ACMI PILOT STUDY—PHASE 2

The Future of Museum Engagement, Data and Older Audiences

October 2019

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ACMI PILOT STUDY (PHASE 2 REPORT): The Future of Museum Engagement, Data and Older Audiences

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over two weekends in September 2019, the RMIT **ACMI Tea** project invited matinee cinema audiences to share a cup of tea and a biscuit, and discuss their associations, connections and sense of belonging with ACMI. Across a variety of cultures, tea is understood as core to conversation and connection. Through this project, and building on Phase 1, we specifically sought to identify and develop socially-thick understandings of the (digital and non-digital) experiences and potential opportunities for older adults to engage with ACMI on its reopening.

Using a series of three postcard-questions (see Figure 1) aimed at discursive elaboration, we engaged with audiences to ethnographically and creatively reflect upon how they view ACMI as an institution, as a place for belonging, and what they would like their digital (and non-digital) experiences with ACMI to involve.

Key Findings

1. *Social Hub*
   ACMI is a familiar, trusted and welcoming social hub amongst older audiences.

2. *Expanding Participatory Digital Inclusions*
   Older audiences as "savvy senior surfers" (NSA 2019) are transforming ageism around digital engagement.

3. *Critical Digital Literacies*
   Demand for critical-creative workshops—peer-to-peer and intergenerational activities—around new media technologies like VR.
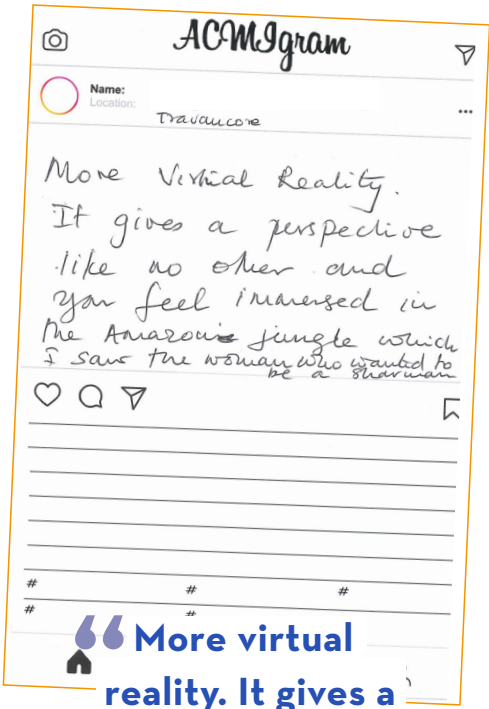
Recommendations

1. **Enhancing audience's** rich social life through different digital and non-digital social encounters that engage older audiences in reflective and casual ways—like ACMI Tea;

2. **Expanding digital participations** that are responsive and inclusive to the diverse interests and needs of older audiences (such as mobility, geographic location and transportation costs, caring responsibilities), through film and exhibition 'screenings' via online platforms like social media (i.e. Tik Tok or Instagram live);

3. **Developing critical-creative digital technologies workshops** with, and for, older audiences, including peer-to-peer and intergenerational workshop opportunities for grandparents and grandchildren.

