Book Review: Delivering Impact with Digital Resources: Planning Strategy in the Attention Economy by Simon Tanner

In **Delivering Impact with Digital Resources: Planning Strategy in the Attention Economy***,* **Simon Tanner** *offers a new guide to delivering and sustaining the impact of digital content, focusing particularly on the galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM) sector. While the book could further interrogate the value of impact and delve deeper into the complexities of the attention economy, this book charts a timely path in seeking to bring the GLAM sector more squarely in line with digital practices across public and private institutions and will definitely be a worthwhile read for those seeking to actively improve their organisation's performance, finds* **Ignas Kalpokas***.*

This review originally appeared on [LSE Review of Books](). If you would like to contribute to the series, please contact the managing editor of LSE Review of Books, Dr Rosemary Deller, at [lsereviewofbooks@lse.ac.uk]()

Delivering Impact with Digital Resources: Planning Strategy in the Attention Economy. **Simon Tanner. Facet Publishing. 2020.**

Simon Tanner's [Delivering Impact with Digital Resources]() is aimed at bringing the galleries, libraries, archives and museums (GLAM) sector up to scratch when it comes to the contemporary digital economy. This is done by way of introducing an updated version of the [Balanced Value Impact (BVI) model](), originally developed by the same author nearly a decade ago. While there is no denying that Tanner is a fervent advocate of his model, the main concerns whilst reading this book are whether the value of impact is overplayed and whether the author aims to drag GLAM institutions too far into the digital economy.

The BVI model is specifically aimed at measuring the impact of digital resources by demonstrating their quantifiable impact on the life and/or opportunities of communities. The 'balanced' element of it, meanwhile, refers to the broad scope of the model's input, ranging from evaluating the context in which the digital content in question operates to post-measurement response and feedback (thus making the model somewhat circular and self-referential). As such, the model can be applied to any digital content, both commercial and non-commercial. However, while Tanner's original effort essentially provided a toolkit, this book adds substance to this otherwise rather abstract form by applying it to a particular sector – GLAM. This application is all the more useful because the GLAM sector does not immediately come to mind when one thinks of impact assessment, and thus has been largely ignored in methodological discussions despite facing increasing pressures to demonstrate its societal value.

The author himself describes the intended readership of this book as composed of 'practitioners, decision makers and scholars working with content and culture in relation to memory institutions' (xxv), such as museums and archives. As such, it is definitely a useful guide through the maze of the various impact assessment techniques and exercises intended to measure the performance and audience engagement of institutions. A multiplicity of case studies and examples of impact assessment, ranging from local Bangladeshi libraries to the British Library, allows readers to grasp the propositions and better understand the implications of proposed measures more clearly. Getting hands-on with the detail of impact planning and starting with something as basic as defining what a strategy is, the different kinds of value and so forth, the book then goes through every step of the BVI model. Such a technical exposition should help make sense of the various resources an organisation might have and presents them so that they can compete in today's digital attention economy.

On the plus side, Tanner's idea to contextualise his argument within the attention economy is commendable. While this has been the buzzword in communication and marketing studies over the past few years, there has been limited uptake in other domains. The same can be said for the GLAM sector, which is not typically associated with the cutthroat online competition over audience eyeballs that the attention economy implies. Nevertheless, the discussion of the attention economy itself is underwhelming. The title of the book would seem to suggest that a discussion of it plays a significant role in the overall project of the book. However, in practice that is not the case – it only makes a brief appearance in Chapter Four. This is just about enough for conceptualisation purposes, but leaves much to be desired for those with no or little prior knowledge of what the attention economy actually is all about.

The ultimate focus of the book is, however, impact; although tangential to the attention economy, impact is understood primarily from an institutional, rather than audience, perspective. It is this institutional how-to emphasis that must be seen as the moving force of the entire book. This how-to is provided through the elaboration of the BVI model. While it is described in meticulous detail, this may be exhausting and off-putting for a less committed reader. There are simply so many different measurements, analyses and techniques packed together that it ultimately becomes impossible to see the forest through the trees. Unfortunately, the text is also rather dry, making the work feel more like a technical instruction than an inspiring programmatic book, which it most likely aspires to be.

On a different note, one might question whether this exclusive focus on impact and metrics ('evidence-based' assessments) is what the GLAM sector really needs. In addition to potential concerns about full submission to the neoliberal value-for-money focus, Steffen Mau's critique of the [metric society](#) immediately springs to mind here. According to this critique, the newly emerged capacity for quantification and big data-based analysis has brought about a relentless drive towards evaluation and comparison. It might well be that this impact drive is more akin to a sign of the (quantifiable) times than a necessary attribute of GLAM institutions. Typical of the metric society, the goal is always to maximise impact, optimise engagement. One can only wonder whether such focus might distract from the broader aims that the institution has. Likewise, it seems more than likely that only certain (and perhaps uniform) content will be prioritised while those less easily transferable into digital impact stars will be left out – something that could be very problematic if we are talking, for example, about memory institutions.

Overall, this is a book that is rather hard to pin down. It definitely charts a timely path in bringing the GLAM sector more squarely in line with digital practices across the spectrum of both public and private institutions. Indeed, particularly in times of COVID-19 and limited mobility, competition over online attention is ripe, and any actors who disregard impact and engagement are bound to suffer significant challenges. Simultaneously, however, one might question whether strengthening reliance on impact metrics is really what the sector needs. This goal is simply taken for granted without further discussion. Moreover, the style and layout of this book are unlikely to inspire a sceptical reader. Hence, while this book is certainly a worthwhile read for those working in the GLAM industry who are actively seeking ways to improve their organisation's performance, mass readership would be difficult to foresee.

Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Impact Blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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