هيئة الشارقة للمتاحف
Sharjah Museums Authority

May 2024 - Issue 5

MUSEUMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST JOURNAL



MUSEUMS and SOCIAL MEDIA

Explore the evolving landscape of museum communication in the digital age, from immersive experiences to social media

هيئة الشارقة للمتاحف
Sharjah Museums Authority

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DESIGN: NEXST SOLUTIONS

PUBLISHER: Sharjah Museums Authority copyright 2024

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Museums in the Middle East Journal is published biennially by Sharjah Museums Authority, covers different topics, and is editorially independent. For submission and enquires, e-mail: CallforPaper@sma.gov.ae

© Museums in the Middle East Journal 2024
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Connecting Communities:

SMA's Social Media Impact on Museums

In recent years, the advent of social media has revolutionised the way museums interact with their audiences. This digital transformation has not only bridged geographical gaps but has also played a pivotal role in enhancing audience engagement and promoting inclusivity, particularly amidst the challenges posed by the global pandemic. Sharjah Museums Authority (SMA) stands as a prime example of leveraging social media platforms to foster meaningful connections with diverse audiences.

Social media platforms such as Instagram, X, Facebook, and TikTok have become virtual gateways to museums, offering glimpses into their collections, exhibitions, and behind-the-scenes activities. SMA, recognising the potential of these platforms, has embraced social media as a powerful tool to reach broader audiences and enhance visitor experiences. Through captivating visuals, interactive posts, and engaging storytelling, SMA has successfully cultivated a vibrant online community, transcending physical boundaries and inviting people from all walks of life to immerse themselves in the world of art and culture.



Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, when physical access to museums was restricted, social media emerged as a lifeline, enabling SMA to maintain connections with its audience and even expand its reach. Virtual exhibitions, live-streamed events, and online videos for arts and crafts became commonplace, providing audiences with enriching experiences from the comfort of their homes. SMA's digital initiatives, such as its partnership with the "Museums with No Frontiers" and its online 360 view of exhibitions on our website, allowed individuals worldwide to explore the rich cultural heritage of Sharjah remotely, fostering a sense of connection and belonging during challenging times. We also added our permanent collection of Arab art exhibition, accessible online as a virtual tour.

Moreover, social media has played a pivotal role in promoting inclusivity within the museum space. By embracing digital platforms, SMA has been able to engage with diverse communities, including those traditionally underserved or who were geographically afar. Through targeted outreach and content, SMA has actively worked towards dismantling barriers to access and fostering a more inclusive environment.

One notable example of SMA's commitment to inclusion through social media is its collaboration with local community groups and local organisations, including universities.

We delivered numerous online lectures in collaboration with master's students from universities, which provided valuable expertise to a wider audience through social media and online platforms. Furthermore, audio guides were translated into sign language using apps like VGuide SMA, making self-guided tours more inclusive for individuals with hearing disabilities.

By amplifying diverse voices and perspectives, SMA has enriched its online presence, reflecting the multiplicity of identities and experiences within the community, especially our autism community and people with disabilities.

Furthermore, social media has served as a catalyst for innovation within the museum sector, prompting SMA to explore new ways of engaging with audiences and adapting to changing needs. From interactive online workshops to immersive augmented reality experiences, such as the programmeme launched at the Resistance Monument in Khorfakkan, SMA has embraced digital technologies to enhance visitor engagement and create memorable experiences. By harnessing the power of social media analytics, SMA has gained valuable insights into audience preferences and behaviours, allowing for more targeted and personalised content delivery.

In conclusion, the advent of social media has had a profound impact on the museum world, revolutionising the way museums engage with their audiences and promote inclusivity.

Museums must prioritise investment in digital platforms and social media as essential communication tools to stay relevant and accessible in today's interconnected world. The statistics underscore this imperative: as of 2022, nearly 4.66 billion people worldwide use social media, representing around 60% of the global population. In the Middle East, social media usage is particularly prevalent, with countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE boasting some of the highest social media penetration rates globally. As we navigate the challenges of the pandemic era and beyond, social media will continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of museums, making art and culture more accessible and inclusive for all.

Author



Yousef Jamil Salhi

Founder of the Elijah Short Ideas Project

Youssef Al-Salhi is a film director, academic, and cultural researcher. In 2018, he established the Elia Short Film Festival in Jerusalem, showcasing emerging talent in the cinematic arts. Currently pursuing his master's degree in cultural management, Al-Salhi's thesis delves into the "Cinema Museum in Jerusalem: Prospects and Challenges." Alongside his academic pursuits, he is a lecturer in filmmaking courses and digital marketing. He is also a published author, contributing literary articles to Filistin Ashabab magazine and offering critical reviews of cinematic works. His academic research encompasses various aspects of cinema and cultural management, including The Cinematic Biography of the Palestinian Photographer Sulafa Jadallah, The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in Marketing Farha Film by Director Darin Sallam, and Cultural Sustainability in Palestinian Institutions. Al-Salhi has a keen interest in cultural heritage preservation and museum management.

Exploring Paradoxes:

Contrasting Experiences of Museum Visitors and Social Media Browsers

INTRODUCTION

The visitor experience for a museum visitor does not start with the purchase of an entrance ticket; rather, it commences prior to that. Motivations of self-enrichment and perception to build meaning from the visit converge, shaping the narrative and objectives of the trip they aspire to fulfil and leading to enduring memories.

Today, it is most reasonable to ask: to what extent does the museum visitor experience parallel the digital world of online platforms, such as Instagram? Can the encapsulation of an exhibit in a brief video, lasting under a minute, offer a comparable experience and meaning to physically visiting the museum's halls?

Exploring the dynamic between museum visitors and their online counterparts perusing social media platforms merits attention. How can this relationship be examined? Is it a symbiotic one where one complements the other? Or does it entail an inverse correlation, where positive impacts are counterbalanced by negatives? Alternatively, could it be a direct relationship with variables that change proportionately? This paper aims to examine these dynamics and their implications for each experience. While it holds potential for innovating practices to enhance both browsing and visiting experiences concurrently, could it also lead to the creation of new connections and intersections between them? On the other hand, might it pave the way for future crises within museums, potentially restricting visitor access?

The Museum's Physical Experience vs. Virtual Exploration of Social Networking Sites

As pivotal institutions in fostering a knowledge-based society, museums fulfil multifaceted roles encompassing research, curation, and preservation, while concurrently offering diverse avenues for exploration, education, and entertainment[7]. Each visitor embarks on a distinct journey within the museum, shaping their experience in unique ways. While this process may not be immediately observable, its effects manifest later in individuals' behaviours and the formation of their personal identities[8]. Consequently, the significance of the visit is realised as meaning is constructed, and the visitor's objectives are attained.

Silverman's research underscores the notion that the visitor's experience is an ongoing process of recollection and interaction[9]. This idea is further supported by Falk, who posits that the true impact of a museum visit unfolds not instantaneously, but rather at a later juncture, as changes manifest in attitudes, behaviours and knowledge[10]. This delayed impact may be attributed, in part, to visitors' tendency to contextualise their encounters within the museum setting. When confronted with exhibits that pique their interest, individuals draw upon their existing knowledge and experiences, facilitating the construction of novel understandings or alternative modes of thinking and behaviour.

The museum visitor experience begins with their journey to the place, culminating in their exploration of its corridors, perusal of informational materials, and engagement with exhibits or artworks through contemplation, comprehension of contextual backgrounds, inquiry and interpersonal interaction, thereby fostering a social dimension through shared presence with fellow visitors.

The visitor experience does not end with the conclusion of their physical visit; rather, it transcends the museum's walls, lingering in memory to be revisited at opportune moments. How does the visitor's experience, while standing before an exhibit amidst other fellow visitors, compare to the digital exploration of an online visitor via the museum's social networking platforms?

The physical encounter within the museum fosters direct engagement with the exhibits and spontaneous interactions with visitors. It allows for overhearing opinions, sparking discussions, and perhaps even learning information from a visitor about an exhibit based on their prior experiences. This broadens the scope of knowledge exchange, fosters critical thinking, and helps in later recollection by invoking the visual experience tied to the exhibit and the social interactions with fellow museum visitors.

While the experience of a museum visitor versus what is accessible to a browser on social networking sites may diverge, the latter enables individuals to view, read, share and comment on artworks and exhibits. These activities reflect an alignment with contemporary technological advancements, showcasing how digital tools transform websites into dynamic social platforms for information dissemination. In essence, this facilitates the engagement of a broader spectrum of potential museum visitors.

Furthermore, an online visitor has the option to explore further through search engine websites. By clicking on links provided in the museum's Instagram profile, they can access the museum's website for virtual tours or immersive experiences designed to deepen their understanding of artworks. Consequently, any assessment of the relationship between physical museum visits and virtual visits via websites must consider the components and impacts of each medium, and how they mutually influence one another.

What Do Museums' Exhibits Look Like on Social Media?

Museum exhibit designs cater to visitors of varying ages, backgrounds and experiences, fostering social engagement within the museum environment[11]. This inclusivity is evident in both traditional exhibits that showcase collectibles, artworks and paintings. Such exhibits encourage visitor participation and interaction with others, which could begin with a gesture as simple as a visitor asking another to take a photograph of them in front of an artwork. This may start discussions about the piece, the artist's intent, and diverse perspectives on its interpretation.

While traditional museums focus on collecting and displaying artworks, modern approaches prioritise the use of technology to develop interactive exhibits that enhance learning[12]. Through the integration of new technologies, exhibits are designed to immerse visitors in dynamic experiences, fostering a deeper connection with the experience.

Undoubtedly, the role of social networking sites differs significantly between traditional and contemporary exhibitions, a distinction that can profoundly influence the online visitor's experience. This disparity becomes evident when a museum presents an artwork via Instagram as a static image versus showcasing the same artwork through a video or using digital display technology in the physical exhibition space that projects the image across the ceiling, floor, and walls of the gallery. By exposing the online visitor to these contrasting possibilities, social media platforms offer a glimpse into the innovative display technologies increasingly employed within museums. This comparison does not imply that one method is better than the other; rather, it serves to intrigue the online visitor, tempting them into visiting the museum, witnessing the artwork firsthand, and partaking in the experiential encounter. It is interesting to explore how modern display technologies can be effectively leveraged within museums and integrated into the digital landscape of social media platforms.

Numerous factors can negatively impact the visitor experience during the museum visit.

When exhibit designs prioritise group dynamics, it may then affect individual experiences. Consider the scenario of an interactive exhibit requiring a group of five people: if a visitor prefers to arrive early to avoid crowds and finds themselves alone in the exhibit, they may be unable to engage with the experience. If this is recurrent, every situation like this could negatively impact the visitor's overall museum experience. They might subsequently share their frustrations, either intentionally or inadvertently, which could influence others' perceptions before they enter other museums.

[7] Definition of a museum according to the International Council of Museums.
[8] Rennie, L. (2007). Museums as Learning Institutions. Rowman Altamira.
[9] Silverman, L. (1995). "Visitor Meaning Making in Museums for a New Age." Curator, 38(3). 161-170.
[10] Falk, J. H., and Dierking, L. D. (2000) Learning from Museums: Visitor Experience and the Making of Meaning.
[11] Heath, C. and Von Lehn, D. (2008) "Configuring Interactivity: Enhancing Engagement in Science Centres and Museums." Social Studies of Science, 38, no.1 63-01.
[12] Bradburne, J. M. (2000) Interaction in Museum: Observing Supporting Learning. (Hamburg: Libri Books on Demand).

Interactive exhibits could foster patterns of visitor interaction, yet in reality, these interactions primarily occur between the user and the technology, limiting group participation to some extent. Consequently, this type of interactive relationship could be linked to social networking sites and understood as an intermediary between the virtual visitor and the museum. Consider an interactive exhibit centred around an electronic screen reliant on touch interaction. Leveraging this technology by programming it onto the museum's website and promoting it through social networking platforms extends the museum experience to audiences because it does not require their physical presence in the space. Making such interactive experiences accessible remotely via smart devices they use on a daily basis does not diminish the value of in-person museum visits and engagement with exhibits and takes into account the growing trend towards integrating advanced practices that leverage social networking sites as effective intermediaries between visitors and museums.

Group visits to museums can also pose challenges for individual visitors, potentially impeding their ability to fully engage with exhibits and derive knowledge and enjoyment from their visit. Furthermore, overcrowding within museums can disrupt the visitor experience, leading to hurried movement through galleries and insufficient time to appreciate each exhibit.

It's evident that the conditions surrounding museum visits are often less than ideal. Could social networking sites offer a potential solution to escape the congestion and noise of museums in the future? The answer to this question is not straightforward, as both yes and no arguments have valid justifications. Social media platforms provide a virtual escape from crowded physical spaces, they too can become inundated with various digital content and paid advertisements, potentially distracting browsers. Without a coherent content strategy and a clear visual identity, museums risk diluting their online presence and diminishing virtual visitor engagement. Therefore, it's important for museums to maintain a consistent brand image across their social platforms and develop robust strategies for curating and publishing digital content on their websites.

What sets these platforms apart is their accessibility to data long after it's published. Users can easily retrieve saved content in their archives or search for specific topics using relevant hashtags. Essentially, these platforms serve as an electronic archive for online visitors, where they can revisit photos, video clips of museum exhibits, or recorded interviews with curators.



Museum Digital Content on Social Media

Instagram primarily relies on the creation and dissemination of digital visual and audio content through photos and video clips, and less on textual content. As a popular social media platform, it has contributed to the promotion of cultural institutions' activities, including museums', owing to its easy and rapid flow of information as well as popularity among users.

While Instagram holds significant potential as a digital platform for museums, some argue that the photos and video clips published on the platform may not fully satisfy visitors' desires or curiosity. For instance, artefact displays may appear flat in digital images, limiting viewers' ability to perceive the object in its full dimensions and potentially diminishing the artistic value of the displayed item.

Should the creative team within the museum's marketing department invest effort in crafting professionally illustrated and designed digital content on Instagram, it holds the potential to stimulate the visitors' interest and prompt them to visit the museum to experience the exhibits firsthand. Further, videos may captivate viewers even more by leveraging multiple media formats to attract attention and pique curiosity. Whether aimed at promoting museum exhibitions, showcasing acquired artworks, or simply narrating short stories about the museum and its activities, these videos have the capacity to creatively introduce the museum and its activities.