Meet Maria and Rob—indicative of our key findings: Maria and Rob have missed church today to come to an ACMI film. They love ACMI's commitment to film — especially the chance to see "old" films which they love. They are active grandparents and take their grandchildren to workshops at ACMI and then hang around. They feel there is an opportunity lost—why not have grandchildren and grandparents do new media workshops together? Both Maria and Rob say that they aren't digitally active. And yet, after our interview Rob starts to text his grandchildren on his phone and Maria calls a friend on her phone.
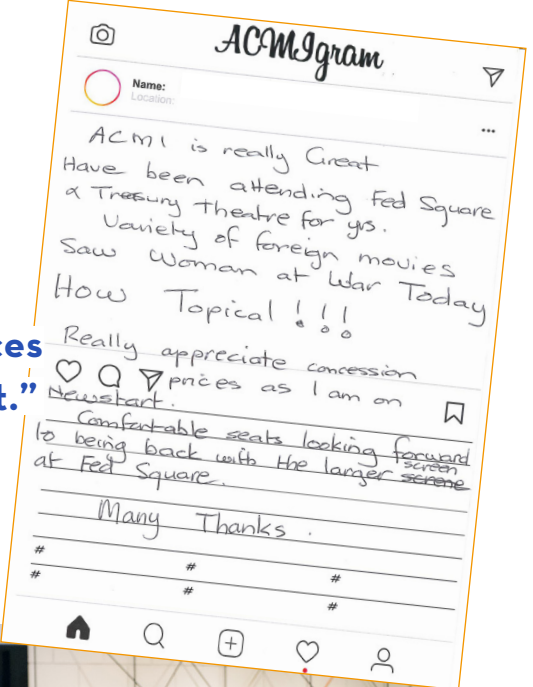
Example Postcards

ACMIgram

Name:
Location: Travancore

More Virtual Reality.
It gives a perspective
like no other and
you feel immersed in
the Amazonia jungle which
I saw the woman who wanted to
be a shaman

> **More virtual reality. It gives a perspective like no other"**

> **I love the latest technology—it keeps me young."**

ACMIgram

Name:
Location: Northcote 3070

Keep up your inclusion of older
patrons. I love the latest
technology—it keeps me young
when you reopen ACMI could you
please show Angelica Mestisis's
ASSEMBLY. I saw it at the Venice
Brennale and the Melbourne
public need to see this wonderful
work.

> **Really appreciate the concession prices as I am on Newstart."**

ACMIgram

Name:
Location:

ACMI is really Great
Have been attending Fed Square
a Treasury theatre for yrs.
Variety of foreign movies
Saw Woman at War Today
How Topical !!!

Really appreciate concession
prices as I am on
Newstart.
Comfortable seats looking forward
to being back with the larger screen
at Fed Square.

Many Thanks.

> **Good, diverse programming."**

ACMIgram

Name:
Location: Ballarat
re 'Woman at War'
@ Treasury Theatre

I have a very positive view of
ACMI overall. Its cinemas
@ Fed Square are our favourite
cinemas with big screen &
comfortable seating.
Good, diverse programming also
including the Matinee seasons.

About 50% of the pay
exhibitions I have attended
& been interested in.
Most notably on Kubrick,
Aardman & Kendrick.

I miss the hardcopy ACMI programs.
It means my attendance @ ACMI
has dropped by 50% by not
being able to plan ahead.

ACMI TEA (PHASE 2)

Project Summary

Over two weekends in September 2019, the RMIT **ACMI Tea** project invited matinee cinema audiences to share a cup of tea and a biscuit, and discuss their associations, connections and sense of belonging with ACMI. Across a variety of cultures, tea is understood as core to conversation and connection. Through this project, and building on Phase 1, we specifically sought to identify and develop socially-thick understandings of the (digital and non-digital) experiences and potential opportunities for older adults to engage with ACMI on its reopening.

FIGURE 1: ACMI Tea Postcard prompts.

Using a series of three postcard-questions (see Figure 1) aimed at discursive elaboration, we engaged with audiences to ethnographically and creatively reflect upon how they view ACMI as an institution, as a place for belonging, and what they would like their digital (and non-digital) experiences with ACMI to involve.

