

# The Smartified Museum: Mediation Of an Art Recognition App on Museum Visitor Engagement

Jiayu Chen

University of Cambridge

## Abstract

This article explores mobile technologies' mediation on museum visitor engagement. I conducted an exploratory case study featuring a group visit to the National Gallery in London. Three participants were invited to use an art-recognition app called Smartify during their 2-hour, self-led trip in the museum. By observing, analysing, and interpreting their behaviours as well as self-reported mentalities, I collected empirical evidence to discuss the how the app has influenced their aesthetic experience by creating new modes of communication. Qualitative data was collected through participant observation, focus-group interview, and follow-up survey. Three themes identified include (1) positive feelings, (2) enablement, and (3) personalisation, and I further interpreted them as interconnected dimensions for reshaping visitor engagement. The results indicated that when using an mobile app, museum visitors could have diverse means to initiate active engagement with the exhibition while their experience might be transformed into a heavily information-centred one. Informed by Pierre Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, I found that the app made the participants' aesthetic experience more like an informationcollecting activity. Their technology-infused interactions in the museum space are essentially process of cultural capital exchange. Thus, the museum is "smartified" as it gives visitors a sense that they would become "smarter" after acquiring information. This case study suggests that mobile technologies have a transformative potential in elevating museum visitor engagement. However, appropriately utilising mobile technologies in museum to maximise the positive impacts on visitor engagement requires further explorations and active discussions.

**Keywords:** media in cultural environment, mobile app, museum engagement, software and new media, technology-mediated experiences