Having explored two renowned museums by following them on Instagram, the Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, there is a notable discrepancy in the utilisation of Instagram's tools among them.

Some museums demonstrate consistent and periodic engagement, cultivating a refreshed visual identity inspired by their institutional nature. They allocate resources to curate creative and diverse content. Conversely, there are museums that exhibit less activity on digital platforms, with sporadic publishing and potentially less attention to their visual identity. Regardless of approach, museums use Instagram as a medium to engage with the public and attract visitors.

There are two prevalent approaches that museums can adopt when using Instagram. The first is a cautious stance towards digital content, recognising that the virtual experience cannot fully replicate the physical encounter. Under this approach, works of art are preserved in their integrity and legacy, with minimal electronic availability. This approach regards digital content primarily as a marketing tool, focused on introducing the museum and promoting its activities. It refrains from delving deeply into individual works of art or exhibits, leaving the decision to visit the museum to the discretion of the online visitor.

On the other hand, the second approach advocates for leveraging technology to promote the artworks and exhibits acquired by the museum. It embraces the notion that we currently reside in an era of advanced technology where these tools should be used to fulfil their intended purpose. Accordingly, online visitors are exposed to a curated selection of works of art and exhibits, igniting their interest and potentially inspiring them to visit the museum for a firsthand experience to delve deeper into the artworks, reading about their origins, concepts, and the artists or exhibits.



Tools for Digital Content Creation for Museums on Instagram

The nexus between museums and social media platforms centres around the audience, forming a triangular relationship where each component serves as a foundational pillar. In this context, the museum plays a pivotal role in utilising Instagram tools to establish, cultivate, and sustain connections with online visitors. This can be accomplished through various strategies, including:

- Sharing introductory narratives about the museum, and its artworks and exhibitions.
- Hosting live events featuring discussions with artists.
- Conducting virtual tours through short videos to explore the museum.
- Leveraging innovative display techniques within the museum.
- Implementing artificial intelligence technologies to engage with visitors.
- Documenting and sharing behind-the-scenes videos and photos of exhibition production.
- Organising engaging challenges and competitions to stimulate visitor engagement.
- Conducting opinion polls and voting on artworks.
- Reposting visitor-generated content, including photos and stories from their museum visits.
- Documenting and sharing snapshots from museum field trips.
- Encouraging visitors to create and share artistic content inspired by their museum experiences.

The strategies established by museums to use social media play a pivotal role in shaping the nature of their relationship with their audience. A well-crafted strategy that prioritises the provision of creative and engaging content for exhibits can significantly enhance the museum's digital marketing efforts, ultimately motivating online visitors to visit in person. On the other hand, the absence of a strategic plan presents a notable challenge for museums. To overcome this challenge, museums must view social media platforms as integral components of their operations to transition the virtual browsing experience into a tangible visit. ■

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Demystifying and Instafying the Museum Experience

Until recent years, museums in the region only attracted a very niche audience of a certain age and background. One would commonly encounter either cultured older visitors or those whose work was related to the museum in one way or another. On the rare occasion that a group of youths was seen at a museum, it would be for educational purposes, with the visit most likely organised by a school. For decades the greater portion of society was alienated from the rarefied museum experience. Artworks were surrounded by a mysterious aura, intimidating silence reigned over exhibition halls, and no one dared pose for pictures or start a discussion. Only with the recent introduction of social media to these same cultural institutions has there been a pivot in the perception of museums across generations. All museum aspects have been affected, everything from programming and curation to accessibility, awareness, outreach, and artistic production.

Social media platforms have allowed the development of storytelling and communication strategies that cater to different demographics and audiences, making museums much more approachable and attractive. These new audiences have encouraged museums to design different programmes that ensure each generation will find something of interest when they visit the museum. Social media has transformed the museum visitor from an intimidated passive observer into an active participant. Visitors want to engage, post, create content, become part of the trend, or show o□ a certain lifestyle. The museum space has become more public, more accessible for get togethers, weekend plans, new experiences, entertainment, and education.

It is important to note the difference between museums that have not jumped into the social media age, and those who have recognised the importance of social media as a necessary tool and have adapted accordingly. Many regional museums that have housed priceless treasures for decades are struggling to survive and slowly becoming irrelevant largely due to their inability to develop active social media presence, while other, much newer, museums, built with the social media appetite in mind, are selling out for weeks. A case in point is that of important modern art museums in Cairo such as Mahmoud Khalil Museum and the Museum of Modern Egyptian Art which both date to the 1950s and 1960s and house incomparable works of art by international masters and local pioneers. The buildings alone have great historic value. However, the public sector museum administration has failed to realize the unfortunate reality that in 2024, if an institution does not exist on social media, to many people, it does not exist at all. Social media has created an impulse in many people; if someone recommends a restaurant or mentions a destination, the first thing people do is look it up on social media and judge whether it's worth visiting. If they do not find it, they just move on to the next thing. Raised on social media and with many content providers competing for attention, this is how the current generation operates.

In contrast, museums such as Louvre Abu Dhabi and Qatar's Mathaf, among others in the region, have leveraged their social media platforms and the tools they o□er to promote all kinds of content, which means their pages never go silent. They announce and promote diverse content including temporary exhibitions, interesting partnerships, new programmes and community engagement initiatives, special guest visits, highlights from talks, short clips of experts and employees sharing their knowledge, as well as audience engagement content such as competitions and quizzes. They highlight unique items in their collection, special facilities at the museum, or unique architectural features. There is a constant drive to raise awareness and develop a dynamic and engaging online presence that addresses the negative impressions that people may harbor about museums. Social media has addressed every reason that would make a potential visitors reluctant to go. Do you think museums are boring? Come and take part in a fun competition. Do you find museums too intimidating and sophisticated? Check out this compelling story about how easy it is to visit a specific exhibition. You don't know anything about art? Meet our artists and watch them develop concepts and artworks in real time. Are you worried that it's too expensive or inaccessible? Find out about our payment solutions and how we've adapted our space for visitors with disabilities.

With all this online effort, it is difficult for a newcomer to the world of art not to be intrigued by at least one of these initiatives. Targeted communication strategies cater to different demographics; young parents who want to entertain their children, seasoned practitioners who are interested to challenge or share their knowledge, trendy Gen Zs who are looking for something new to do on the weekend, and many more.

These communication tactics not only promote individual events or exhibitions, but feed into the institutional marketing of the museum as a brand, making it appealing to a wider range of people, who can become not just visitors, but also donors, partners, or collaborating artists. Thanks to the renewed interest in museums continuously being fed by social media campaigns, engaged museums such as these have managed to stay open and afloat, with a constant daily flow of visitors.

Social media has not only broken the barrier of cultural accessibility but it has also allowed museums to expand their educational role in society beyond the physical walls. In a very fast-paced world and an increasingly globalized age, it has become nearly impossible for anyone to attend all the important cultural happenings in the region or the world. Social media has allowed art enthusiasts and cultural workers to keep up with what is happening in the world around them and stay up to date without the financial or physical burden of constant travel. Additionally, we have seen in recent years how global circumstances may force a museum to close its physical doors. In these cases, social media has stepped in to ensure that a museum's work and presence survives and operates virtually. When COVID-19 hit, social media allowed museums to reinvent themselves after decades of their role being restricted within their physical spaces.

Museums are no longer just going with the social media flow; some are slowly introducing new trends themselves. By successfully using certain visuals and language, museums have managed to appeal to a less predictable and much younger, dare I say "hipper," audience. I remember visiting museums as a child. It was a grown-up activity that I had to endure. Today, I visit museums and it seems like the trendiest activity I could be doing. The ticket lines are endless and if you don't post your picture contemplating a piece of art, are you even relevant? Culture has become cool.

Museum presence on social media, has also provided access to key audience analytics. Museums can gauge what audiences like and what they don't, what each generation responds to, what goes viral and what doesn't pick up. This insight is invaluable not only for the development of museum content calendars but also for their programming. It is a barometre of their community and an indicator of how they can best serve it and attract new members. Today, museums have professional teams on the job, regularly pivoting and adapting social media strategies to stay ahead of constant platform algorithm changes and fickle audiences.

The impact of social media can also be seen in the way museums look. The nature of museums is slowly evolving to accommodate the preferences of social media audiences. Some museums actively encourage artistic production that is visually attractive or controversial – read Instagrammable – to appeal to its newly engaged audiences. If there's no crazy installation or aesthetic setting worth posting, the museum is no longer worth the hype. I can't help but think of the Museum of the Future in Dubai as an example of this. When I tried to visit during a short trip to Dubai, I was surprised to learn that tickets were sold out weeks in advance. I managed to assuage my generational FOMO (fear of missing out) by driving by and at least getting a picture of the exterior. The museum was inaugurated in 2022, built in the age of social media, and most definitely designed with this audience in mind. The monumental architecture, the intriguing visual identity, the visitor experience, the content curation all come together to very cleverly cater to the appetite of a content-hungry generation. I think we can safely say that in this age where social media is king, there is a clear shift from mystifying the museum experience to Insta-fying it. ■

Author

The National Museum of Oman

Sultanate of Oman

The National Museum is Oman's flagship cultural institution, showcasing the Sultanate's cultural heritage—both tangible and intangible—from the earliest evidence of human settlement in the Oman Peninsula to the present day.

The Museum was established by Royal Decree 62/2013. The National Museum has received honorary patronage from His Majesty Sultan Haitham bin Tarik on 27 September 2020. The National Museum is a multi-campus institution, overseeing several historical houses in Old Muscat, namely, Bayt Greiza, Bayt Sayyid Nadir, Bayt Sayyida Muzna, Al-Saida Museum and Muscat Gate.

The museum aims to achieve its educational, cultural and humanitarian mandate by upholding Omani values, fostering a sense of belonging, and raising public awareness among citizens, residents and visitors about Oman's history, heritage and culture. It seeks to develop their creative and intellectual capabilities, particularly in preserving artefacts and highlighting Oman's culture by employing and adopting best practices and standards in its operations. The vision of the National Museum of Oman is to lead the museum industry in the Sultanate, achieving a significant qualitative shift in this sector.

The Museum houses more than 7,000 artefacts carefully assembled in 14 exhibition halls, in addition to 33 digital immersive experiences. It is the first museum in Oman to include an educational centre that follows international standards, state-of-the-art conservation facilities and fully equipped laboratories, and a UHD cinema. It is also the first in the Middle East to adopt Arabic Braille script and the first to house an open-plan museum storage concept, where visitors can learn about the various processes that artefacts undergo before they are put on display.

The National Museum:

Navigating Cultural Communication on Social Media

In a rapidly evolving era marked by technological advancements and shifting communication paradigms, social media has emerged as an indispensable tool for disseminating messages and engaging with audiences. In this vein, the National Museum of Oman endeavours to leverage social media platforms to publicise its mission and foster meaningful interactions with the public. Through modern and innovative approaches, aligned with the museum's core objectives and Omani values, it raises awareness among the populace about its rich history, heritage, and culture, and nurtures a sense of belonging among citizens, residents, and visitors to Oman. The museum aims to illuminate the diverse civilizational, historical, and cultural facets of Oman.

A Window into the World

Social media platforms serve as a gateway for the National Museum, offering a glimpse into the depth of Oman's historical and cultural wealth. The museum's digital content is distinguished by its focus on archaeological collections, showcasing the brilliance of Omani civilisation and the ancient heritage of the land. Omani culture comes alive on social media through a range of events, including collaborative exhibitions with leading museums worldwide. They feature archaeological collections and fine arts, fostering cultural and civilizational dialogue between the Sultanate of Oman and nations around the globe. Furthermore, social media platforms spotlight workshops, lectures and guided tours tailored for visitors of all ages. Led by experts and specialists across various fields, these interactive sessions provide insights into Oman's diverse cultural heritage. Guided tours offer virtual visitors an immersive journey through the museum's corridors, enriching their intellectual experience. These initiatives are dedicated to presenting Oman's cultural history in innovative and engaging ways, serving as a valuable addition to cultural exchanges across generations and cultures.

Textual Content Across Social Platforms

When it comes to content published across various platforms like Facebook and X, there's often a similarity in the information shared, albeit with varying levels of detail. This is largely influenced by the platform's format, which allows for more extensive content, and the preferences of its users.

When composing tweets or posts on other social platforms, brevity is key due to character limitations. Visuals may also be incorporated, such as up to four images or a short video. It is also advisable to limit the number of hashtags per tweet. For longer content, it can be broken into a series of tweets while ensuring the "news" context remains relevant and clear to users. This approach is particularly effective when covering museum updates and news-related activities.

Instagram provides a plethora of interactive features to engage with audiences, including polls, posters, questions, and disappearing stories that vanish after 24 hours. The platform's emphasis on visual content allows for diverse marketing opportunities, with text integrated into images or presented across a series of sequential images.

When it comes to crafting content for YouTube, simplicity reigns supreme. The platform's straightforward format allows for a main title to accompany the video clip, supplemented by keywords that facilitate user searchability. With its vast reach and comprehensive nature, YouTube stands as the pinnacle platform for content dissemination.

A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words

As the adage goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words" (Sidi, 2023), and the National Museum upholds this principle by carefully curating images that convey meaning and significance. Each image is selected with precision, often incorporating multiple images to provide a comprehensive portrayal of events for the public. Furthermore, the museum's media team places great emphasis on crafting brief yet impactful image captions tailored to the nuances of each social media platform and its target audience. For instance, when covering exhibitions such as "Asymmetrical Design," the team collaborated with exhibition curators to select images that reflect the essence of the curator's vision. Subsequently, concise descriptions were added to prompt engagement and spark curiosity among viewers. Notably, on platforms like Instagram, where communication adopted a conversational tone (Sidi, 2023 AD), this approach fostered meaningful interaction with the audience.

Teaser Clips

Visual clips, particularly teasers, stand out as compelling tools for audience engagement, especially in anticipation of events and exhibitions. For instance, consider the teaser clip promoting the inauguration of the Sultan Qaboos bin Said Corner, which garnered an impressive view count of 91,420 on Instagram. This clip resulted in significant interaction from the audience, prompting widespread sharing across various social media platforms.