Overwhelmingly, we received positive responses from participants who perceive ACMI and the matinee cinema program as **culturally important** ("It's an asset and a gem"), **comfortable** ("I feel quite at home on my ACMI visits"), **affordable** ("I really appreciate concession prices as I am on Newstart"), **inclusive** and **accessible** ("ACMI is an important organisation and accessible to us all", "Keep up your inclusion of older patrons"), and invested in "**good diverse programming**" ("ACMI provides access to excellent content not easily available elsewhere"). Indeed, as we discovered, ACMI's programming of foreign films for CALD and non-CALD communities is much-loved and important to its older audiences:

> **"I love how ACMI brings Latin American movies. I am a Spanish speaker and is always great to know I can watch Spanish movies."**

There is also an understanding of ACMI as **responsive to its audiences' needs**, as evident in this response by one of the participants: "I think ACMI is a very important institution to Melbourne. Katrina Sedgwick was very responsive to a request a couple of years ago re: seniors programs 'matinees'."
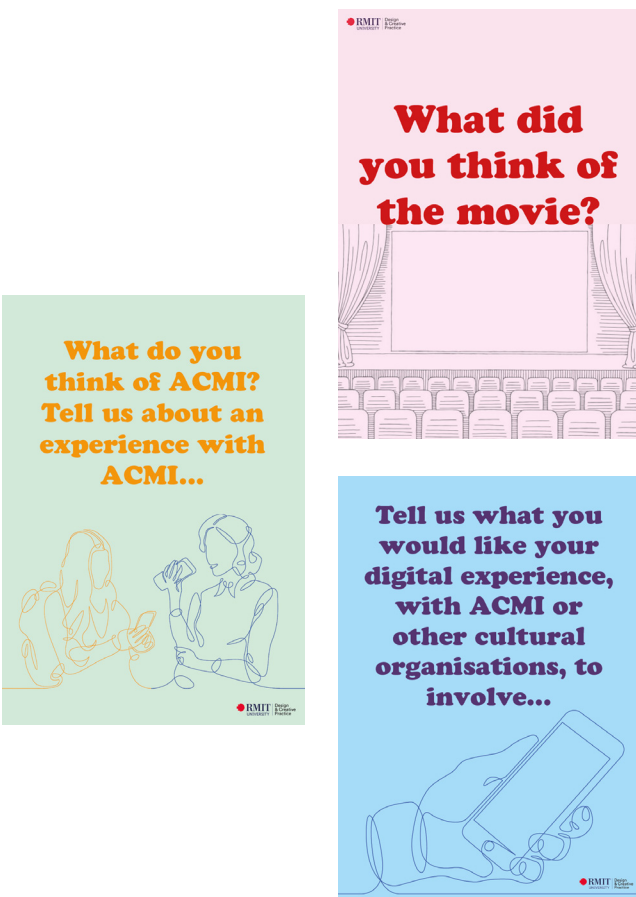
The *Key Findings and Recommendations* of this study (see Section 3) suggest that there is also a great opportunity to **harness** and **enhance the existing investment, curiosity and engagement of older audiences** through additional (digital and non-digital) social encounters. These include:

1. *Key Finding 1: Social Hub*
   ACMI is a familiar, trusted and welcoming social hub amongst older audiences.

2. *Key Finding 2: Expanding Participatory Digital Inclusions*
   Older audiences as "savvy senior surfers" (NSA 2019) are transforming ageism around digital engagement.

3. *Key Finding 3: Critical Digital Literacies*
   Demand for critical-creative workshops—peer-to-peer and intergenerational activities—around new media technologies like VR.

This report details the aims of the **ACMI Tea** (framed as Phase 2) project, along with elaborated *Key Findings and Recommendations* for impactful directions and outcomes moving forward.

1. Project Overview

In Phase 1 (April 2019), the RMIT research team explored ethnographically the ways in which audiences of ACMI connected lived experiences and perceptions *in* and *through* social media (predominantly Instagram). Through the idea of digital wayfaring, which understands the digital as entangled in social and material everyday practices, we investigated audiences' associations, connections and sense of belonging with ACMI. In the fieldwork, which occurred at the physical ACMI site prior to temporary closure, the gap in understanding around older adults' engagement with the institution — *in* and *through* digital and non-digital social encounters — became apparent.

