioned similarly to the aversion reviews at Madame Tussauds, in that the three reviewers who stated that they did not like Shakespeare, then used this fact as a foil against which to highlight their subsequent enjoyment of their experience. At Tate Modern, however, aversion claims were used to support positive, "surprised" reviews only about half of the time (5 of 11). Six negative reviews started with a caveat that the reviewer does not like or understand modern art. Reviewers of the other three attractions did not feel it necessary to temper a negative review with admissions about their tastes. Aversion claims hint that some cultural forms are institutionalized in a way that leads some people to feel excluded.

Themes in TripAdvisor Reviews

The content analysis found a popular orientation across nearly all reviews. A more detailed analysis of the reviewers' accounts, focusing on the embodied-audience focused reviews, shows that reviewers tended to highlight their own experience:

Awesome!

It's completely worth it. Had so much fun. They [waxworks] really seem to be real, it's fantastic. Definitely want to go again. I took lots of pictures and couldn't be more happy to be there next to those famous people.

(Madame Tussauds, 5 stars)

"Best zoo"

[…] we loved it the animals are well taken care of and we found our way around the zoo and saw all the animals, there were great photo opportunities, would definitely return, only negative was there were no elephants.

(ZSL London Zoo, 4 stars)

Outstanding experience

Today we visited the globe and saw Titus Andronicus. I cannot say how much I enjoyed the whole thing. The theatre is spectacular and the way the play is staged is great - you feel very involved and all your senses are utilised. […]

(Shakespeare's Globe, 5 stars)

Fabulous space and position for enjoying art and the environs

Had a lovely Saturday afternoon walking along the promenade from the South bank, enjoying the views, and winding up at the Tate Modern. […]

(Tate Modern, 4 stars)

Each of these reviewers describes an embodied experience, what they did (walking, taking photos, finding their way, enjoying views, engaging senses) and how they reacted to the whole experience (had fun, loved it, enjoyed it). Displays are mentioned in simple ways (title of play, missing animal species, "famous people" depicted in lifelike waxworks), but these are not analyzed in any detail.

Reported experiences also include encounters with staff, as well as discussions of shops, catering and the state of the toilet facilities:

Fabulous experience

[…] Friendly and efficient staff at the ticket desk, doors and shop. There is a restaurant / cafe on site but I didn't use either as plenty of eateries nearby. Toilets were clean and well stocked. I bought a programme (£4) and a couple of postcards from the well-stocked shop […]

(Shakespeare's Globe, 5 stars)

Since the reviewer's own experiences are primary, one bad experience can result in a negative review for the attraction:

Poor service in the shop.

Poor customer service in the gift shop. The girl who served me was very rude […]

(ZSL London Zoo, 3 stars)

This recalls Pine and Gilmore's (2011) comment that a bad experience is particularly memorable.

Other reviewers focus on practicalities and offer advice, such as how to avoid queues or how to save money by taking a packed lunch or booking a ticket in advance. Offering direct advice, often using the second person voice, suggests an audience focus:

Only go on a 2 for 1 voucher

[…] You can get 2 for 1 deals […] so please check these first. […]

(Madame Tussauds, 3 stars)

A Must-See in London

[…] Tips: If you opt for a standing ticket, take a mac/raincoat with a hood to wear.
You're not allowed umbrellas and heavy rain can really put a dampener on the
experience. […]

(Shakespeare's Globe, 5 stars)

Reviews listed amenities or offered advice in an abstract though audience-focused manner,
often mixing personal experiences and advice.

Children were frequently mentioned in reviews of all four organizations, and this
included (implicit) advice for parents:

Good day out

I went to madame tussauds london and it is a really good day out!! All of the figurines
are great and so are the information cards that go with them! However the parking is
really bad, as in there isnt any!! Also if you have young children with a pushchair
then you will struggle to get to the auditorium […]

(Madame Tussauds, 4 stars)

Magnificent Matisse

This is a fabulous collection of Matisse's cut outs . The colours are stunning and the
way the works of art have been grouped is excellent. […] Children will love the
vibrancy of the work and of course seeing 'The Snail' which is so much bigger than
children expect ! […]

(Tate Modern, 5 Stars)

In these examples, reviewers consider practical issues (parking and managing small children
in strollers), making suggestions on what would interest children (Matisse's colors and his
Snail). Cultural objects are mentioned and briefly evaluated ("figurines are great," "colours

are stunning"). Many reviews described children's experiences. The attention to children suggests that many reviewers visit cultural attractions as family groups. Reviewers also attend cultural attractions with other adults (many write in the first-person plural, "we"), but children are a special category that requires adults to glean additional intelligence for a successful visit—in this way, children are analogous to problems with queues, overpriced tickets, or friendly staff.