Video Series to Introduce Intangible Heritage

The museum's media team curated a series of video clips, offering viewers an immersive experience of Omani traditional music within the Intangible Heritage Hall at the National Museum. This hall showcased a diverse array of musical instruments and popular arts that embody Oman's intangible heritage across generations.

Structured into several sections, the video series began by introducing viewers to various folk arts, followed by a closer look at traditional musical instruments. The series culminated with profiles of prominent Omani artists, spotlighting their contributions to the nation's rich cultural tapestry. These video clips were strategically shared on Instagram, each lasting no more than a minute to captivate audiences' attention. Accompanying each clip was a concise caption, offering viewers a glimpse into the content awaiting them.

"Describe to Me" Initiative

The National Museum demonstrated a commitment to inclusivity by extending its outreach to various segments of society, including individuals with disabilities. In collaboration with the Omani Association for People with Hearing Disabilities and "Describe to Me" initiative, aimed at providing tailored resources for individuals with hearing impairments. Focused on promoting the Sultan Qaboos bin Said Corner in the Renaissance gallery. This initiative entailed the creation of specialised texts and a series of video clips over a period of three months. These clips, which showcased twelve collections belonging to the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said, and were designed to be accessible to individuals with hearing impairments through sign language interpretation and the ALT text feature to describe images for the visually impaired and blind.

Through this initiative, the National Museum endeavours to broaden horizons for this segment of the community and foster awareness of the museum's collections via its social media platforms. The museum is committed to sustaining this initiative due to its significant impact on the targeted audience.

"Muhibukum" Competition

To enhance engagement and interaction on the museum's social media platforms, various competitions were introduced, each with unique themes. "Muhibukum" is one example, which coincided with the media campaign for the inauguration of the late Sultan Qaboos bin Said Corner from September 29 to October 20, 2022. The competition aimed to highlight the Sultanate's collectibles. Over the course of four weeks, four questions were posed on Instagram, each relating to a specific collectible. The competition garnered significant participation and interaction from the audience.

From Antiquity to Modernity

One of the ideas that the media team has recently adopted is "From Antiquity to Modernity," featuring two designed leaflets. Each leaflet showcases contrasting objects: one from ancient times and another from the modern era. Brief descriptions accompanied the collectibles, prompting the audience to contemplate the evolution and distinguishing features of both. What sets this concept apart is its ability to spark engagement among researchers, students and enthusiasts. By encouraging individuals to share content and delve deeper into the details of these collections on their own platforms, the media team fosters a dynamic exchange of ideas. This approach prompts periodic innovation in presenting such concepts, inviting those interested in the museum field to actively engage with this type of content.

Followers' Statistics on Social Media Platforms

The number of followers on the National Museum's social media platforms is as follows: 27.1K on

Instagram, 29,480 on X, 342 on Youtube, and 5.1K on Facebook. Visits to the museum's website reached 167,597.

Collaborations with Content Creators

One of the strategies The National Museum employs to augment its follower base is leveraging the influence of content creators and social media influencers. By extending invitations to attend various museum and cultural events, the museum endeavours to engage with a broader audience. A prime example of this outreach strategy is the collaboration with influencer Mohammed al-Mukhaini (with 1.3 million followers) during the announcement of the museum's 2024 calendar of events, celebrating Omani maritime achievements and key maritime figures. During his visit to the museum's Maritime History gallery, Mr. al-Mukhaini shared insights on the showcased collectibles and introduced the calendar of events. The positive response garnered on his page translated into increased engagement on the museum's social media platforms, with heightened interest in purchasing the publications.

National Museum Publications

The National Museum annually announces its "Museum Publications Programme," featuring a diverse array of publications available for purchase through the museum's ticket sales office. The museum's media team promotes these publications across various social media platforms. Notably, one recent highlight is a publication titled "A Collection of Marine Sciences," a testament to the maritime expertise of the Omani navigator Ahmed bin Majid as-Saadi. This publication authenticates his navigational expertise through the documentation of his seminal work, the "Book of Benefits in the Science and Rules of the Sea," dating back to the 11th century AH / 16th century CE. The manuscript is on loan from the al-Assad National Library in the Syrian Arab Republic since 2019. To facilitate public access to these publications, the media team is currently developing a dedicated webpage on the museum's website. This initiative is poised to launch at the Muscat International Book Fair in 2024.

The Museum Website Speaks Chinese

In collaboration with the People's Republic of China, the National Museum embarked on a significant initiative by launching a Chinese-language version of its website on November 30, 2023. This endeavour serves as a gateway for Chinese-speaking tourists and residents to explore Oman's rich cultural heritage spanning across different historical epochs. By offering website content in Chinese, the National Museum aims to rejuvenate cultural and museum tourism in the Sultanate of Oman, with a specific focus on enhancing the museum's visibility. This initiative provides an invaluable opportunity to showcase the museum's pivotal role, highlight key events and exhibitions, and showcase its diverse array of activities to a broader audience.

Friends of Oman Museums Membership

The museum's media team promotes the Friends of Oman membership across various social media platforms. Through engaging posts, they introduce the membership benefits, highlight key services and showcase media coverage of associated events. Additionally, the museum has curated a dedicated webpage on its website exclusively for membership, offering a comprehensive guide, a direct registration form, and an archive of notable activities and programmes. It also has a weekly feature on Instagram stories to introduce the membership as a timely reminder for the public. Furthermore, every new member's subscription is celebrated with a personalised welcome, underscoring the museum's appreciation for their support and participation.

Conclusion

The National Museum is committed to staying abreast of the rapid advancements in social media platforms. It recognises them not merely as technological tools, but as invaluable means to foster deeper connections with the public. By leveraging these platforms, the museum aims to cultivate meaningful and interactive engagements, introducing audiences to Oman's rich culture, heritage and arts. This forward-thinking approach emphasises the museum's modern and innovative vision for the cultural heritage preservation, steering it towards a promising future. ■

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Museums and Social Media:

The Ajman Museums' Experience: Department of Tourism Development of Ajman

Museums have significantly evolved as custodians of history, culture, and art, actively incorporating social media into their communication strategies. This article offers a comprehensive examination of Ajman museums' use of social media, spotlighting their profound impact on community engagement, cultural preservation, and tourism promotion. It delves into the most notable cultural moments and events showcased on Instagram, including the inauguration of Rashid Al Khader House, alongside other significant activities, underscoring the transformative influence of social media in shaping the trajectory of cultural institutions.

Museums hold pivotal roles as educational and recreational centres, offering gateways to multifaceted realms of history, culture, and art. In contemporary times, the advent of social media has transformed public interaction with museums, facilitating their outreach beyond spatial constraints. Ajman museums show this change by using different social media platforms to increase engagement and get the public involved.

Social Media and Public Engagement

Recognising the pivotal role of social media in contemporary communication, Ajman museums have proficiently integrated these platforms into their outreach strategies. The Ajman museum's Instagram page (@ajmanmuseums) serves as a dynamic digital interface, offering comprehensive content and insights into educational and cultural endeavours. This initiative transcends mere digitalization, aiming to broaden the museums' reach to a diverse global audience.

The Ajman museum's Instagram page offers visitors a comprehensive experience, featuring interactive content and weekly quiz competitions that encourage active participation. By fostering interaction and engagement, the museum extends the physical visit experience into the digital world. This approach aims to present the museum as a vibrant and interactive environment, inviting individuals and families to discover the highlights of Ajman Museum on Instagram. [https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17929369523141934/].

Cultural Excellence in Ajman Museum

Ajman Museum recently hosted a remarkable poetry evening titled Bawh Al Qawafi (Speaking Rhymes), organised by Ajman Development of Tourism Department. This cultural event demonstrated the fusion of poetry with Emirati heritage, offering attendees and sponsors a one-of-a-kind experience. The evening featured three of the emirate's distinct poets: Omar Allohaimed, Mohammed Bn Nawah Almenhali, and Mohamed Bin Hamad Al Kaabi, moderated by the distinguished poet Jassim Al Obaidli.

In addition to the poetry recitals, the event offered attendees the chance to indulge in musical and artistic performances and to explore a photo exhibition organised in collaboration with Sultan Bin Ali Al Owais Cultural Foundation. Furthermore, a bustling market event showcased an array of local products. This multi-

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Department of Tourism Development in Ajman

United Arab Emirates

The Department of Tourism Development in Ajman, UAE, was established by Emiri Decree No. 3 of 2012, on the directions of His Highness Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi, Member of the UAE Supreme Council and Ruler of Ajman. Its mission is to elevate the emirate's tourist attractions and formulate strategic plans to enhance tourism locally, regionally and internationally through the organisation of conferences, exhibitions, and global promotional campaigns to draw visitors. It also focuses on enhancing tourist facilities and services to meet international standards. The department also collaborates with relevant authorities to develop regulations and systems governing the tourism sector and oversees the management and improvement of tourist and archaeological sites. It is also responsible for assessing and regulating tourist establishments, ensuring compliance with tourism standards, licensing travel agencies, and monitoring their operations.

dimensional cultural affair sought to enrich the community by providing a holistic experience that transcends conventional museum visits. [For more information, visit: An evening of poetry at Ajman Museum: https://www.instagram.com/p/C1eQoF5J81k/].

Recognition of Cultural Icons: Rashid Al Khader House

The inauguration of Rashid Al Khader House marks a significant addition to Ajman's cultural landscape, commemorating the legacy of the late Emirati poet Rashid Al Khader. Born in 1905, Al Khader left an indelible mark on Nabati poetry in the UAE. The meticulously restored house serves as a testament to honouring his life and contributions to the UAE's cultural heritage.

The opening ceremony, attended by dignitaries including His Highness Sheikh Ammar bin Humaid Al Nuaimi, Crown Prince of Ajman, and Chairman of the Executive Council of Ajman, underscored the imperative of preserving and valuing cultural icons. Rashid Al Khader House offers visitors a window into the poet's life and achievements, providing a unique opportunity to immerse oneself in the rich cultural and poetic tapestry of the UAE. It enhances Ajman's cultural landmarks, reaffirming its commitment to safeguarding and enriching cultural heritage. [Rashid Al Khader's House: https://www.instagram.com/p/C0y4QoVhX6t/].

Community and Educational Initiatives

By using social media as an educational tool, Ajman museums go beyond traditional displays, spreading knowledge in new ways. In this attempt, the Ajman Department of Tourism Development, in collaboration with strategic partners and hotel establishments, initiated a Ramadan Iftar initiative, distributing iftar meals to fasting individuals. This initiative underscored the cultural and historical significance of Ajman Museum during the holy month.

The integration of philanthropic and community endeavours is paramount to fostering positive societal impact. In this regard, social media serves as a vital conduit for communication between individuals and charitable institutions, enabling awareness-spreading about social issues.

Active engagement through these platforms can inspire community involvement in charitable activities, thereby enhancing support for individuals in need. [To learn more about this initiative, visit: Ajman Museum's Iftar initiative: https://www.instagram.com/reel/CrBaHALBFxL/?igshid=Y2NkYjk0MDhjYg==].

As part of its efforts to bolster cultural consciousness and foster visits to Ajman Museum and other tourist destinations, the department also published a bilingual promotional story tailored for children. This story offered captivating and informative content about the history and contemporary landscape of Ajman. The initiative aimed to instill a sense of pride and curiosity regarding their heritage. This bilingual narrative served as an extension of the department's support for the longstanding "UAE-Korean Cultural Dialogue" programmeme initiated by the Ministry of Culture and Youth many years ago. Additionally, the department released a compilation of three children's stories highlighting the natural allure and prominent tourist landmarks across Ajman's areas, including Al Zorah, Manama, and Masfout. Presented in an engaging narrative format, these stories captivated children's imaginations. These publications affirm the department's commitment to enhancing the educational and intellectual understanding of Ajman. [https://we.tl/t-vyvM88I98I].

Heritage Events and Celebrations

During National Day, the Government of Ajman organised vibrant heritage celebrations and entertainment spectacles in Ajman Museum and the Heritage District. The festivities were designed to foster social cohesion and instill a deep sense of pride in the emirate's rich cultural legacy. The commemoration of UAE Union Day at Ajman Museum underscores the government's dedication to preserving and promoting its cultural heritage while also highlighting the museum's pivotal role as a communal centre.

Spanning four days, December 1 to 4, these celebrations represented the Government of Ajman's commitment to safeguarding and promoting cultural identity. UAE Union celebrations strengthened Ajman Museum's position as a crucial hub, fostering communication and social cohesion within the community, thus reinforcing its stature as a premier cultural institution. [For more information, visit: https://www.instagram.com/p/C0UjPHOPYBv/].

As a testament to Ajman's dedication to fostering arts and culture, the Al Murabbaa Arts Festival took place in the Heritage District of Ajman in the presence of distinct dignitaries. The festival aimed to showcase the rich legacy of human civilisation in Ajman, highlighting the diverse cultural and traditional arts that define the region. Over the course of ten days, the festival featured more than 60 artists and creators, offering attendees a rich experience within a historical ambiance. [https://www.instagram.com/p/CPnqkZjJdBx/].

The "Freej Mayan" festival, organised by the Tourism Development Department, was held in Ajman's Heritage District and Souq Saleh on December 23 and 24, 2023. This event exemplified the department's dedication to preserving cultural heritage and fostering meaningful connections between the local community and its history.

The festival featured artistic performances by internationally renowned bands and traditional games set amidst the Heritage District of Souq Saleh. Interactive heritage workshops also offered attendees the opportunity to learn embroidery techniques on prints and craft traditional dolls. Moreover, visitors enjoyed a shopping experience at Freej Mayan's shops and participated in the "Khayt" initiative aimed at sustaining handicrafts in Souq Saleh.

The festival showcased the department's commitment to preserving cultural heritage while fostering cultural awareness within society through interactive platforms to showcase local heritage. The festival also served as a cornerstone in the department's ongoing efforts to safeguard cultural identity and cultivate a sense of pride and belonging among future generations. [For more information, visit: #Ajman_Tourism on Instagram].