ACMI's older audiences are primarily engaged through the **matinee cinema program**. While this audience comprises 70% of ACMI's members, these audiences rarely go beyond the cinema, with less than 1% attending exhibitions and other public programs. As Seb Chan and Matt Millikan explained, when asked why increasing this

audience's engagement with ACMI mattered, the promotion of **social cohesion** and **intergenerational learning**, and understanding possible **barriers to digital participation**, were important aspects of this engagement.

In response, across two weekends in September (2019), we established a living lab at the Treasury Theatre that coalesced reflective and exploratory ethnographic and creative practice methods to understand how ACMI programs for older audiences are being conceptualised as part of broader everyday practices and lived experiences.

Building on Phase 1, the **ACMI Tea** project sought to understand older adults and their lived experiences as crucial in developing nuanced dimensions of the digital as part of everyday life. While some of our participants were hesitant in claiming digital savvy titles, ("I can get tickets online, but would like some help in understanding how I might use technology more readily"), their discussions of lived experiences put many on the National Seniors Australia (NSA) scale of "savvy surfers" [1].

> **I love how ACMI brings Latin American movies. I am a Spanish speaker and is always great to know I can watch Spanish movies."**

Indeed, the findings of this study (see Section 3) suggest that there is a great opportunity to **harness** and **enhance these "savvy surfers" skills and curiosity through co-creative methods**. Many participants, for example, had suggestions about ways in which to enhance this engagement from **peer-to-peer and intergenerational workshops around VR** to deploying **social media (like Instagram) for digital storytelling** for when mobility might mean that they are unable to visit the physical site ("The ABC is doing great Instagram stories. Stuff like that from ACMI would be awesome," said one participant).

Our findings also correlate with recent reports, including a report by National Seniors Australia (NSA), which reveal *diversity* and *heterogeneity* in terms of ability, comfort and attitudes amongst older audiences engaging in digital experiences [1]. Our recommendations, informed by this and other reports (see *60+ Online* and accompanying literature review), also emphasise the value and importance of engaging older audiences as co-creators, not simply consumers, of future experiences and social encounters.

2. Aims

The key aims and guiding questions for the Phase 2 **ACMI Tea** project were identified by the RMIT research team in consultation with Seb Chan and Matt Millikan following the completion of Phase 1.

2.1 Key aims

1. Identify how older audiences currently engage with ACMI and what the organisation means to them;

2. Develop understandings of the possible future role that ACMI could play in relation to increasing older audiences' engagement and understanding of digital media practices;

3. Explore the digital and non-digital audience engagement opportunities and social encounters that ACMI might implement to generate greater engagement with these audiences upon re-opening.

2.2 Guiding questions

What does it mean for last century's media consumers to age with, and age well, with a media-based cultural institution?

What roles should and do museums take up in relation to ageing well?

How can a media-based cultural institution combat ageing and loneliness in the city of Melbourne?

How can museum programming intervene in the possible barriers to digital participation confronting older audiences, through intergenerational social encounters?
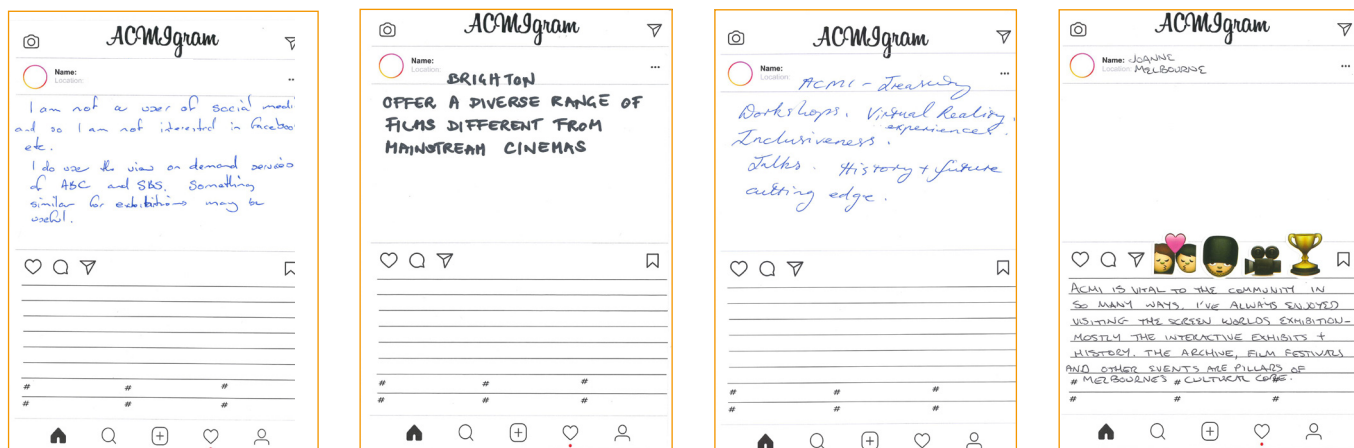

