Chapter 8

Conclusions and implications

Introduction

The overall research aim of this study is to investigate the factors that influence the extent to which the Australian state museums incorporate electronic marketing strategies into their overall marketing activities. The thesis itself has taken a narrative approach because it is considered that the significance of electronic marketing to the Australian state museums is inseparable from the development of the museum sector itself, which is inextricably linked to the changes apparent in the museums’ external environment over a period of time. It is felt, then, that there is a ‘story’ to be told, a story that has each chapter building on the preceding, culminating in the analysis of Australia’s current state museum system presented in Chapters 6 and 7.

Within this framework, this concluding chapter firstly presents a synthesis of the ‘marketing’ and ‘museum’ perspectives discussed in Chapters 6 and 7. The marketing perspective in Chapter 6 was based on the results of fieldwork visits to the case study museums, and a subsequent assessment of their buildings and exhibitions, their marketing material and website, and the overall ‘feel’ of each museum. Chapter 7’s museum perspective was provided by an analysis of the themes that became apparent within the data collected from interviews with staff from the six Australian state museums. The synthesis of these two chapters is structured around the research questions, and seeks to address the extent to which the research has provided insight into the overall research aim.

In subsequent sections, this chapter also considers the implications of the research for theory and practice, and suggests avenues for future research. The final section of the chapter consists of a brief concluding statement.
Synthesis of perspectives

As just stated, the main task of this concluding chapter is to present a synthesis of the marketing and museum perspectives set out in Chapters 6 and 7. Central to this approach is this thesis’s use of data triangulation—where multiple perspectives of the same phenomena are analysed through different data sources (Denzin, 2006). This was a strategy used here to access the richness and depth possible from an analysis of the multiple sources of data available within the Australian state museums.

It was noted in Chapter 1 that the research questions that inform the design for this study followed a progression of interactivity between museums as organisations, marketing theory and the development of the museum concept over time. In line with this research design, and as stated in Chapter 5, this thesis seeks to generate theory to suggest likely relationships between the use of electronic marketing in Australia’s state museums, and the various internal factors and external forces evident both in the literature and in the findings presented here. It also seeks to analyse the activities of the Australian state museums and the opinions of a selection of their staff from the strategic and marketing operational levels\(^1\). The following sections, then, set out the research questions in turn, providing discussion and analysis in relation to these aims. A final section discusses the implications of the synthesis presented in relation to the overall research aim.

**Research question 1**

A qualitative approach was taken in this thesis because it provides the variety and depth of data required to understand the Australian state museums in relation to the overall research aim. With this in mind, the first research question developed sought to provide an overview of the situation in the Australian state museums at the time of writing:

\[\textit{RQ 1} \quad \text{To what extent do the Australian state museums exhibit a marketing emphasis?}\]

\(^1\) It was noted in Chapter 7 that the analysis presented here does not include data from other sections of the museum, such as curators or researchers, who might present a different perspective or understanding on what constitutes the necessary focus of their museum.
It was felt that would be a vital step towards building a picture of the museums and establishing the level of commitment to the marketing concept. In addition, RQ 1 would also provide further insight into any differences between each museum.

On the basis of the data presented here, the Australian state museums, with some variation, demonstrate a strong commitment to the marketing concept. The analysis of the secondary data presented in Chapter 6 clearly showed that the museums followed similar strategies as found in the for profit sector. This was evident in their use of an integrated approach to their collateral and the incorporation of branding into their overall marketing strategies. Indeed, the fact that all the museums were either involved in, or had completed, a rebranding process was indicative of a marketing emphasis. The significance of the marketing concept can also be seen in the extent to which museums now use marketing communication as a tool for reaching their publics. There were, though, instances where marketing was not either wholly accepted or was perhaps not understood. For example, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery did not exhibit the same level of involvement in brand as other museums. There were also instances with the smaller museums where integration of materials, the website or marketing communication in general, was not reflective of marketing being at a strategic level within the organisation.