Masfout Museum: Linking Heritage and Digital Communication

Masfout Museum, located amid stunning mountain views in Ajman, represents an important promotional attraction on social media to disseminate information about the region's history and rich heritage. Through the use of platforms such as Instagram, the museum allows virtual visitors to get a brief glimpse of its splendour, encouraging them to visit it in person to explore the diverse heritage of the region. [Link to Masfout Museum's announcement on Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/reel/C0OyGzMJ8Gj/].

Masfout Museum is considered a great example of how cultural institutions can benefit from social media to build a bridge between the digital world and the real experience, creating a virtual experience that attracts the attention of a global audience and invites them to visit it in person to learn about the local heritage.

The Internet's Role in Potential Expanding Public Access and Communication

The Internet plays a vital role in facilitating access to information and content across various channels. Ajman museums launched a digital platform to enable the public to have access to an interactive experience and learn about its most important sections, Ajman's history, most important professions, and popular markets.

Facilitating Cognitive and Emotional Communication

Ajman museums leverage the dynamics of social media to foster connections with its audience through indirect communication experiences. By encouraging individuals to partake in virtual interactions, museums cultivate an environment where virtual engagements enhance both communication and interaction. These initiatives aim to instill a profound desire among the public to personally visit museums and explore their exhibits.

Utilising social media as a tool to evoke emotion and deepen connections is a strategic approach in a time of growing fascination with digital experiences. By providing a glimpse into the rich cultural heritage preserved in Ajman museums, these platforms become catalysts for forging strong connections between the institution and its audience.

Conclusion

Ajman museums' engagement with social media demonstrates the remarkable efficacy of these platforms in cultural preservation, fostering community participation, and bolstering tourism promotion. The incorporation of social media into museum communication strategies has not only spread awareness but also significantly enhanced the experience for visitors and enthusiasts of cultural endeavours alike.

By blending tradition with modernity, Ajman museums use social media to reach people everywhere, making cultural heritage accessible to everyone around the world. This innovative approach surpasses conventional museum visits, fostering integration, instilling pride, and nurturing a sense of belonging amidst ongoing technological advancements. Moreover, it lays a robust foundation that actively shapes the future trajectory of cultural institutions.

Ajman museums has advanced in this evolving landscape, showcasing the transformative power of digital platforms in preserving and enriching cultural heritage through its dedication to educational initiatives and community cultural events. Its success in leveraging social media underscores the adaptability of cultural institutions and the influence that digital platforms wield in shaping the global cultural narrative. ■

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Impact of Social Media on Amplifying Museum Identity

The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 sparked a significant shift towards digital interaction across various facets of human life, with art and its venues playing a central role in this transformation. Social media platforms became vital channels for the expression of visual aesthetics, with cultural institutions embracing platforms like Facebook and Twitter, now "X," to showcase activities, seminars, conferences, and art exhibitions. Museums, in particular, emerged as prominent players in leveraging digital technologies to engage with audiences, navigating the challenges posed by the pandemic, which directly targeted their spaces. As a result, several international museums introduced the concept of Virtual Tours, using diverse methods such as live mobile photography within empty museum corridors or focusing on photographing artworks accompanied by interpretive explanations. Notably, the renowned Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain, exemplified this approach, effectively fostering interaction between its audience and collection.

Understanding the interplay between digitization and museum space is important today. Despite knowledge gaps regarding the pivotal cultural role museums play in their respective countries, digital technologies have emerged to clarify the significance of museums in documenting visual aesthetics digitally and to serve a worldwide audience without them actually visiting that space. By harnessing digitization to support their vision, museums elevate their identity, emanating from the rich collections and artistic works they house, thus enriching public knowledge. As Charles Tyler noted, “identity serves as a guiding force, delineating what is and is not significant to us.1” The concept of "museum identity," originally conceived to document a country's cultural essence, assumes a crucial role in preserving and cementing the existence of artistic values. In this digital age, combining museum identity with digital technologies transcends national boundaries, morphing into a visual and expressive identity. Thus, a question arises: How do digital technologies, particularly various social media networks, bolster this identity?

In addressing this question, it is imperative to examine two museum spaces that have adeptly employed these techniques: the Prado Museum in Madrid and the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, Palestine. Given my direct involvement in the digital activities of the latter, I will elaborate extensively on its approach.

However, first we explore the pioneering efforts of the Prado Museum, which pioneered the concept of "Virtual Tours.” This approach, as previously mentioned, emerged as a pivotal strategy for harnessing social media networks during periods of public isolation, offering virtual access to museum corridors to audiences interested in Spanish, European and international artwork. Without a doubt, this helped attract many enthusiasts to view the captivating artworks from afar. The museum went even further and provided explanatory captions for each artwork, recognising them as integral components of the museum's identity. By disseminating these works through social networks in a virtual realm, the museum not only amplified their visibility but also preserved and enhanced their cultural significance. As Pearce asserted, these works transcend mere representations to become "iconic" symbols, embodying profound meanings that reflect the essence and cultural heritage they encapsulate.

In this flourishing digital era, with its potential to profoundly influence the “shaping of the next generation's identity within an evolving and pervasive virtual culture[2]”, the consumption of digital exhibitions, archived images, and participation in virtual seminars... play a significant role in the cultivation of cultural identity for each “view.” We are witnessing a tangible shift in the cultural fabric of humanity. This transformation need not be perceived solely negatively; rather, it presents an opportunity for self-development through the use of technological advancements, thereby enriching one's existence.

In embracing digital platforms, we “combat” what Cesar Antonio Molina terms "digital naivety." We harness technological tools to “further help us, contribute to our personal development without forsaking our cherished values, best habits and our sources of knowledge3.” By fostering such digital interactions within museums, we inspire viewers and recipients to explore the cultural tapestry housed within these institutions.

In the case of the Palestinian Museum in Birzeit, Palestine, it has demonstrated a consistent and uninterrupted presence on social media networks. Using these platforms as dynamic communication channels, the museum effectively promoted its art exhibitions, artistic activities, scholarly seminars, cultural workshops and research initiatives. It actively engaged other Palestinian and international cultural forums, showcasing a diverse array of research and artistic activities it spearheads. This concerted effort underscores the museum's commitment to fostering a communicative relationship with social networks, with the primary objective being: (i) the documentation of the museum’s own identity followed by the broader cultural identity of Palestine, which permeates the artistic realm showcased within its exhibitions and activities; (ii) keeping abreast of digitization trends and archiving all events pertaining to its operations, ensuring accessibility for readers and researchers; and (iii) disseminating and preserving Palestinian culture on a global scale. The museum leverages social media platforms to transmit a comprehensive record of its activities, aiming to reach and engage with a diverse audience of followers and enthusiasts.

An example of the Palestinian Museum's effective use of social networks is evident in the promotion of its exhibition, "A People by the Sea: Narratives of the Palestinian Coast (1748-1948).” This exhibition delves into the historical narrative of Palestinian coastal cities within the 1948 territories, notably spotlighting Jaffa, Haifa, and Acre.

The museum offers a virtual tour of the exhibition through its YouTube channel, along with digitised documentation of various associated activities and art workshops. Additionally, the museum conducted introductory seminars via social media platforms, highlighting the value of coastal cities and the symbolism encapsulated within their trees, architecture, art and literature. I participated in one such seminar, titled "The Land of Oranges: Economy, Art and Social Structures." Organised by the Palestinian Museum in collaboration with Taqafya, the seminar garnered significant engagement on platforms like Facebook and X, fostering meaningful interaction between speakers and viewers. Attendees expressed keen interest in the "People by the Sea" exhibition, showcasing a digital coexistence with its collections, some of which were featured across social networks.

The initial concept of promoting the exhibition through social media channels, coupled with ongoing updates on exhibition activities via the museum's official pages on platforms like Facebook, X, and Instagram, played a pivotal role in portraying the cultural and artistic landscape of Palestine. For virtual visitors unable to physically attend the exhibition, it offered them a digital avenue to explore the historical heritage of Palestinian cities an aspect unknown to many. Harnessing the power of the digital age, this exhibition aimed to dispel ignorance by shedding light on lesser-known historical narratives for viewers and enthusiasts. Through social media platforms, the landmarks and themes depicted in the exhibition become accessible, contributing to the collective memory of society.

Further, as the minute photographs are taken of the exhibition and shared through these networks, their contents transform into "memory," as articulated by Jacques Le Goff, manifesting “not only in textual records but also in conversations, images, symbols, rituals and commemorations.4”

Exploring Museum Identity through Social Media Networks

What motivates the public to engage with the webpages of international museums and their publications?

[1] Tyler, C. (1992). Sources of the Self : The Making of the Modern Identity, Translate by Haider Haj Ismail, Beirut: Arab Organisation for Translation, 2014, p. 75.5

[2] Greenfield, S. (2015). Mind Change: How Digital Technologies are Leaving Their Mark on Our Brains. Translated by Ihab Abdel Rahim Ali, Kuwait: World of Knowledge Series, 2017, p. 141.1

[3] Molina, C. (n.d.). How Beautiful it Would be Living Without Culture. Translated by Hosni Malaitat, Kuwait: Takween Publications, 2022, p. 87.

[4] Le Goeff, J. (1996) History and Memory, translated by Jamal Shehayed, Beirut: Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, 2017, p. 162.2

Is it a quest for personal identity or rather a means of exploring the collective identity of these institutions, thereby delving into cultural identity? The answer lies in the notion of "postmodern identity," as articulated by Darren Barney in "The Network Society," wherein identity is perceived as "a multifaceted construct shaped by a myriad of relationships, choices and actions across various contexts.[5]" This overlapping dynamic plays a crucial role in shaping the nexus between the individual and museums within a network environment.

Consider the content curated by a museum Facebook page — a communicative practice aimed at constructing a digital discourse through images, videos, and written texts. These representations convey symbolic and iconic meanings, facilitating the interpretation of cultural structures, highlighting the intellectual trajectory of museums, and spotlighting their contribution to the educational journey of the individual, thereby augmenting their sense of identity. As a result, many actively seek to engage with these pages, continuously revisiting their outputs as they fulfil the aforementioned functions.

A significant avenue for uncovering museum identity lies in engaging with interactive virtual tours offered by museums, coupled with insightful analyses of their artistic collections. For example, the Prado Museum's continuous live broadcasts of "introductory" videos. These videos provide viewers with an in-depth overview of the museum's current status, recent acquisitions, and detailed explanations of its significant works of art, spanning Spanish and European art history.

For instance, just two days ago, the museum released a video featuring Manel Reyes, a museum staff member, presenting historical artworks housed in Hall 41. What was particularly striking is the high level of interaction —be it through likes, comments, or shares. Such videos serve as an alternative for individuals who may not be able to visit the exhibition in person, allowing them to immerse themselves in the visual aesthetics captured by the camera. It was also notable that museum staff members delivered their explanations in both Spanish and English, underscoring the museum's commitment to global outreach as stated earlier. This exemplifies the overarching goal of communication networks—to fortify museum identity and transcend its local confines, ultimately fostering the dissemination and preservation of this identity on a global scale.

The Reina Sofia Museum in Madrid also uses social media platforms—particularly Facebook—as a primary tool for showcasing its artistic and cultural identity. Among its strategies, the museum presents a curated selection of drawings accompanied by succinct narratives. The museum also provides updates on conservation activities, promotes documentaries supported by the institution, and highlights cultural and academic workshops and seminars conducted in collaboration with Madrid-based Spanish universities.

However, the level of engagement with the museum's posts is lower compared to the Prado Museum's page. This variance can be attributed, in my view, to the former's reliance on static imagery as opposed to the latter's use of dynamic visuals. In today's digital world, there's a heightened preference for dynamic imagery as it fosters a more interactive experience, prompting greater engagement between the viewer and the content. This also applies to the Palestinian Museum, which, akin to the Reina Sofia Museum, predominantly features static imagery. Whether static or dynamic, imagery serves as, in the words of Gilles Deleuze, "the sum of lines or shapes of light, the chain of masses of space-time. 6"

Both approaches via social networks carry significant intellectual value, offering us an opportunity to explore and comprehend our diverse cultural elements. Museums serve as a conduit for preserving, disseminating, and communicating these cultural components, both locally and internationally. As museums maintain an active digital presence, consistently updating their platforms with fresh content and documenting their cultural identity, they invite broad engagement and vital participation. This plays a pivotal role in reinforcing the museum's identity, introducing it to a wider audience, and effectively conveying its cultural narratives to those interested in the depicted fields. ■

[5] Barney, D. (2004). The Network Society. Translated by Anwar Al-Jamawi, Beirut: Arab Centre for Research and Policy Studies, 2015, p. 187.

Impact of Social Media on the Cultural Experiences of Museums:

The Case Study of Djerbahood in Tunisia

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Introduction:

This article focuses on the contribution of social media to the relevance of the museums' cultural experience. It is an attempt to shed light on a new way of seeing and living this heritage. Indeed, the research looks at the emblematic case of Djerbahood, a cultural project on the island of Djerba in Tunisia, which has been created by transforming a small village into a cultural place, comparable to an open-air museum thanks to the intervention of urban art. The main objective is to illustrate how through social media, the cultural space will become a kind of platform or interface, which is based on an infinite number of scripts. The article begins by contextualising the role of social media as a component of digital culture and explaining how they influence the cultural experience of museums. It then looks at the impact of social media in spreading Djerbahood 's unique experience to the public, examining how the photos and videos shared have attracted the attention of visitors, transforming this monument from a static space to an architecture who promote a new form of story, a story told by the user himself. Based on the results of this study, the article highlights how this initiative can serve as a model to connect museums and cultural spaces with the population.

Museums and the Digitisation of Visitor Experience

With the emergence of digital technology and the digital revolution, museums are beginning to evolve to adapt to this new technological era. Unlike cultural institutions of the past, where museums were self-deterministic, in the 21st century, new digital directions, and the very nature of the enterprise has by necessity become a shared endeavour between the museum and its audience, and the general public (Tula Giannini, 2019, p45). Indeed, today's visitors are part of the connected generation that projects its cultural interests through its digital experiences. Cultural institutions are thus moving towards the digitalisation of visitor experience in order to regain communication with Generation Z.

Researchers are increasingly interested in this problematic evolution. The book (Museum Futures, 2021) highlights the integration of virtual experiences and artificial intelligence into the exhibition and presentation of artworks.