FIGURE 2: Responses to the ACMI Tea postcards.

3. Key Findings and Recommendations

The *Key Findings and Recommendations* reported here are informed by data collected from written (and in some cases verbal) responses to a set of three postcards (see Figure 1), which asked: (1) *What did you think of the movie?* (2) *What do you think of ACMI?*, and (3) *Tell us what you would like your digital experience, with ACMI or other cultural organisations, to involve.*

Using the postcards, and by offering cups of tea and biscuits, we invited visitors to respond and decorate the postcards (using emoji stickers) based on their associations, connections and sense of belonging with ACMI, before and after each cinema session. A total of 336 postcard-responses were collected from visitors attending the matinee cinema program, between 21–23 September and 28–29 September, over a third of the total number of visitors. See Table 1 for a breakdown of postcard responses.

Postcards	Total number of responses
1. What did you think of the movie?	117
2. What do you think of ACMI?	125
3. Tell us what you would like your digital experience with ACMI, or other cultural organisations, to involve.	94

Table 1: Number of postcard responses.

1. KEY FINDING 1: *ACMI as a Social Hub*

Extending and expanding rich social life through different digital and non-digital social encounters.

ACMI as comfortable, familiar and welcoming "social hub" [2] is a commonly held perception, particularly amongst returning visitors. This finding was reflected in Phase 1 of the project (through ethnographic observations and interviews) and cited as a motivation for repeat audience visitation in the report *A Strong Foundation: Australian Centre for the Moving Image Visitor 360 Annual Report* [2]. Similarly, in Phase 2, we have identified the ACMI matinee cinema program as providing opportunities for like-minded audiences to connect through film, place and storytelling. As one participant commented, "As retirees, it has become one of the most important forms of entertainment for us." ACMI has an opportunity here to **enhance its role as a connector across social, material and digital lives.**

> "We haven't met any men but we've met each other" — Two women recount how they met at ACMI, years ago, and are now "best friends". They note that while the ACMI matinee cinema program is a great place for older singles to meet and interact, social encounters only really happen between those who are more outgoing. A casual program following the screenings, they suggest, like ACMI Tea, could provide a safe space and encourage those who aren't as social as these "two Gemini best friends", to mingle and interact, and share their thoughts and experiences of the film.

Recommendation

Living Lab programming activities that engage audiences in reflective and casual ways through, for example, "after movie discussion groups", like the RMIT ACMI Tea project. Anecdotally, many of the matinee cinema program visitors enjoyed the opportunity to discuss the movie and other experiences with the RMIT research team, and their friends or fellow visitors, after the movie. As detailed in the accompanying literature review, not only is it important to think about strategies to get older audiences into a cultural institution**,** given the increase in social isolation amongst ageing populations, but importantly, once inside, *how* they are engaged becomes increasingly important.