In sum, reviewers paid audience-focused attention to practicalities of the experience, and description of embodied personal experiences, which Verboord (2011) describes as part of a popular aesthetic. Although cultural objects or displays were mentioned on some occasions, there was little engagement beyond simple mentions or a general observation that the entire content of the organization was good or worth seeing.

Organizational form

We found almost no mention of organizational form (commercial, nonprofit or public). Reviewers complained about admission fees for both Madame Tussauds (for-profit) and ZSL London Zoo (registered charity). A few reviewers defended the Zoo by noting that it is expensive to keep wild animals in central London, but no reviewers mentioned the nonprofit status of the Zoo (one reviewer mentioned ZSL's research focus). No reviewer defended Madame Tussauds entry charges, although some positive reviews stated that the experience was worth it. Reviewers frequently noted that Tate Modern (a registered charity) had free entry for permanent exhibitions; many reviewers mentioned or complained about the cost of entry for special exhibitions, but only one reviewer mentioned the museum's organizational form, and this was an indirect and not-quite-accurate reference (along with an exclusion-type aversion claim):

Culture???

I apologise now to all the 'artists' out there but this is the biggest waste of public money I have ever visited. If a piece of material draped round a glass on the floor is art then I'm so pleased that I am not a member of the cultured community.

(Tate Modern, 2 stars)

Interestingly, only two other reviews (of the 280) specifically mentioned organizational form, both in reviews of ZSL London Zoo. One of these reviewers got it wrong and the other was only half way there:

Too commercial for me

[…] the entrance fees are very expensive and this is before you add all the other costs involved at premium rates. The whole zoo just feels a little too commercial, driven by profits and tourists over animal conservation. […]

(ZSL London Zoo, 3 stars)

zsl london zoo

[…] i would go again as you can tell they do care a lot about the animals and its not just a business for them to make money so they have a big thumbs up from me for that.

(ZSL London Zoo, 5 stars)

Information on organizational form is readily available on websites (nonprofits often highlight their charitable status) and for nonprofits, often emphasized to visitors, for instance, through posters or donation boxes. Given we found only three indirect or incorrect mentions of organizational form in 280 reviews, however, it is clear that organizational form is not salient to reviewers.

Discussion

Reviews are evidence of how people (reviewers) are oriented toward cultural experiences. On the whole, reviewers did not engage with cultural status (high/popular) or organizational form (commercial/nonprofit), nor did they dwell on the content. Instead, practical concerns dominate. All cultural organizations were evaluated according to a popular orientation that mixes an embodied approach (Atkinson, 2011) with an audience focus (Gans, 1974) which could be termed a "popular aesthetic" (Verboord, 2014). Evaluations based on aesthetic criteria were rare and, when extant, superficial. Organizational form is invisible to consumers and was almost never deployed as an evaluative criterion.

The analysis finds a small number of reviewers (six out of 280, all in high-culture organizations) who mix some element of symbolic mastery with first-person narrative or second-person advice. It also finds a modest number of status and aversion claims (found in 31 reviews in the sample, across both high and popular organizations, also interspersed among narrative and advice). Aversion claims, in particular, are an interesting exception to the general finding that reviewers ignore cultural classification. In saying that an attraction probably was not for them, reviewers appear to engage with the classification of that attraction. The analysis found that three reviewers thought Madame Tussauds might be too lowbrow ("tourist trap") for them, and fourteen other reviewers thought that Shakespeare or modern art would be too highbrow. As Ang (1985) argued with respect to the mass culture critique and the television show *Dallas*, some ideas are so strongly institutionalized that consumers need to engage with the idea regardless of how they feel about the cultural form. A minority of reviewers engaged with ideas of Shakespeare or modern art being "difficult" (some of these reviewers were turned around by the experience; others were not), or with Madame Tussauds as being only for the great unwashed.

Verboord (2014) distinguished anti-art claims (evidence of popular discourse) from anti-entertainment claims (evidence of high-art discourse), but we found that aversion claims did not function either way in a majority of cases. Some aversion claims in the Tate Modern reviews were anti-art expressions. However, half of the aversion claims for Tate Modern, and all of the aversion claims in Madame Tussauds *and* Globe reviews were used in a "surprised" trope; a hook on which to hang a positive review. In this way, all of the aversion claims displayed a popular orientation.