According to Gutierrez, the digitalisation of the museum experience is a kind of reconnection with the community (Turia + Kant, 2021, p427) that serves to re-create the link between cultural institutions and the general public. Reflecting on the future of museums in the digital age, John H Falk and Lynn D Dierking affirm that digital life and culture is radically changing real space in the physical museum as it merges and becomes part of a new digital culture ecosystem-one that embraces diversity, inclusion, complexity and contemporary art and culture (Giannini, 2019, p34). The authors highlight the new digital ecosystem that reflects the complexity of the contemporary cultural experience and the relationship between the museum and the new generation of visitors. This radical transformation is the result of the integration of digital technology into museum culture and the art world. Indeed, museums have become complex environments that bring together the real and the virtual by creating a digitised museum culture adapted to a connected audience. In "Museum Experience Revisited" (2020), John H Falk and Lynn Dierking offer an in-depth reflection on the evolution

of museums towards an approach centred on the visitor experience. The book highlights the interactive nature of visitor experience in museums and cultural exhibitions. Focusing on the behaviour, needs and expectations of contemporary visitors, the study focuses on the social dimension of the museum experience that begins before the museum visit and continues after the visit. This experience could determine the relationship between the general public and the cultural site and guide visitor choices. People visit museums in order to satisfy specific, often highly personal and/or sociocultural needs (H Falk, D Dierking, 2016, p 33). In order to re-establish the relationship with the contemporary generation, museums are increasingly interested in integrating the museum experience into the socio-cultural environment of this generation, which projects develop through digital experience and digital interaction.

A report prepared by "Axiell" examines the digitaliation of the museum experience by presenting different approaches to the integration of digital into the visitor experience. The book sheds light on various digital techniques embedded in museums, such as digital immersion and mobile apps that serve to boost exhibition accessibility. The report also addresses the use of social media as a means of communication between cultural institutions and the community. TATE MODERN, UK is one of the projects presented in the study as examples of museums that offer a digital socio-cultural experience to its visitors, through engagement in different platforms and social media, such as Facebook, X and Instagram.

Social Media and Museums

Museums can be categorised into four according to the results of the analysis: sleepers, social-oriented, visit-oriented and experience-oriented (De Bernardi & Gilli, 2019, p163). Taking a closer look at this categorisation, Parsehyan defines Sleepers as museums that do not bond with their visitors prior to or after their visits (ŞAMLIOĞLU, 2020, p3547). On the other hand, the author defines social-oriented museums as those who have invested in social media and web services. They also connect with their visitors on a daily basis and form a following (ŞAMLIOĞLU, 2020, p3547). This category of museums is interested in connecting with visitors by engaging in digitalisation, adapting to the digital culture of the contemporary community. However, Parsehyan is focusing on another more developed approach to digitalisation through the study of experience-oriented (De Bernardi & Gilli, 2019, p163) Musems. It is a visitor-centric approach that offers immersive experiences that foster interaction and interactivity through social media and the physical experience of visitors. This approach sees the visit itself as an immersive experience, in addition to having a social media presence and digitalising their contents (ŞAMLIOĞLU, 2020, p3547). In fact, various museums are now moving towards this approach, which suggests digitising museum culture through the digitisation of visitor experience and the integration of social media in communication with the community. According to Parsehyan, the integration of social media into the experience of museum visitors concerns the "pre-visit stage" which integrates the services offered by the museum site and the social media that influence the decision visit (Parsehyan, 2021, p3544). The author argues that the media coverage of museums via digital platforms and social networks could encourage the general public to visit these places and ensure communication between museum and visitors, beyond the physical experience.

In his thesis (Delrieu, 2016), Delrieu touches on the roles of social media in the media coverage of museums and cultural spaces. The study examines how the presence of museums on connected media such as Snapchat and Tiktok contributes to the visibility of cultural spaces and the dissemination of exhibitions to the general public. Delrieu believes that digital media coverage of museums could boost the visitor experience. In this context, this research focuses on studying the impact of social media on visits to cultural spaces and museums, by presenting the case study of Djerbahood in Tunisia, which represents an example of a museum mediated through social networks.

The Experience of Djerbahood: Studying the Impact of Social Media on Cultural Perception

Our research focused on immersive museum activities on the Internet and more specifically on social networks. Indeed, with the development of various virtual communication tools, museums have come up against this change and have tried to broaden the narrow scope of their walls and to assert their identity no longer as closed and closed institutions but open to the world and its audience (Landry, 2008, p1). Indeed, this new cultural visibility in cyberspace has established a new mode of exchange, and of sharing both subjective and intuitive.

It is in this sense that we have been interested in the case of Djerbahood, an open-air museum located on the island of Djerba in Tunisia. Art has taken its place in the valorisation of the material and intangible heritage of the neighbourhoods of the village ERRIADH formerly "HARA Sghira". Indeed, it is a grouping of the works of about 100 artists from all over the world, to support this initiative to showcase the "HARA" that started in 2014 and continues until today[4]. This urban museum project allowed artists to play with the infrastructure and architecture of the Erriadh neighbourhoods, and the public space to create a street art. This cultural

[4] Le Courrier de l'UNESCO, 2, p 21-23, https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000367839



Figure 1: Example of Street art in Djerbahood [5]

initiative was the vision of the Franco-Tunisian artist and Street Art specialist Mahdi BEN SHEIK in order to revive the narrow streets of the neighbourhood, creating a whole route that promotes immersion and discovery. The floors, the walls of the village have been painted with several frescoes, and where Graffiti and Tags have invaded the facades of several buildings.

Indeed, since the project began, dozens of local and foreign tourists have faded every day, creating a stream of important photos and images on social media, through the intuitive media coverage of these visitors. The high visibility of the site through the cameras of visitors has prompted users of social platforms such as Facebook and Instagram to discover and take a closer interest in the phenomenon of Djerbahood. It is a new relationship between the cultural space and the public, through the medium of virtual applications. This ephemeral nature of content on platforms creates a kind of visual narrative to the works, a storytelling similar to oral storytelling6. Indeed, this virtual representation that Djerbahood has experienced on the various platforms has helped to promote it as a new kind of cultural destination.

To this end, we developed a questionnaire for social media users to explore the impact of this project and social media on this cultural perception. Disseminated on social networks, the questionnaire focuses on the impact of the virtual world on the cultural experience and especially on the role of social media in influencing the perception of culture and the arts in Tunisia. In this quantitative study, we collected responses from 102 people who use social media. The results we were able to gather show that 91% of social media users use the platforms several times a day. This means that these platforms provide daily points of contact to interact with a large part of the population. Indeed, 80% of respondents know about Djerbahood on the networks, and believe that Djerbahood has impacted their perception of museums and cultural spaces in Tunisia. Thus, we can confirm that Djerbahood represents an example of museums that deserves to be studied in depth.

Our research showed that 68.1% of the people who responded to the questionnaire discovered Djerbahood through social networks (Instagram, Facebook, X, etc.). After Djerbahood's artistic intervention, the space became a cultural venue that welcomed artists, historians and visitors from different regions and countries. Indeed, the

[5] https://djerbahood.com/portfolio/vajo/

[6] Elena Villaespesa, Sara Wowkowych, « Storytelling éphémère à travers les réseaux sociaux », https://publications-prairial.fr/balisages/index.php?id=48.

media coverage of this international event has attracted the interest of influencers and content creators who constantly visit the village and share photos and real-life stories of their visits, in order to attract followers and to always be up to date. Located on the famous tourist island of Djerba, Djerbahood is still becoming a destination for tourists and visitors to the island who take advantage of their stay to share its experiences in this iconic cultural exhibition. It was through memories shared on social media that people discovered this open-air museum.

In addition, 57.9% of the respondents confirmed that they visited Djerbahood, and 75.4% of them made their decisions because of the photos and experiences shared on social networks. In addition, 74.6% of respondents who have not yet visited the museum say they plan to do so in the future. These results also show that social networks make a strong contribution to the media and the use of space. The general public approves an interest in the museum, even before visiting it. Photographs, video montages, and shared stories have evolved into channels of communication and appreciation, enabling visitors to actively engage with exhibitions and immerse themselves in the artwork, effectively becoming part of the exhibition experience. Photographs and videos shared by visitors have helped create a form of immersion: mental transport in the imagination, a fictitious image that allows the museum to perceive in another way in cyberspace. It is no longer a question of the spectator facing the work, but of the spectator facing a representation of the work. Social networks have allowed people to share their own experience, their personal experience through a story told in the stories of the different platforms, thereby influencing the perception of Djerbahood.

Focusing research on the impact of social media on museum perceptions, we asked: To what extent has Djerbahood's presence on social media strengthened connections with the population? 57.6 per cent of the respondents said "yes considerably". We also found that 65% of respondents found that social media had a strong influence on their general perception of culture and art. Thus, the virtual presence of museums is essential to its recognition in the real world; hence the need for museums to invest in cyberspace and in the digital socio-cultural life of a connected contemporary generation. Indeed, social media could contribute to the valorisation of museums and cultural sites by transforming itself into places of communication and reconnection between museums and the general public.

Conclusion:

In short, the future of museums in the age of social media suggests immense potential. By taking a participatory approach, museums could re-connect with the general public by working to engage the visitor in the museum experience. Indeed, our study proposes to develop the role of the public by transforming it from an observer visitor to an active participant who acts, interacts with the cultural experience, especially through social networks. ■

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Museum Educational Platforms:

Navigating Opportunities and Challenges in the Digital Landscape

Over the last two decades, digital technology has undergone remarkable integration into contemporary society. This swift integration has propelled museums into a continuous quest to leverage its benefits, aiming to enrich the visitor experience both within their physical spaces and beyond walls as well as explore innovative ways to reach broader audiences and enrich engagements with their collections. Furthermore, these technologies offer extensive opportunities for archiving and re-presenting museum content, including exhibitions and permanent collections, in various formats such as virtual exhibitions which facilitates access to museum content from different locations, both during and after the conclusion of exhibition periods.

In this vibrant context, museums have adeptly employed a variety of available technologies in diverse forms, spanning from websites to interactive display devices seamlessly integrated within exhibitions. Concurrently, there has been a concerted effort towards crafting captivating digital content tailored for both in museum experiences and display on digital platforms. The emergence of social media networks and mobile applications has ushered in new realms of interaction with museum content, fostering deeper engagement opportunities. Moreover, innovative technologies such as augmented reality have elevated the participatory nature of museum experience, offering visitors immersive and enriching learning experience.

The evolution of digital technology and the increase in innovation opportunities have coincided with significant shifts in museum trends. Initially, the first generation of science



The educational platform of the Metropolitan Museum of Art
www.metmuseum.org/metkids

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Rami Muhtaseb, a specialist in digital learning, earned his doctorate in educational technology from the University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom. His research delved into the influence of Arab culture on digital technology usage in formal and informal learning, particularly within the Palestinian context. Dr. Muhtaseb currently serves as a researcher and consultant in digital learning. He played a key role in developing the museum educational platform "Sanasel: We Play Together, We Learn Together" in collaboration with a team from the Palestinian Museum. His research interests span digital collaboration, scientific communication via social media, and the integration of digital technology in both formal and informal learning environments.

Dr. RAMI MUHTASEB



Sanasel: Play Together, Learn Together, www.sanasel.org

museums predominantly centred around static displays of artefacts, neatly collected and showcased in boxes. Subsequent generations saw the introduction of interactive elements, where visitors could activate exhibits through buttons. However, it was the third generation of museums that truly revolutionised the visitor experience. They prioritised interactive exhibits, designed to foster exploration and engage multiple senses, transforming museum galleries into immersive environments of discovery. Today, as we move into the fourth generation of museums, there's a visionary shift towards prioritising dialogue and active participation, particularly regarding pertinent social scientific issues, within their exhibitions. This forward-thinking approach seeks to create dynamic spaces where visitors are not just observers but active contributors to the discourse, shaping the museum experience in profound ways.

Within this dynamic context, digital technologies offer diverse opportunities for visitor interaction and engagement with museum content. This holds particularly true across art, cultural, and history museums, where innovative methods for displaying, preserving, and interacting with content have become increasingly accessible both during and after the museum visit.

Today, there's a growing emphasis on developing educational museum platforms aimed at enriching the learning experience and fortifying the museum's connection with its audience.

These platforms offer interactive and customisable avenues for presenting information, catering to the diverse interests and preferences of museum visitors. By embracing these digital advancements, museums can effectively transcend traditional boundaries, fostering deeper engagement and enriching the overall visitor experience.

Educational platform Sanasel: Play Together, Learn Together

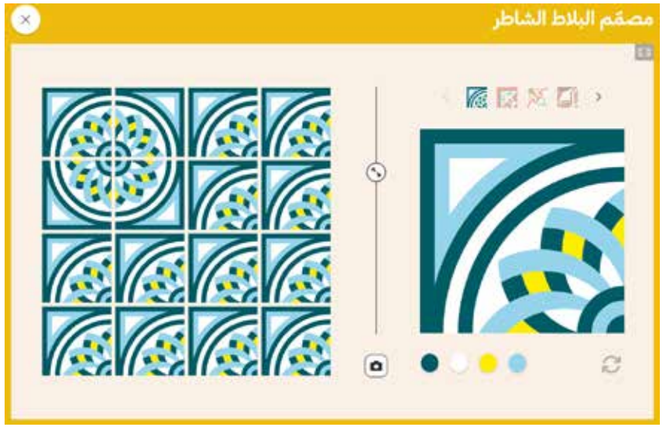
In this section, we delve into the innovative features and key aspects of the Sanasel (Terrace walls in Arabic) educational platform, the first of its kind as an educational museum website in Arabic, launched by the Palestinian Museum in July 2023. It caters to a wide audience, including children, adolescents, families, teachers and individuals engaged in learning about the rich history and culture of Palestine. The platform offers a diverse range of educational activities, including animations, games and virtual tours, along with valuable resources tailored for teachers and educators across multiple themes. Sanasel fosters self-expression and encourages the sharing of opinions and ideas. What sets it apart is its incorporation of elements of fun, surprise and exploration, achieved through interactive content presented under four themes that form the foundation of the platform's design and content:

Explore: the educational platform offers a gateway to free-choice learning experiences, enabling users to explore a diverse array of topics inspired by the exhibitions, activities and projects of the Palestinian Museum. It also endeavours to reimagine museum content, including the museum's permanent collections, in interactive and simplified formats, using different formats such as audio recordings, visual presentations, and virtual tours.