The comments of the museum staff interviewed also supported the idea that the Australian state museums were exhibiting a marketing emphasis. Their realisation that a customer focus was an important determinant of the extent to which electronic marketing would be incorporated in museum marketing strategies illustrated this. While there were indications that the operational-level staff were more aware of the differences between strategic and tactical marketing, all staff interviewed here appeared to consider marketing as integral to the future of the museum sector generally.
Research question 2

Central to the discussion of RQ 2 is how staff from the Australian state museums perceive the twenty-first century environment in which museums now operate. The research question itself was part of the narrative approach taken here, and aimed to establish a base upon which the later research questions could stand:

*RQ 2 What are the drivers of change in the museum sector?*

Using the perspectives provided by the museum staff it may be possible to demonstrate how various factors have operated to shape museum activities.

Throughout the analysis and discussion chapters it was obvious that museum staff considered that the changing nature of the public was at the heart of the changes with which museums must now contend. However, it has been demonstrated here that the interconnectedness of the issues makes a straightforward list of ‘drivers of change’, with ‘the public’ at number one, difficult to justify. Clearly, there has been a shift in focus globally as museums have evolved from elitist institutions to broader-based public institutions. This has been driven by societal trends, which include the fact that the public has changed. The public are certainly better educated, better informed of their options and choices, and are simply no longer satisfied with the same approach to the visitor that museums adopted in the past. Museums have acknowledged this, and the need to respond differently from the past, and have therefore sought to become more engaged with their publics.

In addition, the issue of technology and its effect on museums was a theme that was evident throughout the data in Chapters 6 and 7, and appears both as a major indicator of the way the public has changed and as part of how the Australian state museums have responded. That the public is more technologically aware is now almost a truism. However, how cultural institutions like museums respond is not as clear cut. It has been shown here that museums must embrace technology, incorporating it into their suite of offerings in ways meaningful to their publics. Significantly, they must also ‘sell’ technology to their staff.
The other drivers of change that could be seen in the data—the need to operate in a professional and business-like manner, and the rise of a competitive marketplace—were also linked to the changes evident in the ‘new’ public, as they both relate to the role that museums now play in society. Museums are competing in the same marketplace as for profit entertainments, but they are also recipients of public money, and must operate transparently. It is now a complex external environment and the Australian state museums appear to be aware of the significant changes that have occurred. Certainly, many of the responses as reflected in their marketing-related activities, such as their advertising and promotions and their public statements, are evidence of this.

**Research question 3**

RQ 3 was intended to build on RQ 2, inasmuch as the literature indicates that the drivers of change in the museum sector have resulted in an environment in which marketing is seen to be critical if a modern museum is to be competitive. RQ 3 is, then, designed to outline the role marketing has in museum management:

*RQ 3 What is marketing’s role in museum management?*

The various facets of this question incorporate perceptions of the significance of marketing as evidenced by the use of marketing activities and the place of marketing in museum’s organisational structure. Central to RQ 3 is the question of whether marketing plays a strategic role in all museums, or if it is more seen just as being about tactical marketing communication tools.

It was noted in the discussion of RQ 1 above that, overall, the Australian state museums are clearly undertaking marketing activities indicative of them having a marketing emphasis. The presence of a substantial range of marketing activities—branding, rebranding activities, the various integrating strategies, and marketing to their publics—made clear that marketing was viewed as a strategic option for museums. From the fieldwork visits it could be seen that marketing programs, on the ground, were important in the day to day management of the museum. This is not to say that this is the case across all the museums or uniformly the case within every museum. There were instances, notably in the smaller museums, where marketing did not appear to be
part of the museum’s ethos. Certainly, the words were usually there, but the actions were not. Whether this is due to a lack of commitment or a lack of resources was difficult to determine without further research.