Though we have found a popular orientation that spans reviews of all types of cultural organization, we must be clear that we do not argue that Distinction has disappeared, nor do we argue against effects of status or class. Clearly, reviewers are likely to vary in status as well as taste. And status, class, and economic resources are likely to influence reviewers' approach to cultural experience. However, across the 280 reviews in our representative sample, the overwhelming majority of people, likely from different walks of life, have reviewed high- and popular-culture organizations using remarkably similar strategies.

On the whole, TripAdvisor reviewers do not draw on discourses of high or popular culture. Instead, they provide *advice on practical matters* (how to avoid queues or crowds, how to save money, what to wear, where to eat, or how children will fare—often given in second person voice, "you," to an imagined reader). It is significant that *advice rarely included comment on aesthetic or display issues,* or *specific suggestions on what displays to see or avoid*. Reviewers focus on *their own needs* (how their own children reacted, whether the toilets were available and clean, or if the theatre seats were comfortable) and *the responsiveness of the attraction to their practical needs* (having friendly, helpful staff, especially with respect to tickets, food service, or shops). Reviewers' experiences are clearly shaped by the affordances of the cultural organization as a whole package and the broader context in which culture is received mediates reception.

The reviewers' strategies may be shaped by the TripAdvisor context. In general, reviewers follow certain conventions of reviewing, which press towards an audience focus and experiential reporting. As a travel site, TripAdvisor may push toward the practical, as the site is designed for peers to give travel advice. However, there is nothing in TripAdvisor that says that reviews of cultural experiences must exclude the aesthetic experience, evaluations of the content of exhibitions or performances, or specific advice on what displays or objects are must-sees. This bias towards personal experience may be a characteristic of social media (Hanrahan, 2013; Verboord, 2014). Nevertheless, as Golder and Macy (2014: 143) observe, "The online world is not identical to the offline, but it is entirely real." It may be that people who write "travel stories" of their visits to cultural organizations online might make status claims and display cultural capital offline. However, "online interaction is already deeply woven into the daily experience of millions of people worldwide" (Golder and Macy, 2014: 144) and as more people gain their knowledge of cultural organizations from review sites such as TripAdvisor, they will encounter embodied, audience-focused accounts, rather than Distinction-based accounts which embrace differences in cultural categories.

With respect to reviewing conventions, it is interesting to note that reviewers rarely give information about themselves in reviews. Reviewers evaluate based on their own (practical rather than aesthetic) experiences, and reviews often consist entirely of first person narratives about a visit. Even so, most reviewers tell nothing of themselves and give no indication of why a reader might be interested in or believe the reviewer's account. Interest is simply assumed. Though a small minority reveal fragments of personal information (scientist, Tate member), reviews are pseudonymous. This type of anonymity carries with it an *assumed equality* across contributors, and is characteristic of online reviews and social media generally. DiMaggio (1991: 142) suggests that "The engine behind declassification is the market economy." Our research suggests that this engine is amplified by conventions

(anonymous, equivalent, and preferring social/practical experience over traditional aesthetic reception) for user-generated Internet content.

Our study demonstrates that *TripAdvisor reviews occupy an online social space where cultural distinction is not particularly relevant*, and suggests that reviewers rarely engage with cultural classification or play status games, at least within the context we study. Golder and Macy (2014: 143) write, "Users who desire status, admiration, social approval, and attention in their offline relationships will bring those desires with them to their online networks." However, we have not found much evidence for status-seeking users on TripAdvisor. This finding is consistent with Griswold's (1991) speculation that the influence of cultural entrepreneurs was minimal outside their elite purview, and it may suggest that there has always been a widespread lack of engagement with cultural classification by people who do not belong to the cultural elite. (See Griswold and Wohl, 2015, and Long, 1986, for examples of readers who resist cultural authority in book-selection or reading practices.) There have also been changes in society with concomitant changes in audience expectations that may explain our results. For instance, researchers have suggested that the contemporary "experience economy" encourages people to seek entertaining experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 2011; Rifkin 2000; Featherstone, 2007), and this may have led to changes for audiences whereby most experiences, including cultural ones, are now evaluated solely by an embodied aesthetic. Lamont and Lareau (1988) suggest that dominated groups have autonomous standards; our study extends this in that we found that *online reviewers* have autonomous standards with respect to experience in cultural organizations, given that they do not engage consistently, or normally at all, with cultural classification.