Create: users are presented with a plethora of themed activities designed to foster the creation of digital or tangible artefacts. Drawing inspiration from the exhibitions of the Palestinian Museum, these activities offer the chance to engage with museum content and apply it in various settings—be it at home, the park, neighbourhood, school, or even within the museum itself. Moreover, visitors are encouraged to share their creations with their communities or the museum's audience, either directly on the platform or through social media channels. This section also features introductory activities related to the workings of the Palestinian Museum, such as the restoration and preservation of collections, artistic works, and the archiving of historical documents.

Play: Through this section, visitors engage in a series of cognitive experiences, intriguing quizzes, and challenges designed to enrich their experiences and foster skill development. The games are designed to accommodate various levels and ages. They simulate educational issues, artworks, and topics inspired by museum exhibitions and artistic works. The section also includes activities that introduce prominent figures (artists, scientists, etc.) and exploring locales, with a focus on using elements of surprise and suspense.

Connect: This section aims to enhance audience engagement with the museum by informing visitors about its activities and enabling them to express impressions, opinions, ideas, and share suggestions in ways that encourage free expression and constructive contribution. It also encourages the audience to share their productions and experiences, such as sharing artworks and audio content. Looking ahead, the platform aims to cultivate communities of interest centred around themes inspired by the museum's exhibitions and projects.



Sanasel Educational Platform Activity: The Creative Tiles Designer

Target Audience

While museums strive to engage a broad audience through their educational platforms, catering to diverse demographics can introduce complexities in platform design and content presentation. For example, it is important to clearly separate sections for children from those targeted at adults (such as teachers). Content tailored for children should consider elements like colour schemes, simplified language, and interactive features (such as using animated cartoon characters). Conversely, educators should be provided with straightforward access to museum content tailored to them.

The design of the Sanasel educational platform aims to offer visitors a dynamic and personalised experience. This is achieved through the appearance of a touch controlled "Wheel of Fortune" on the main screen. The "Surprise Me" option on the main page also appears, offering a random activity selection. The visual identity of the platform facilitates the audience's seamless transition between its four actions. Moreover, the platform offers a wealth of educational resources curated specifically for educators, encompassing a diverse range of interactive materials to enrich curricular and extracurricular learning experiences.

Platform Technology

The choice of technology used in developing educational platforms should align with the preferences and habits of the target audience. For example, it's necessary to research which types of electronic devices are most used by platform visitors (mobile phones, tablets, personal computers) in order to prioritise them in design and consider them at all stages of platform development and

activities. There is also the possibility of building educational platforms as either websites or mobile applications. Websites stand out for their compatibility with all devices, as well as their ability to be viewed from any internet browser. On the other hand, mobile applications provide better interactivity but may limit access to the platform through personal computers.

There are also numerous considerations that influence the selection of technology used in building the platform, such as cost, target audience's age group, and technology support for the languages intended to be displayed on the platform. However, paramount in my perspective is recognising that the process of developing and updating activities on educational platforms is an ongoing process. Therefore, it's important to consider the use of open-source technologies in building the platform.



Arabic Calligraphy Reading Exercise | Sanasel

It's also useful to research or develop reusable activity-building tools, allowing the creation of engaging and interactive learning experiences through interactive videos, presentations, quizzes, and memory games. This streamlines the integration of new activities into the platform with minimal effort, ensuring its sustainability, as some technologies offer abundant free resources for educational platforms.

Social Media Integration

In the initial stages of educational platform design, it's crucial to explore avenues for integration between the platform being developed and the museum's websites and its channels on social media platforms. This integration offers visitors the chance to delve deeper into museum content, enhancing engagement between the museum and its audience. Additionally, social media serves as a powerful tool for promoting the platform by promoting new activities on various museum channels. For example, the Sanasel educational platform features a “Click here if you liked this activity” option under each activity, enabling users to effortlessly share activities on social media platforms. Further, by activating a platform or activity-specific hashtag on social media, visitors can share the activities and their creations via social media (e.g., share your work on #theplatform).

At this juncture, it is imperative to underscore the need to prioritise privacy and security policies, particularly in educational platforms tailored for children. The museum's responsibility to protect personal data necessitates meticulous attention to how user data is handled during platform navigation, ensuring the utmost protection of user privacy. Given that a significant portion of platform users comprises children or adolescents, this aspect carries heightened importance. It's important to note that most platforms recommend voluntary registration, soliciting limited personal data such as name and age, alongside an option to provide an email for receiving newsletters.

Educational Platform Goals and Sustainability

Sustaining the educational platform hinges on innovative activities and a steady influx within a specific timeline, all while considering financial viability and promotional strategies. Accordingly, museums must prepare a comprehensive outreach strategy to engage the target audience and familiarise them with the platform's offerings from inception. Promoting the platform and reaching a wider audience can be achieved through sharing new activities across the museum's social media platforms, and it's important to consider strategic scheduling, such as releasing activities tailored for children during school holidays. The platform can also garner attention through interactive screens during museum events.

Beyond activities, it is important to leverage cutting-edge digital technologies (tools, applications) and continuously explore options for integrating emerging technologies to enhance interactivity in platform activities. It is also vital to establish a dedicated team to oversee activity development and synchronize platform content with museum exhibitions. The platform can be used as a tool to engage with the public and encourage their involvement in the activities organised by the museum within its galleries, thus enhancing the complementarity between the actual aspect of the activities and the technical aspect.

Fostering a participatory environment within the digital platform is invaluable. This involves encouraging visitors to share their impressions, ideas and creations from their museum visits, as well as actively incorporating participatory content and activities where the public's contributions are featured prominently. For example, an option like “Submit your work to the Virtual Visitors’ Exhibition” can be found in the "Create" section of the Sanasel educational platform.

It's also important to continue tracking reports and success indicators on the platform, including accessing data and statistics provided by tools such as Google Analytics or Piano, which provides insights into audience demographics, geographic distribution and areas of interest. This helps understand audience preferences and identifies areas that deserve greater focus. It is beneficial to establish partnerships with educational institutions so that diverse segments of the museum audience —students, teachers, researchers— ensure a steady influx of new educational materials.

Research and Evaluation

The exploration of digital technology use within museums has garnered significant global interest. There is also a growing emphasis on investigating how digital tools can enhance educational experiences, given their capacity to facilitate various forms of interactivity. Anna Kraft (2013) outlines four key attributes that characterise learning in the digital era, fostering children's and youth's creativity: plurality, playfulness, participation and possibilities. Educational platforms can also be utilised for researching informal learning in museums, as the data that can be collected through the educational platform, alongside visitor engagement statistics, present a robust dataset for research in the field of museum learning. Moreover, educational platforms offer an opportunity for bespoke evaluation tools tailored to both physical and virtual museum activities.

Literature also reveals an ongoing dialogue surrounding digitization and its impact on replacing the in-person experience with a virtual one, impacting engagement with visitors. This makes it imperative for museums to strike a balance between the digital aspect and the tangible aspect when transferring the digital experience to their exhibit halls. Furthermore, understanding the cultural context is paramount. It is important to study the impact of local norms and values on the acceptance of digitizing museum content and its suitability for this culture before digitizing museum content and displaying it through museum platforms.

Reflecting on the insights provided, it is evident that Arab museums must invest in innovative technological solutions to expand their digital presence and engage a broader audience. Therefore, continuous research into advancements in digital tools and their potential implications for the museum experience is crucial, taking into consideration the local context when identifying opportunities while aligning with the vision and objectives of these establishments. ■

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Unleashing the Potential:

How AI Empowers Museums' Virtual Engagement and Global Connections via Social Media

Abstract

In the digital era, museums use social media to reach a global audience. This research focuses on the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) in enhancing virtual engagement and global connections. AI can analyse large datasets and optimise engagement strategies. AI algorithms help museums understand audience preferences, customise content, and deliver personalised experiences across social media platforms. AI technologies like natural language processing automate content moderation, sentiment analysis, and translation tasks, improving interactions with a diverse audience. AI-driven recommendation systems suggest relevant content based on user preferences, fostering deeper engagement and connecting visitors with museum collections aligned with their interests. AI also facilitates cross-cultural connections by breaking language barriers and enabling museums to engage with international audiences in their native languages. It analyses social media data to identify trends and audience sentiments, allowing museums to adapt engagement strategies. Ethical considerations include responsible AI use, data privacy, and transparency to ensure positive user experience and visitor trust. AI empowers museums to optimise content, personalise experiences, and create inclusive and connected virtual environments through social media.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, AI, museums, virtual engagement, social media, global connections.

Introduction

In digital age, museums embrace new technologies to enhance their engagement with audiences and expand their global reach. One such technology that has gained significant attention is Artificial Intelligence (AI) (Díaz-Rodríguez & Pisoni, 2020). Through AI-powered virtual engagement and social media platforms, museums can unleash their potential by creating immersive experiences and fostering global connections with audiences like never before; this introduction explores transformative impact of AI on museums' virtual engagement and its ability to connect with audiences worldwide through social media (McMillen & Alter, 2017).

Traditionally, museums have served as physical repositories of cultural artefacts, limited by physical space and geographic boundaries. With advent of AI, museums are breaking free from these constraints and entering digital realm. AI enables museums to create virtual exhibitions and immersive experiences that anyone can access anytime and from anywhere (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). This virtual engagement brings art, history, and culture directly to screens of individuals worldwide, democratising access to knowledge and fostering a sense of inclusivity and diversity (Savaget et al., 2019).

In past, museum visits often entailed a passive experience for visitors, limited to observing and reading about exhibits without opportunity for interaction. In latter half of 20th century, museums began shifting towards more user-centred approach, encouraging visitors to engage with



Figure 1: AI on Museums' Virtual Engagement and Global Connections

sites and objects actively, form their interpretations, and interact with materials (Giannini & Bowen, 2019; Gaia et al., 2019). This shift was supported by established guidelines set forth by UNESCO and ICOMOS, which advocate for conservation, protection, and promotion of cultural heritage sites. Cultural heritage organisations now strive to offer activities, programmes, and spaces that are welcoming to diverse audiences to foster positive and long-lasting relationships between visitors and cultural heritage they encounter (Grincheva, 2023).

With their vast user bases and global reach, social media platforms have become powerful tools for museums to connect with audiences on global scale. AI algorithms empower museums to tailor their content, recommendations, and interactions based on user preferences and demographics, thus personalising virtual museum experience (Giannini & Bowen, 2019). Through social media, museums can engage in real-time conversations, share behind-scenes glimpses, and provide interactive educational content that sparks curiosity and fosters community among art enthusiasts, students, researchers, and public (French & Villaespesa, 2019).

AI-powered analytics and data mining enable museums to gain valuable insights into audience preferences, behaviours, and interests. This

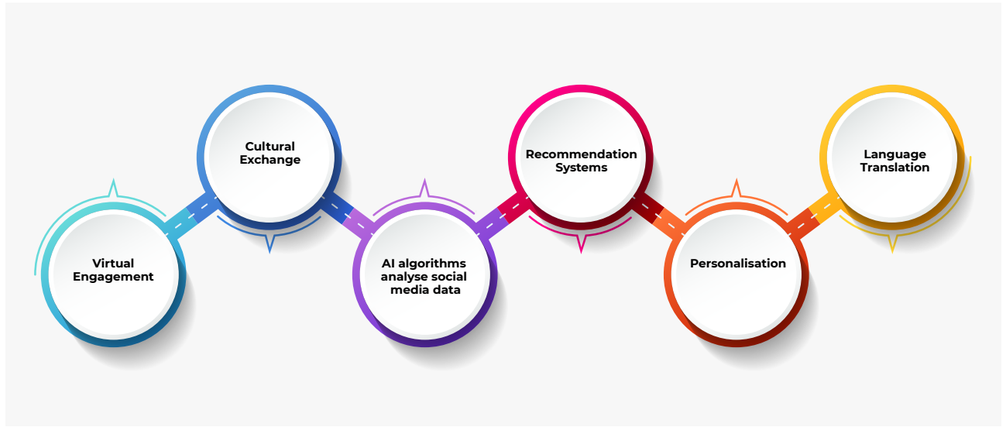


Figure 2: Impact of AI on Museums' Global Connections

information allows museums to refine content strategies, develop targeted marketing campaigns, and curate exhibitions that resonate with virtual visitors. AI algorithms can also facilitate discovering hidden connections and patterns within vast collections, enabling museums to present new narratives and interpretations and enrich visitor experience (French & Villaespesa, 2019).

As museums embrace AI technologies, ethical considerations must be considered; data privacy, algorithm bias, and digital divide are addressed to ensure equitable access and fair representation (Grincheva, 2023). It is important to balance virtual engagement and physical museum experiences, recognising that AI complements, rather than replaces, tangible and multisensory encounters that physical museums offer (Savaget et al., 2019).

AI has unleashed new possibilities for museums to engage audiences virtually and establish global connections through social media (Gaia et al., 2019). By harnessing power of AI, museums can transcend physical boundaries, democratise access to cultural heritage, and create immersive experiences that inspire and educate audiences worldwide (Pisoni et al., 2021). Navigating ethical considerations and balancing virtual and physical realms is crucial to ensure holistic and inclusive museum experience. The aim of research is to explore how AI can enhance museums' virtual engagement and foster global connections through social media platforms.

AI and Virtual Engagement

In the digital era, museums constantly seek innovative ways to engage with their audiences beyond the physical walls of their institutions (French & Villaespesa, 2019). With the advent of social media platforms, museums have found powerful means to reach global audiences and create virtual connections. Simply having presence on social media is not enough to effectively engage with diverse and dispersed audiences (Grincheva, 2023). This is where artificial intelligence (AI) emerges as transformative technology that empowers museums to enhance their virtual engagement strategies (Giannini & Bowen, 2019).