As seen in Chapter 7, predominately the museums do include marketing in their formal organisational structures and exhibit a belief in the benefits marketing can bring to the museum. Again, though, there was some evidence that this was not uniform. The larger museums all had marketing either reporting to the Director, or as the responsibility of an Assistant Director or similar. Consequently, for the most part, marketing was represented at board level. The issue in the smaller museums was that marketing tasks were not necessarily allocated to marketing-specific positions. Staff commonly had multiple roles and marketing was just one of them. While perhaps related to resourcing issues, it also was indicative of a lack of understanding of how marketing could be used in museums.

Significantly, it has been shown here that the successful implementation of marketing programs is partly dependent on there being a culture within the organisation that will allow marketing to have a strategic role, as well as a tactical role. Such a culture was apparent in many of the case study museums, but internal marketing strategies were needed for that to occur across all areas of the museums.

**Research question 4**

Taking account of the discussions of RQ 2 and RQ 3 set out above, RQ 4 looked to move the analysis to a more detailed level. That is, it has been established that there has been various drivers of change that operated to establish an environment where, within an overall marketing emphasis, electronic marketing strategies may be seen by the Australian state museums as appropriate. With this in mind, RQ 4 aimed to shed some light on the extent to which museums use electronic media within their overall marketing strategies:

**RQ 4**  
*To what extent are electronic media part of museum marketing strategy?*
Specifically, RQ 4 sought to provide insight into how the Australian state museums are using electronic media generally, where electronic marketing fits into marketing within the organisation, and therefore, determine the significance of electronic marketing within the case study museums.

From the data it was evident that the Australian state museums rarely use any electronic media other than a website. There is some limited use of podcasts and most museums use some form of e-mail list for newsletters, but none appeared to incorporate these forms of electronic media in the overall marketing strategies. Certainly none used mobile marketing or SMS, even as a tactical tool. For this reason this thesis mainly considered the museums’ websites as their primary example of electronic media, and the primary delivery channel of electronic marketing strategies. It should be noted, though, that all museum interviewees had knowledge of the range of strategies possible. Strategic-level interviewees were well aware of the options but were cautious, and operational-level staff were more enthusiastic about the types of activities that might be possible if there were support and resources.

This was also the case with the museum’s websites. Websites were seen by all staff from the Australian state museums as having considerable potential. However, while there was enthusiasm for their use, the idea of them having a strategic role within overall marketing strategies was more of an issue for the operational-level staff. This was certainly the case in relation to the website’s role in brand building, where operational level staff considered websites to be under-utilised at present.

As evidenced by the assessment in Chapter 6, the Australian state museums do not use their websites strategically, though they appear to understand the marketing role their website is playing when it delivers content to its various publics. Only a few appear to have gone past the idea that their website’s main role is as brochureware. Those that have are conceiving of the need to connect to a ‘virtual visitor’ and plan to use their website as a strategic channel, providing users with services, content or information specific to their needs. For the most part, this has not happened in any museum as yet.
Importantly, the likelihood of that happening—the success or otherwise of such an electronic marketing program, or indeed any such use of such technology generally—rests with the support website technology has within the museum. It is also linked to the support the medium has with senior management. In other words, all staff, not just the marketing department or the IT department, need to see the value for the museum before they will ‘get behind’ any electronic marketing initiatives.

Research question 5

As was noted above, there are significant differences between each state museum and how they operate. These relate primarily to the differences in museum system structure between the states. There are also similarities in collection type, particularly between the natural history-based museums. Within this context, the final research question sought insight into what this situation might mean in relation to this thesis’s overall research aim:

RQ 5  *What are the similarities and differences between the six state museums in their approach to marketing generally, and electronic marketing specifically?*

The aim of RQ 5 was, then, to explore the themes evident that might explain any similarities or differences between museums and perhaps to point to issues that could be useful to museum management when it comes to electronic marketing strategies in particular.

The Australian state museums do differ in corporate and organisational structure. Each colony, then state, has taken a different path with their state museum systems. Therefore, structural differences have largely been a result of government decision making, and subsequent organisational structures set out in state legislation. However, the museums have more in common than not. For example, the external forces that have shaped the Australian state museums’ approach to their audience, their consequent approach to marketing and then to electronic marketing, have been external to the museums and have been felt across all museums. Similarly, the internal factors noted in
Chapter 7 that influence how the case study museums might respond have been evident in all museums as well.