This is not to say that people go to cultural organizations to examine the toilets and test the staff. Some people (with the right "contextual cultural capital") do have "unforgettable aesthetic experiences" (López-Sintas et al, 2012) and some may view some

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cultural experiences more as "educative leisure" than pure entertainment (Hanquinet and Savage, 2012). We believe that all the reviewers have looked at waxworks, plays, artworks, or animals, as the main object of their visit, and they do so from a personal horizon of expectations that includes some form of *habitus* (which may be situated, as Lamont, 1992, suggests, in a sense of virtue rather than in a love of the arts). However, in reviewing cultural attractions, reviewers clearly show that the wider aspects of the experience are salient and powerful, and the personalized, embodied experience is paramount.

TripAdvisor reviews cover an enormous range of issues and opinions (c.f. Hennig-Thurau *et al*, 2004). This is a strength for TripAdvisor's business model in that that almost anyone can find a text that speaks directly to them. It is also a strength of our study, as we have shown that, despite the range of issues, there is little commentary, aside from a few aversion claims, that indicates the salience of cultural hierarchies. The display of "status mastery lite" does not appear in reviews of popular-cultural organizations. It occurs very infrequently in reviews of high-culture organizations, always accompanied with descriptions of experiences and/or advice.

We have argued that this is evidence of an online space where cultural hierarchies have little relevance. Theoretically, our results suggest that Bourdieusian theory needs reassessment in the digital age. However, our paper also recalls that *habitus* is not just a mental disposition, but as Bourdieu argued, also an embodied one. Reviewers' experiences in cultural organizations are embodied through their interactions not only with cultural objects and the display or production qualities of exhibitions and performances, but also with the building, the staff, services, and with the people who accompany them. Cultural experience is an interaction between visitor and cultural organization as a whole package. Further, TripAdvisor reviews are linked to reviewing conventions. Consequently, user-generated reviews involve a three-way interaction of reviewer, organization, and website.

Recently, high-culture organizations, in the UK as elsewhere, have worked to be accessible to broader audiences. Our results suggest that people with a popular orientation attend high-culture *and* popular-culture organizations, and they value the experience. On a narrow, practical level, our results suggest that to succeed in a popularizing strategy, high-culture organizations may do well to consider ancillary experiences, such as clean bathrooms. In a broader sense, TripAdvisor—along with other social media—offers the audience a greater voice in cultural organizations (or the illusion of voice). TripAdvisor reviewers make their demands known in public reviews. This is the polar opposite of the creator orientation in which the artist or cultural organization tells or trains audiences how to act and react. Now the audience tells the attraction what it expects.

Future research

Our data suggest that there are online cultural arenas where cultural classification is not particularly relevant, where status games are rarely played, and where an audience orientation is ascendant. When they consider an experience in a cultural organization, reviewers focus on practical, embodied functions over abstract cultural capital. It is not clear whether egalitarian assumptions embedded in Internet review sites *suppress* expressions of cultural capital that reviewers demonstrate "in real life" or whether the reviewers who contribute are *actually uninterested* in claiming status honor based on symbolic knowledge. This is a question for future research, although it seems likely that the culture of TripAdvisor is relevant.

Digital trace data and the approach we have taken suggest a new way to study cultural consumption, especially by "ordinary" people; such data provide a window onto ordinarily hard-to-research popular attitudes towards cultural classification and status display. We suggest there is value in considering popular attitudes toward cultural consumption and that

examining digital trace data is a useful strategy that may provoke a new understanding of the role of cultural hierarchies, consumption practices, and the creation of meaningful experiences.

Note

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[1] Madame Tussauds is spelled without an apostrophe, despite being named after founder and wax figure maker Marie Tussaud, perhaps highlighting its orientation toward popular culture and against pedantic elites.

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Table 1. Orientation and Status Claims in Four Cultural Organizations (N)	Madame Tussauds	ZSL London Zoo	Shakespeare's Globe	Tate Modern
	Popular-culture, commercial	Popular-culture, nonprofit	High-culture, commercial	High-culture, nonprofit
Embodied-audience focused	67	61	62	53
Status claim	0	9	3	2
Aversion claim	3	0	3	11
Symbolic mastery	0	0	2	4
Total N	70	70	70	70