Artificial intelligence (AI) empowers museums to enhance their virtual engagement strategies and create meaningful connections with global audiences through social media (McMillen & Alter, 2017). By leveraging AI algorithms, museums can analyse vast amounts of data, gain insights into audience preferences, and deliver personalised experiences across social media platforms (Díaz-Rodríguez & Pisoni, 2020). AI's ability to process data and identify patterns allows museums to tailor their content and engagement strategies, optimising the virtual experience for each visitor (Savaget et al., 2019). AI automates content moderation and sentiment analyses tasks, freeing up resources for museums to focus on creating compelling content and fostering interactions (French & Villaespesa, 2019). AI-powered recommendation systems further enhance engagement by suggesting relevant content based on user preferences, increasing continued engagement and exploration of museum collections (Gaia et al., 2019). AI unleashes potential for museums to expand their reach, engage with diverse audiences, and foster global connections through virtual platforms.

AI and Global Connections

In today's digital age, museums are no longer limited by physical boundaries and can reach a global audience



Figure 3: Impact of AI on Social Media Data Analysis for Museums

through social media platforms. Artificial intelligence (AI) plays pivotal role in enabling museums to establish meaningful connections and engage with international audiences on personalised level (Díaz-Rodríguez & Pisoni, 2020). AI-powered technologies such as natural language processing and machine translation have revolutionised communication by breaking language barriers (Grincheva, 2023). Museums can utilise AI to automatically translate their content into multiple languages, ensuring visitors worldwide can access and comprehend the information presented; the expands the museum's reach and promotes inclusivity and cultural exchange (Gaia et al., 2019).

AI-driven recommendation systems contribute to global connections by connecting visitors with museum collections that align with their interests, regardless of geographical location, by analyzing user preferences, behaviours, and past interactions, these systems suggest relevant content and exhibits to individuals (French & Villaespesa, 2019). Visitors from different corners of globe can explore and engage with museum collections that resonate with their personal tastes and cultural backgrounds (Pisoni et al., 2021). This personalised approach enhances the visitor experience, fosters sense of connection, and cultivates deeper appreciation for diverse cultural heritage (McMillen & Alter, 2017). By leveraging AI technologies, museums can transcend borders, bridge cultural gaps, and create global network of cultural institutions and audiences, fostering shared sense of community through virtual engagement.

By applying AI algorithms to LIDAR data, Ababneh et al. (2022) automate the identification and classification of Gadara Tunnel within the scanned environment. AI helped segment and extract relevant information from the point cloud data generated by LIDAR, making it easier to analyse and interpret the captured information. Machine learning algorithms are also trained to recognise specific patterns or structures in the LIDAR data, enabling automated detection and characterization of features of interest. Also, this data assisted in the fusion of LIDAR data with other sensor data of GPS, to create more comprehensive and accurate models.

AI and Social Media Data Analysis

In the digital age, social media has become critical platform for museums to connect with their audiences and share their collections and stories (Savaget et al., 2019). The vast amount of data generated on social media can be overwhelming for museums to analyse effectively; this is where artificial intelligence (AI) plays crucial role (French & Villaespesa, 2019). AI technologies offer museums powerful social media data analysis tools, enabling them to gain valuable insights and enhance their virtual engagement.

By leveraging AI algorithms, museums can process and analyse large volumes of social media data, extracting meaningful information and understanding audience preferences, interests, and behaviours; this knowledge empowers museums to tailor their content and engagement strategies to better resonate with their target audience (Díaz-Rodríguez & Pisoni, 2020). AI-powered recommendation systems can suggest relevant content and exhibits to individual users, creating personalised experience that enhances visitor engagement (French & Villaespesa, 2019). AI-driven social media data analysis provides

museums with valuable insights into audience sentiment, enabling them to adapt their strategies in real-time and make informed decisions to optimise their social media presence.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are of utmost importance when utilising artificial intelligence (AI) in social media strategies for museums. Museums must prioritise responsible AI use by ensuring that AI algorithms and systems are ethically designed and deployed (McMillen & Alter, 2017). Respecting user privacy and obtaining informed consent requires clear communication about data collection and usage practices. Transparency is key, as museums should explain how AI algorithms analyse data and influence content recommendations (French & Villaespesa, 2019). Bias and discrimination must be actively mitigated, as AI algorithms are prone to biases in data they are trained on. User empowerment and control should be promoted, allowing users to personalise their experiences and control their data (French & Villaespesa, 2019; Pisoni et al., 2021). Establishing accountability and oversight mechanisms is essential for monitoring compliance with ethical guidelines and addressing any issues promptly (Gaia et al., 2019). By prioritising ethical considerations, museums can responsibly utilise AI, fostering trust, inclusivity, and positive user experience in their social media engagements.

Conclusion

Integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into museums' social media strategies offers numerous benefits, including enhanced engagement, personalised experiences, and global connections. Ethical considerations must be at the forefront of these AI implementations. Museums should prioritise responsible AI use, ensuring transparency, user privacy, and informed consent. Mitigating biases and promoting fairness in AI algorithms is crucial, as is empowering users and maintaining accountability. By upholding ethical standards, museums can leverage AI to create meaningful and inclusive social media experiences, fostering trust with their audiences and maximizing positive impact of technology in cultural sector.

In addition to these ethical considerations, museums must engage in ongoing dialogue and collaboration with stakeholders and experts in AI ethics to stay informed about emerging guidelines and best practices; they should also prioritise responsible and sustainable use of AI technologies, considering environmental impact and seeking energy-efficient practices. Fairness and inclusivity should be ensured by addressing biases and discrimination in AI algorithms and proactively seeking representation and diversity in training data. Ethical integrity should extend to responsible handling of AI-generated content and intellectual property rights, including proper attribution and licensing.

Lastly, transparency with audiences is essential. Museums should provide clear information about role of AI in their social media strategies, its benefits, and limitations, this transparency promotes trust and open communication, allowing museums to involve their audiences in discussions about AI ethics and gather feedback for continuous improvement, by prioritising transparency, fairness, inclusivity, sustainability, and responsible content handling, museums can responsibly integrate AI into their social media strategies, creating positive experiences and fostering trust with their audiences. ■

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The Role of Artificial Intelligence Applications in Virtual Museums

Abstract:

The revolution brought about by modern technology has constituted a pivotal change in many fields, perhaps the most prominent of which is the cultural field represented by museums, which serve as visual archives of past peoples and civilisations. . At the core of this technology lies Artificial Intelligence (AI), which has been utilised across various applications and domains. Museums are among the institutions in which AI has been employed in abundance, leading to the creation of "virtual museums." The virtual museum is an AI by-product. The technology is used in a variety of museum operations, including management, display, guidance, and conservation. The employment of AI in museums has resulted in a mixed opinion, with some believing that it strips the museum of its basic function, and others supporting the idea of virtual museums and AI, especially in light of the current global situation, which the Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted.

Introduction

The scope of virtual reality technology is extensive, with limitless potential for future applications. It constitutes a computer-generated environment where humans can engage instantaneously, much like they do in the physical world. Notably, virtual museums stand out as pivotal platforms for interaction, transcending geographical and temporal constraints. This accessibility, facilitated by AI, enables individuals to visit them at their convenience from any location.

Virtual museums frequently draw on the essence and content of physical museums, irrespective of whether the virtual museum has a corresponding physical counterpart. This essence, derived from real museums, has been cultivated through contemporary communication and technological advancements, particularly digital technologies and the Internet, ensuring alignment with the authentic museum experience across various aspects.

However, the key distinction between physical and virtual museums lies in their physical presence. Unlike physical museums, which are tangible spaces (walls, floors, and ceilings), virtual museums exist solely in the digital realm. Direct engagement with virtual museum contents has propelled this type of cultural institutions to greater prominence and success compared to their physical counterparts. AI applications played a significant role in enhancing this experience, contributing to its success.

This paper aims to explore the impact of AI applications on virtual museums, particularly in this technologically advanced world. Thus, this paper questions: What is the role of AI in shaping the culture of virtual museums?

Definition of Virtual Museums

While several definitions within the museum field have gained traction, a universally accepted definition remains elusive. Within museum discourse, terms like electronic museums, digital museums and online museums are often used interchangeably to denote collections of digital artefacts or exhibitions. However, they all emphasise the indispensable role of technology (Ahmed, 2009, p. 100).

Virtual museums serve as a collective repository of physical museum exhibits from various locations, rather than being affiliated with a specific physical

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institution. These exhibits are digitally represented within a single online platform, incorporating a plethora of digital educational resources such as texts, images, video clips, and three-dimensional renderings, accompanied by commentary (Sayed Muhammad, 2018, p. 212).

Definition of AI

AI has a rich history spanning several decades. Its roots trace back to the early 1950s, when scientists attempted to create machines capable of human-like thought processes. Since then, AI has evolved significantly, with countless researchers and developers striving to engineer intelligent systems and machines. The history of AI can be categorised into four distinct periods: classical AI, connectionism, symbolic AI, semi-symbolic AI, and multi-agent AI. Each of these periods witnessed advancements in underlying technologies that enabled the development of AI, along with shifts in how AI was perceived and utilised.

The first period, known as classical AI, emerged in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It marked the inception of systems that were rule-based and specialized. During this era, researchers aimed to create systems with human-like reasoning by encoding them with extensive sets of rules and facts. This period saw the emergence of various AI applications tailored to specific functions and domains (https://doi.org/10.1051/itmconf/20235301004).

AI Applications and Virtual Museums

AI applications play an important role in facilitating the operations of virtual museums and greatly enhancing their efficiency and success.



Image 1: Modern technologies used for virtual display in museums.
Source: Al-Hajji, p. 261.261.

a. Virtual Tours

The rise in popularity of immersive online museums can be attributed to advancements in AI. Modern technologies like virtual and augmented reality have enabled the creation of interactive and dynamic experiences in recent years. Visitors can now explore ancient civilisations, witness historical events, and even shape their own interpretations within these museums, which transport them to virtual realms. Immersive e-museums offer a level of engagement and involvement unmatched by traditional museums, enhancing the overall visiting experience (Abdel Maqsoud, 2016, p. 38).

b. Education: Role of AI in Education through Virtual Museums

In addition to their touristic role, museums serve an educational function, acting as institutions with a pedagogical purpose. They inspire and motivate learning through their content, fostering attention and concentration among learners. Virtual museums, facilitated by AI, provide a platform for easy learning, enabling individuals to acquire new information and skills while supporting self-directed learning. These features are integral to the educational activities offered by museums (Ahmed, D. 2009, p. 31).

Virtual tours are regarded as an effective application for learning systems, benefiting both teachers and learners by facilitating self-directed learning. These tours offer diverse perspectives, distinguishing them from physical visits by their accessibility without the need for transportation. This convenience is made possible by AI applications, particularly those leveraging virtual reality technology (Muhammad, S., 2018, p. 195).

c. Presentation

Presentation is a vital aspect of virtual museums, serving as a means for visitors to engage with the museum's offerings. In many cases, it represents the sole opportunity to showcase the museum's collections, exhibits, and educational content to a global audience.

AI applications play a significant role in enhancing the presentation process within virtual museums. They offer valuable services to both visitors and virtual guides, converting images into informative data and creating comprehensive databases. This is achieved through various technologies, including 3D laser scanning, infrared reflectors, and X-ray imaging (http://ar.scribd.com/doc/24544427/Virtual-Museum).

To accomplish this, essential equipment is required to construct the virtual environment, including computers and cutting-edge software applications capable of producing three-dimensional models and facilitating the creation of realistic simulations. Prominent programmes utilised for this purpose include 3ds Max, TimeScope, and others, alongside various interactive displays (Enab, 2020, p. 5).

d. Museum Tours and Interaction

AI applications facilitate virtual tourist guidance, which has been successfully implemented in countries like Britain and Egypt. Virtual guides are programmemed to offer explanations and information about museum collections, drawing from a comprehensive database. Notably, Egypt has pioneered in this domain, as exemplified by the virtual representation of King Tutankhamun serving as a museum guide within the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. This programmeme, employing Mixed Reality technology, marks the first-ever utilisation of mixed reality in museum contexts.



Image 2: Using technology to view 3D exhibits.
Source: Al-Hajji, p. 258

Rami Hammad, the programmeme's designer, described how it works: Upon wearing a virtual reality device, visitors are introduced to the character of King Tutankhamun within the hall of his treasures. Guided by King Tutankhamun, visitors embark on a virtual journey through history as they explore the surroundings. Scenes depicting Pharaonic gods and guards create an immersive experience reminiscent of temples or audience chambers. Unlike conventional virtual reality glasses, this setup allows users to blend the museum environment with the virtual world, enabling them to freely move around and interact with statues, as well as view pictures and videos of museum pieces. The programmeme also features an interactive game designed to unveil the secrets of these artefacts (https://www.elwatannews.com).

Robotic assistants, interactive displays, and chatbots are examples of AI technologies employed for human interaction, finding utility across diverse domains, from customer service to entertainment. For example, automated assistants aid customers by assisting in product navigation and offering recommendations. The rising popularity of interactive displays enables users to engage with digital content in more intuitive ways. Additionally, AI-driven chatbots address customer inquiries and provide valuable product details on websites. For instance, the Art Institute of Chicago integrates automated assistants and interactive displays to enrich the visitor experience. The automated assistant offers insights on collections and guided tours, while interactive displays offer a more immersive approach to exploring and interacting with art. Furthermore, the museum employs AI-powered chatbots to address frequently asked questions, thereby alleviating pressure on staff and improving the overall quality of customer service (S. Schaffer, A. Ruß, M. L. Sasse, L. Schubotz, 2022, pp. 346–358).

Preserving Cultural Heritage

AI in virtual museum operations plays a pivotal role in conserving and digitising cultural heritage. It facilitates access to exhibits without jeopardising their integrity or exposing them to the risks of theft or damage, particularly rare artefacts. Through this process, digital records encompassing documents, images, videos, and audio files are created and securely stored. AI technology enables efficient tracking and storage of these digital records, enhancing accessibility, storage, and management over time. This is crucial for archiving records and ensuring their preservation for future generations.

Moreover, AI aids in the accurate retrieval of records, simplifying searches, and providing access to

specific documents or files. For example, the National Archives in the United States employ AI to streamline the management and preservation of their digital records. By using AI solutions, they optimise document processing, construct statistical models, and establish searchable databases. This approach enables the archive to effectively store and access records, safeguarding important artefacts and documents for posterity (Magdalena, 2023, p. 5).