For these reasons, the way that museums have considered these issues, and have sought to respond, has largely been the same regardless of the size of the museum, the corporate structure or the organisational structure. As demonstrated, the issues of a customer focus and internal marketing were considered as being significant influences in relation to their electronic marketing strategies. There were ‘on the ground’ differences to be found relating to the different perceptions held by operational level staff and the strategic level staff interviewed. It was postulated that the differences simply relate to the fact that strategic-level staff are concerned with strategic issues and operational-level with implementing strategy.

Importantly, these differences did not appear to play a role in determining how a particular museum viewed electronic marketing. The ‘corporate umbrella’ style museum systems did need to concern themselves with the idea of corporate brand and family brand, which tended to necessitate more involvement in practical marketing matters. But the Australian Museum—single campus and a relatively narrow collection base—was quite dynamic in its approach, being in some ways the most involved in the consideration of the uses to which electronic marketing could be put within the museum sector. The point is, perhaps, that the issue at the heart of what role marketing, and electronic marketing, might take does not relate to any similarities or differences between the Australian state museums, but rather to a range of other factors more common to all.

The overall research aim
In line with the narrative approach taken here, and the use of multiple sources of data, Chapters 6 and 7 both provided a summary analysis that set out the significant points of the findings. The aim of this structure was to provide a summary of the wide range of detailed data available in the Australian state museum sector. The synthesis provided in this chapter analysed the different perspectives drawn from the different types of data. Throughout the preceding chapter, and this subsequent synthesis, there was a clear
overall research aim that informed the research design, the methodological approach,
the interview schedule and the subsequent thesis structure. To reiterate once more, the
overall aim of this research was to:

*Investigate the factors that influence the extent to which the Australian state
museums now incorporate electronic marketing strategies into their overall
marketing activities.*

It has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, and throughout the discussions in
relation to the research questions set out above, that the interconnectedness of the
issues, and their complexity, makes a straightforward ‘answer’ impossible. There are,
however, a number of points that can be made that provide insight into the overall
research question.

Firstly, it can be said that the forces that the Australian state museums contend with—
that have shaped their activities—are external, but the factors that influence the extent
to which the Australian state museums can incorporate electronic marketing strategies
into their overall marketing activities are internal. It is those internal factors that can
then be assessed, manipulated, and can be used to direct policy that may see the
successful use of electronic marketing strategies.

That is not the case with the external forces. The common threads and overarching
themes that run through the hierarchy themes—drivers of change; the rise of
technology; and resourcing issues, for instance—are significant societal changes that
have affected the way museums need to operate and how they see their audience. As a
result, it was demonstrated that marketing is now seen as an essential part of museum
management. But, this amounts to museums as organisations scanning their external
environment and responding accordingly. In other words, the Australian state museums
can do little to shape their external environment, other than to engage in lobbying,
seking to influence the opinions of their publics, such as government, the general
public or the media. As suggested in Chapter 3, museums do need to market to these
publics, and if they do, they are exhibiting a marketing emphasis of sorts. It is with the
internal factors noted in Chapter 7—acceptance of technology and the status of
marketing and electronic marketing—that the case study museums have the most chance of effecting a change. As was suggested above, the internal factors can be seen as filters through which the external forces inform museum responses. Furthermore, they relate to the management style and corporate culture of the museums. Significantly, they are capable of being changed with appropriate strategies.