KEY FINDING 2:
Digital participation and inclusion

Older adults are transforming stereotypes around ageism and digital engagement and are active online in ways that have previously been unaccounted for.

This finding was evident in many discussions that demonstrate a desire by visitors to experience films, exhibitions and other ACMI content through **streaming services** ("I use the view on demand services of ABC and SBS. Something similar for exhibitions may be useful"), **YouTube** ("ACMI could do more by digitising the many films in their library and put them on YouTube"), and **social media** ("The idea of digital access is 'new' to me though using my phone to watch a film or see highlights of an exhibition, etc. is appealing. I imagine this would invite a broader clientele as well as 'foot traffic' to ACMI site itself").

One of the primary motivations for these requests was around broadening accessibility for visitors who might not be unable to attend the physical ACMI site, due to mobility issues, geographic locations and transportation costs, or caring responsibilities: "Whilst I enjoy the outing, a streaming service is attractive. Especially for my elderly mother!" This finding correlates to the 60+ Online report [3] that suggests older people who are unable to participate in activities in person seek alternative ways of attending and contributing, for example, online through social media.

> " **I use the view on demand services of ABC and SBS. Something similar for exhibitions may be useful.**"

Recommendations

Informed by perspectives shared by ACMI matinee cinema program attendees, our recommendations are for digital participations that are responsive and inclusive to the diverse interests and needs of older audiences. This includes the possibility of (fully or partially) 'screening' films, exhibitions and other content through online platforms, such as social media (e.g. Instagram stories) and / or video sharing websites (e.g. YouTube).

There is also a demand by older audiences for participation in digital content, such as long-form essays (via email) and podcasts about ACMI related content. The content for this could be partially or wholly created through monthly recordings of discussions between older audiences visiting ACMI. Discussions could include movie and / or exhibition reviews, or general conversation around subjects that would be of interest to older adults that also relate to themes in the ACMI program. The podcast could be facilitated by ACMI staff and shared through the ACMI e-newsletter, social media channels and website.
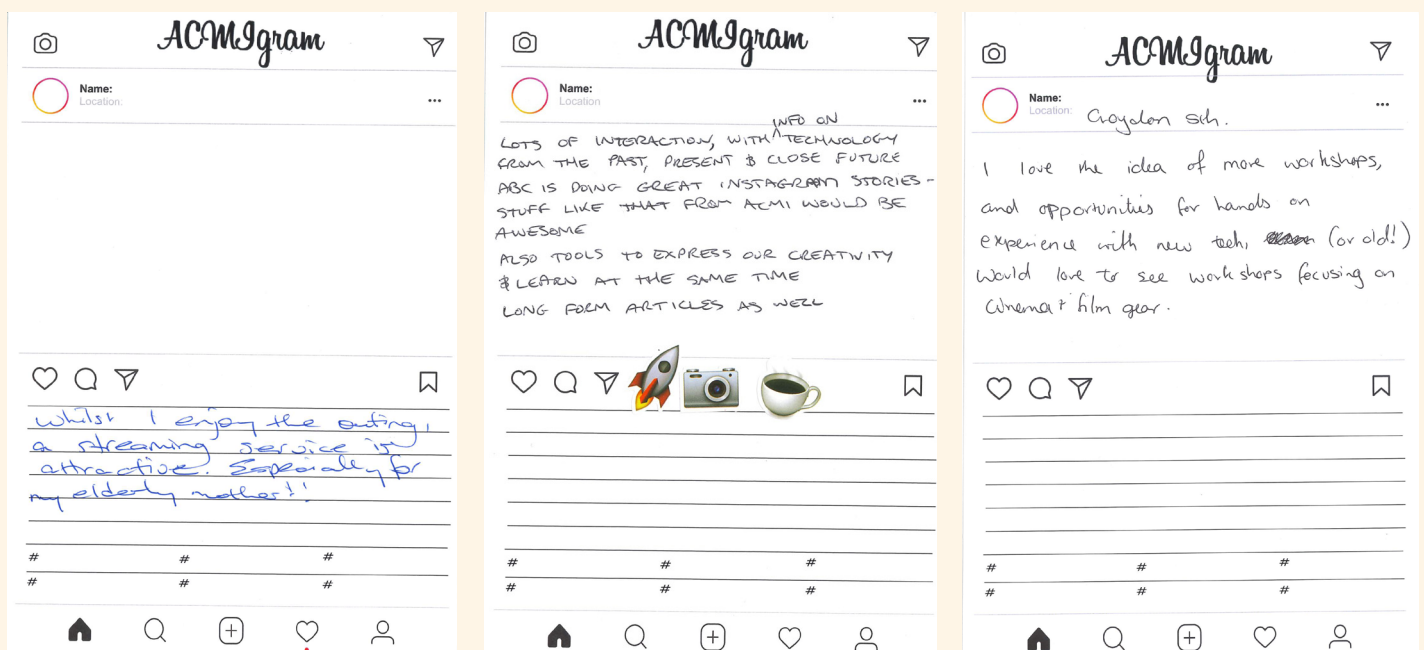

