

Analysis of the visitor experience in 140 characters

Elena Villaespesa
School of Museum Studies
Supervisor: Dr. Ross Parry

1. The Tanks at Tate Modern

In July 2012, Tate Modern opened a new space called The Tanks. The Tanks used to contain the oil that fueled the former Bankside Power Station and have now been turned into Tate Modern's brand-new gallery space. These are the world's first museum galleries permanently dedicated to exhibiting live art, performance, installation, and film work.

Visitors narrate their activities in the gallery on social media channels, building a rich bank of data that was subsequently analysed with the aim of gathering their impressions and thoughts on this new space.

2. Methods

What visitors tweeted during or after their visit offered a great opportunity to apply content and sentiment analysis and to learn about the main topics they talked about and their overall feeling towards the space and live art program. The units of content that have been analysed are each individual tweet. A random sample of 367 opinionated tweets were coded into positive and negative and then analysed cross-tabulating the sentiment also with the tweet theme.

Sentiment analysis

"Went to #thetanks at Tate Modern, and they were an amazing. The dark enclosed rooms showed the artists use of light and sound to the full!"

"Just visited the Tanks at Tate Modern and I don't think I understand any of the creepy arts yet."

Content analysis



3. What did visitors think about the Tanks?

Of all the tweets analysed, 89% regarded the experience as positive. While the space and different installations and performances were the most mentioned themes, we can observe how the industrial space deeply impacted the experience, as many tweets labelled the architecture as "amazing" and "incredible" and mentioned as well the light and the smell. The installations, displays, and events featured in the program also had a very positive response. Meanwhile, negative tweets about The Tanks mainly came from visitors who did not feel comfortable in the space because it was, in their own words, too "dark" and "creepy"; or from visitors who did not understand the contemporary art on display.

amazing

awesome beautiful bemused

breath-taking brilliant cool crazy creative creepy

dark different engaging excellent exciting extraordinary
fantastic fascinating genius gorgeous great

haunting impressive incredible

innovative inspiration inspirational inspiring

interesting intriguing magic magical mesmerising

modern moving nice oppressive original outstanding overwhelming

participatory phenomenal powerful provoked shady spectacular strange

street stunning sublime surreal tankfastic touching unbelievable

unusual weird wonderful

ambiguous bizarre boring
creepy dark

disappointing edgy freaky incomprehensible nonsense odd pretentious soulless surreal uneasy uninspiring unsettling
weird

4. What can we learn from the tweets sent by visitors?

Twitter's 140-character cap poses certain limitations to this analysis, which may not respond to in-depth questions aimed to shed light on whether The Tanks' impact on the visitors radically changed their understanding of live art. Other variables need to be taken into account, such as what motivates people to tweet, or how the average Twitter user profile matches the demographics of the general visitors. This analysis gives an insight of the overall visitor experience to The Tanks, highlighting the most common feelings, comments, and opinions.