This, then, is the crux of the matter and central to the contribution that this study makes to museum marketing research. While many of the factors that have influenced the extent to which the Australian state museums now incorporate electronic marketing strategies into their overall marketing activities are beyond the control of the museums, the success of electronic marketing as a strategy is not. It has been found here that the successful implementation of electronic marketing strategies, or indeed the likelihood of marketing generally, and electronic marketing specifically, being considered as a strategy, was linked to two key issues. The first is the level of customer focus a museum might have—a focus on the world outside the museum, and its audience—which is a significant driver of the level of involvement in marketing generally, and in the strategic use of electronic marketing strategies specifically. The second is internal marketing: all a museum’s internal publics (including non-strategic and non–marketing operational staff, such as curators) need to understand technology and how it can be used connect to the changing public, and how it can fit into a strategic marketing approach. If addressed by the Australian state museums, both these issues could result in electronic marketing playing a more strategic role in museum marketing activities than it does at present.

**Implications**

To the researcher’s knowledge there has not been another study that has investigated the factors that influence the extent to which the Australian state museums incorporate electronic marketing strategies into their overall marketing activities. It is considered, then, that this research has important implications for both theory and practice as it provides perspectives not yet seen in either area.
Theory

In line with Bradford’s (1991) call for museum marketing theories based on research conducted in museums this thesis has sought to provide a contribution based on work in the Australian state museums. This study sought to describe and analyse, as well as compare and contrast, the Australian state museums, providing a snapshot of how they have developed, as background and context for considering the role of marketing generally, and electronic marketing specifically, in each museum’s strategies. Within these parameters, contributions to electronic marketing theory in relation to not for profit and cultural organisations have been made. The role of internal marketing in the successful implementation of electronic marketing strategies has not been discussed in the literature to date. The importance of marketing to museums’ various publics has been noted (Lehman, 2006), but the significance of internal publics has yet to be researched in depth. Similarly, issues such as the role of a marketing orientation, as a part of customer focus, have appeared in the literature (Gainer & Padanyi, 2002; Sorjonen & Uusitalo, 2003; Voss & Voss, 2000), but other than Rentschler and Geursen (2003) have been rare in the context of museums, and non-existent in relation to the place of electronic marketing within an overall marketing strategy.

In addition, the investigation here of the factors that influence museums to adopt, or not adopt, certain strategies has built on current knowledge and added insight to the particular factors at play in the Australian state museum sector. Consideration of the role of the website in museum marketing strategies has added to theories pertaining to brand, marketing communication tools and new media strategy, research areas in museum marketing that have received little interest from researchers. It has been seen here that museums value the role of their website as a strategic tool for building brand. Much of the literature pertaining to brand in museums only pay passing attention to the role of electronic marketing strategies (Hede, 2007; Scott, 2000), or do not mention it at all (Caldwell, 2000). In some ways, this study has had to take a necessarily exploratory stance, purely on the basis of there having been little research in the area to date.

Practice
From a practice perspective there is little research available on electronic marketing that might inform decision-making for museum professionals. What there is takes the form of ‘how to’ manuals. It is hoped that this research will provide some guidance to museums in relation to the implementation of electronic marketing strategies. In particular, the analysis of factors that might hinder or assist the implementation of electronic marketing strategies should result in museums being better able to direct scarce resources to where they can be most effective. The idea that for electronic marketing, and marketing generally, to be valuable museum management strategies, they must be accepted by all internal publics implies that internal marketing programs must be part of any implementation process. While the concept of ‘getting everyone on board’ has been paid lip service, it does seem that internal marketing must be integrated into the museums’ organisational cultures to be fully effective. Similarly, the lesson in relation to customer focus is that it needs to be, again, ingrained in the culture of the organisation.

While the Australian state museums are different in many respects to other institutions, it is hoped that this research may also be of assistance to other not for profit or governmental cultural organisations, even those considerably smaller and with fewer resources.