Figure 3: Example responses to Postcard #3: *Tell us what you would like your digital experience with ACMI, or other cultural organisations, to involve.*

3.

KEY FINDING 3:
Digital literacies

Bolstering the opportunity around cinema programming to engage older adults in critical-creative workshops around new media creation such as VR, including peer-to-peer and intergenerational workshop opportunities

Some of our participants spoke of their interest in understanding how new media cinema works and expressed curiosity in critical-creative workshops to enhance this awareness. This finding speaks to a demand for peer-to-peer and intergenerational learning models that harness the interest for digital participation "by shifting the focus from operational digital skills to critical and creative skills as well as social interaction" [3], in familiar community contexts (like ACMI). As the recent NSA report [1] recommends, given increasing interactions with technology, we need new models for addressing the majority of audiences that are **senior "super surfers"** and **"savvy surfers"** as well as bringing onboard the minority of those still not fully engaged as **"seldom surfers"**.

One visitor, a man in his 70s, expresses an interest in more VR workshops. He attended one a while ago, but he'd like to learn more, to confidently use these and other technologies to create digital experiences. He says it's the way of the future. Given the climate crisis, and the need to reduce our carbon footprint, he comments that at least with VR, we can continue to explore and travel to other places. It's also a way, he adds, to visualise our pasts.

> " There should be more VR workshops during more suitable times for us, such as during the week not just weekends"

> " Tools to express our creativity and learn at the same time."

Recommendations

Workshops with and for older audiences, including peer-to-peer and intergenerational workshop opportunities for grandparents and grandchildren. Many of the participants were quick to remind us of their independence and agency as older audiences, for example, couples requesting two sets of postcards "because we have our own ideas" and other visitors adamant that they could pour their "own cup of tea". Our recommendation for peer-to-peer workshops, then, is informed by our interactions and discussions with participants, but also the *60+ Online* [3] report that suggests a peer-to-peer learning model can contribute to a culture of shared skills development and problem solving, and helping others (peers) based on their own learning needs and interests. The NSA report also suggests that adopting a peer-to-peer learning, or digital mentor, model can leverage the skills of older people fitting the profiles of "super" or "savvy" surfers [1].

Many participants also commented that as grandparents, who often bring their grandchildren to ACMI kids programs, they would like the opportunity to be involved but that workshops are often "age-restricted". Deploying intergenerational workshops would, like the ABC's *Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds* [4], allow for intergenerational knowledge transfer, storytelling and skill acquisition in complex and rich ways.

Indeed, like the ABC program, and as the NSA report [1] also recommends, connecting with existing community organisations that have developed relationships with older audiences, including U3A (of who many ACMI cinema visitors were students of), could also inform a rich and dynamic programming and learning model.

4. Contact

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