**Future research**

There are a wealth of possibilities for further research in the museum sector in relation to both marketing generally and electronic marketing specifically. As was noted in Chapter 4, research into museum marketing is only a relatively recent phenomenon. There are also a number of possible avenues for research stemming for this study. While investigating the specifics of electronic marketing and marketing within the Australian state museums, by virtue of space and focus requirements, a number of areas were only briefly covered. These include further study on the role organisation structure, and the location of marketing therein, plays in the significance of marketing strategies, as suggested by Lehman (2005). There is also room for an investigation of
the relationship between the type of collection (art, natural history, science, etc) and the perceived role of marketing. The question is whether the type of institution or collection has any bearing on the use of marketing. This thesis only briefly touched on this topic—there is scope for other studies to investigate the issue in detail. Similarly, as was noted previously, this research was based on data drawn from interviews with strategic- and operational-level staff. Broadening the interviewees out to include staff from the curatorial and research areas could provide valuable additional insight. Within the area of electronic marketing, further study is warranted in relation to the perceptions of the museum visitor. A study such as that conducted by Chadwick and Boverie (1999) on the characteristics and patterns of behaviour of visitors to museum websites would be useful in the Australian context. There is also an opportunity to further both Kravchyna and Hastings’s (2002) and Sarraf’s (1999) studies on the characteristics of the consumer that uses museum websites and what their expectations are. Combining this with research on the role of marketing in social history versus natural history museums, for example, could also be valuable. The issue is whether visitors to different types of museums’ websites have different expectations. Such data would greatly assist museums’ targeting of the appropriate segment for their offering.

This research concentrated on the Australian state museums. As such, a further study in Australia could benefit by including museums at various levels, that is, local, regional and national, given the federal political structure. There are many variations of the museum concept in Australia, with resource constraints critical at the local and regional levels. While the major museums are predominately government funded, there is a significant and growing private museum sector, particularly at the community level. Research that reveals the role that electronic marketing could play in that level of the museum sector would be a valuable addition to the area of community and social capital. Similarly, there is much to be learned from museums in other countries. This study, while perhaps with some applicability to other countries, could be broadened into a cross-country study and involve comparisons between different cultures and institutional structures. As was set out in Chapter 2, there are a number of significant differences in the development of the museum concept between countries. In particular, it would be useful to compare the situation in the United States, where there is a
tradition of philanthropy in relation to museums funding, with that in Australia, where museums were primarily publicly funded from their establishment. Comparisons with museums in Europe, Asia and developing nations would also be a valid direction for future research to take. In all of these geographic areas, there are avenues for further research into the role of electronic marketing within an overall marketing strategy.

**Concluding statement**

The Australian museum sector has developed quite differently from that in other Western countries, and this has affected the way it views its markets. European museums, for instance, predominately started life as private collections, later moving to be state owned and funded institutions. Australian museums have had a regional focus that largely reflected their original place in colonial and later federal life. They were public institutions—predominately government funded and not for profit—from the outset. While the Australian experience *does* differ from that found in other parts of the Western world, there are considerable similarities. Australia has been equally affected by the social changes that are global in nature. For example, Australian museums have had many issues to address from the 1960s to the present, such as the increase in leisure and recreation time, when analysing their market.

Within this context the use of electronic marketing as a strategy response to the changes around them is only in its infancy within the Australian state museum sector. Certainly museum professionals appear aware of the possibilities, and have most likely seen the activities of the for profit sector working effectively. However, there are many hurdles for organisations, firstly in the cultural arena, where it is more difficult to see the applicability of electronic strategies, and secondly in the not for profit sector. Government funding is frequently tied to performance, and judging that performance is problematic when the results are not necessarily tangible. The Australian state museums have come a long way in a short time, but there is still a way to go before there is widespread take up of the strategic use of electronic marketing within the sector.
Similarly, this thesis has covered a great deal of territory in its pursuit of insight into the research questions and the overall research aim, and throughout has sought to contribute to academic research in a meaningful way, but in the knowledge that there is ample scope for further research. That said, it is possible to conclude here with a simple but thought-provoking proposal. That is, it does seem that whether museums take up electronic marketing or not relates to practical issues, like funding and resources, but whether it is used strategically and to its fullest relates more to philosophical issues like acceptance of the technology and support for the concept of marketing generally. In some ways it is perhaps a matter of mindset, and mindsets are not easily, or swiftly, changed.