Conclusion

Virtual museums are digital platforms established on the internet with the purpose of offering a museum-like experience. In some instances, these museums may lack a physical location. Their objective is to showcase collections in a museum format that is accessible online. For instance, a virtual museum dedicated to the history of Islamic ceramics and pottery can be created to engage visitors, whether local or international, by providing insights into ceramics and Islamic pottery without the need for physical travel. This serves a scientific and intellectual need, which makes it the responsibility of relevant institutions to ensure top-tier presentation and information provision, thus enhancing the visitor's experience to the fullest extent possible.

Virtual museums are dynamic, possessing the capacity to grant unrestricted access to collections to a vast number of visitors, transcending geographical and temporal limitations.

Virtual museums transcend physical limitations by existing within a virtual space, enabling universal access for all visitors.



Image 3: Virtual reconstruction of an artefact
Source: Al-Hajji, p. 265.

AI applications bolster the protection of museum collections exhibited in physical museums, ensuring optimal preservation conditions. They also facilitate interactive engagements with digital exhibits, replicating real-world experiences. Such applications also extend services to individuals with special needs, addressing gaps present in traditional museum settings. Moreover, advanced technological tools enable the digital placement of objects within their archaeological contexts, enhancing visitor experience and understanding.

In contrast to traditional museums, their virtual counterparts offer seamless redesigning of displays at a fraction of the cost and time. They aggregate multi-source content spanning various locations and geographic regions, with the capability for swift and fluid updates of information and displays. ■

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Museums and Social Media

Have you ever taken a school or recreational trip to one of the museums in your country? Was the trip enjoyable for you? Or did you feel bored as you passed between the glass displays? Regardless of how you felt that day, we will take you on a captivating journey in this article as we explore museums from a fresh perspective. Let's begin!

First of all, what are museums? Museums are often perceived as places showcasing antiquities and artworks that fail to captivate anyone's interest. This is the stereotype about museums. However, these institutions actually embody a wealth of inspiration, knowledge and scientific exploration. They serve as custodians of our ancestors' legacies, offering glimpses into their lives and heritage. Museums come in various forms. Heritage museums provide insights into our ancestral history, helping us see what their lives were like beyond the pages of textbooks. Art museums offer a window into the minds of artists, shedding light on the perspectives and motivations behind their works. We uncover the reasons behind an artist's choice of subjects and colours in their paintings, revealing how each stroke and hue carries profound meaning. Therefore, it would be unjust to dismiss museums as mere repositories for antiquities and drawings. However, despite their invaluable contributions, museums face a significant challenge: younger generations fail to recognise their importance. They also do not recognise that artists, poets and professionals from diverse fields seek inspiration within museum walls. Even doctors, engineers, teachers and other groups come to museums to explore the arts and translate artistic expressions into practical applications in their respective domains. We owe a debt of gratitude to archaeologists, whose tireless efforts preserved these treasures for future generations. What we spend a few minutes viewing costs them time and effort.

So, how do we instill an appreciation for museums in our youth? The key lies in firsthand experiences. By leveraging advertisements and modern communication tools, we can bridge the gap between technology-driven lifestyles and the cultural richness museums offer. Some museums have successfully transformed perceptions, becoming centres of cultural enlightenment. Take, for instance, the Museum of the Future in Dubai, a shining example of innovation and allure, captivating visitors with its timeless charm.

The Museum of the Future stands as an architectural masterpiece. The walls adorn a quote by His Highness: "We might not live for hundreds of years, but the products of our creativity can leave a legacy long after we are gone. The future belongs to those who can imagine it, design it and execute it. The future does not wait."

The museum is a place where we can look to the future. Its allure has drawn countless tourists, with continuous advertisements captivating audiences worldwide. In its inaugural year, the museum welcomed over a million visitors from 163 countries, an achievement underscored by its glamour and appeal. According to the Dubai Future Foundation website, the museum integrates elements of exhibition, interactive theatre, and captivating displays, inviting visitors to explore potential future scenarios beyond the present moment.

The Museum of the Future stands as an architectural marvel, characterised

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Arwa Mohammed Hussein, born and raised in the United Arab Emirates, developed a passion for writing inspired by her older sister. Starting with short stories, poems and reflections, writing began as a hobby and evolved into a journey of self-discovery. Through her writing, Arwa found her unique voice to articulate her opinions and perspectives.

by its sophisticated and innovative construction style, akin to a captivating work of art. Spanning three floors, the museum hosts interactive exhibitions focusing on outer space resource development, ecosystems and bioengineering, health and wellness, and spirituality. Another floor showcases emerging technologies poised to revolutionise various areas, including health, water, food, transportation, and energy. The last floor will be dedicated to children, offering them an immersive experience where they can discover challenges and tackle them in their own creative ways, fostering a sense of empowerment and inspiring them to become "future champions." Through this approach, the museum instills in children a positive perception and an unforgettable experience of museums, igniting their curiosity and paving the way for future exploration of different museum offerings.

Now we go to France, where the iconic Louvre Museum stands. Born amidst the French Revolution in 1789, it has evolved into a symbol of distinction and unparalleled grandeur in the world of museums. Established in 1793, it stands as one of the oldest and largest cultural institutions globally, attracting nearly nine million visitors annually. The Louvre Museum has adeptly leveraged social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X, and YouTube to offer insights into current and upcoming collections, exhibitions, and events while also providing virtual tours and private viewing options for select artworks.

It houses a vast collection spanning ancient civilisations, including Eastern, Egyptian, Greek, Etruscan and Roman artefacts, as well as Arab-Islamic civilisation and Islamic arts dating back more than 5,000 years. The addition of new wings dedicated to the Islamic Arts Department in September 2012 marked a milestone in the museum's history, showcasing over 3,000 works of art spanning more than a millennium and three continents, from Spain to India.



Exterior – Museum of the Future



Interior – Museum of the Future

The Louvre takes visitors on a captivating journey across cultures and eras, boasting a staggering collection of 460,000 artworks. Among these treasures are iconic masterpieces like the Venus de Milo statue and the enigmatic Mona Lisa painting, which have left audiences worldwide spellbound. The enigma of the Mona Lisa extends beyond the smile, delving into the meticulously placed rectangles, circles and triangles that adhere to the golden ratio. The painting transcends mere aesthetic appreciation, standing as a testament to Leonardo da Vinci's profound understanding of geometry and proportion.

The Mona Lisa had a profound impact on art in the Renaissance and post-Renaissance eras. It revolutionised contemporary portraiture, with Da Vinci's reparatory drawings encouraging other artists to undertake freer, more exploratory studies.

Vincent Van Gogh, the renowned artist whose fame transcended his lifetime, left behind captivating oil paintings, each carrying a distinct meaning. Among his most celebrated works is The Starry Night, which has a story behind it. Created during a period of confinement in a sanatorium in 1889, Van Gogh noticed the mesmerising night sky from his asylum window. In a letter to his brother Theo, Van Gogh vividly described the scene of a star he saw one summer day. Forbidden from painting in his bedroom, Van Gogh improvised by applying paint directly onto canvas, adding the scene of an imaginary village from memory. In The Starry Night, Van Gogh employed bold, vibrant colours and experimental brushwork to evoke a myriad of emotions. By deliberately distorting reality, he sought to convey his contemplations on life and death, as well as humanity's place in the cosmos, when he painted the beautiful, glowing sky above the village. Van Gogh once wrote to his brother that stars are the final resting place for humans, which is why this scene was interpreted as a meditation on death. Deep brush strokes combined with the bold dark blue spread throughout Van Gogh's The Starry Night, reflecting the turmoil in the painter's mind and hinting at his depression. He created the painting after suffering from several seizures and his transfer to a sanitarium.

Another notable work by Van Gogh is the Sunflower collection, which holds special significance for Van Gogh due to his admiration for fellow artist Paul Gauguin. The inception of this series coincided with Gauguin's liking the



Mona Lisa

first painting, a moment that filled Van Gogh with pride and validation, especially that he looked up to Gauguin. Van Gogh knew then that he was on the right artistic path. Shortly after, Van Gogh left for the south of France, establishing a haven where artists could thrive and inspire one another. Upon learning of Gauguin's impending visit, Van Gogh adorned the guest bedroom with a selection of his paintings. Van Gogh wanted to merge three paintings into one: two renditions of sunflowers alongside a portrayal of the Lady Rocking the Cradle, paying homage to the nurturing essence of motherhood. Recognising that the inclusion of the sunflower pieces heightened the vibrancy of the overall palette, Van Gogh perceived this as an expression of profound gratitude.

Van Gogh's story indicates that one artist can inspire another, fostering the creation of more innovative and captivating artwork. Due to the profound impact of Van Gogh's artwork, a dedicated museum was established in his honour, housing a vast collection of his paintings. The renowned Van Gogh Museum, situated in Amsterdam, Netherlands, boasts the largest assemblage of his works. Social media has played a pivotal role in promoting his art, enabling easy access to his paintings online and facilitating their sharing and exchange on platforms like Instagram, X, and Facebook. This widespread accessibility has increased awareness of his works and garnered increased attention. Contemporary artists have leveraged technology to create digital renditions of Van Gogh's masterpieces or draw inspiration from his legacy, thereby enriching the realm of modern art.

We reach Egypt and head to the Grand Egyptian Museum, often



Louvre Museum

referred to as the New Egyptian Museum. It was constructed with the aim of attracting five million tourists annually. Clad in grey alabaster stone, the museum's design symbolises the iconic pyramids of Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure. A vision conceived in 2002, the museum has finally come to fruition after years of work. Its grand opening unveiled a sprawling complex, showcasing over 100,000 artefacts to the public for the first time. Spanning a vast area of 117 acres, this extensive tourist complex is poised to become the largest museum in Egypt, offering visitors a view of the surrounding archaeological landscape, including the pyramids and adjacent archaeological sites through its glass facades. Designed to appeal to youth, the museum hosts a variety of live events within its courtyards. Furthermore, meticulous attention has been paid to inclusivity, with "general instructions" provided in Arabic, hieroglyphs, and English.

Inside the museum's main building, visitors are greeted by 12 exhibition halls equipped with state-of-the-art sound and light technologies, housing over 50,000 artefacts. In 2016, amid stringent security measures, several of these artefacts were relocated from Luxor Governorate to this building. Among the notable pieces are the war chariots, funerary beds and treasures of King Ange Amun. Additionally, the museum features a grand 25-metre staircase situated in the main lobby area, serving as the focal point for visitor reception.



The Starry Night

The Museum's Key Attractions Comprise

- **Obelisk Square:** the world's first Pharaonic obelisk, suspended on the pyramid wall.
- **Museum Garden:** Dubbed the "Garden of the Land of Egypt," it showcases several trees that were once revered by ancient Egyptians.
- **Restoration Centre:** Housing 19 restoration laboratories for preserving the longevity of archaeological exhibits.

The museum's outer courtyard hosts a training centre for specialised museum personnel. Its entertainment district also features diverse venues, shops and restaurants. Furthermore, the vicinity of the main museum houses several archaeological and service centres, including the Children's Museum, a conference centre, and Museum for People with Special Needs. Inaugurated on Wednesday, 29th November 2023, this museum is hailed as one of the most modern cultural institutions, catering to the contemporary era and drawing significant interest from young visitors.

Finally, we come to Sharjah Archaeology Museum, the first museum established in Sharjah, dedicated to showcasing the history and heritage of the UAE. Originally housed in the 18th century house of a pearl merchant, it was first inaugurated in the Heritage Area in 2005. Subsequently, it was relocated



Sunflower series

to its current location in Saeed Al Taweel Al Shamsi House in Heart of Sharjah in 2012 with an enhanced display style. At the museum, visitors could explore various aspects of Sharjah's customs and traditions, spanning from religious practices to desert living. The museum comprises six galleries, each depicting different aspects of Emirati life, including the natural environment, daily life, celebrations, livelihoods, traditional sciences, as well as oral traditions like proverbs and folk tales.

The museum also showcases numerous distinct artefacts, including the Iftakh, a gold toe ring, with informative descriptions provided in both Arabic and English for every exhibited item. Young visitors can also explore popular stories, proverbs and riddles. This museum is particularly dedicated to fostering children's understanding of museum significance through its educational activities and programmes. One such event, "Reflections and Inspirations from Emirati Heritage," commenced in Sharjah on November 16. Organised by Sharjah Museums Authority in collaboration with the College of Fine Arts and Design at the University of Sharjah, the exhibition rans until April 15, 2024, at Sharjah Heritage Museum.



Interior – Grand Egyptian Museum

Sharjah Museums Authority had also launched "Lamma," an event aimed at providing enriching and entertaining experiences for families and adults alike, underscoring the authority's commitment to making museums accessible to all. Through collaboration with Sharjah Heritage Museum, some female students had the opportunity to participate in the "Lamma" event, facilitated by their social studies teacher, Rana Jamal. Their involvement resulted in attracting approximately 2,000 visitors, leaving a positive impact on the participating students and inspiring others to engage in similar activities.



Exterior – Grand Egyptian Museum

As we come to the end of our journey, it is evident that museums are far from dull. In fact, they offer a journey around the world. The Museum of the Future taught us that museums aren't just repositories of the past; they harbour immense aspirations for the future. The Louvre Museum captivated us with its ancient masterpieces like the Mona Lisa, merging art and mathematics. Van Gogh's paintings offered insights into his life and the genesis of inspiration. The Grand Egyptian Museum offers a fusion of Pharaonic and modern civilisations, hinting at its profound future contributions. Then there is Sharjah Heritage Museum, a tribute to



Sharjah Heritage Museum -- Interior





Sharjah Archaeology Museum -- Exterior





Some images truly exemplify the creative concept behind this event.

the legacy of the UAE and the ongoing events it hosts. Museums and works of art both affirm that museums are enjoyable destinations, leveraging social media to attract visitors.

I hope you have enjoyed our exploration of museums, their influence on people, and the role of social media in enhancing museum experiences. The rise in museum visitors stands as compelling evidence that the world is gradually recognising the significance of these cultural institutions. ■

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Introduction to Museums

In the realm of distinctive locales with defined purposes, museums stand out as formidable institutions. They serve as bastions of human history, curating and safeguarding ancient human heritage while actively engaging in scholarly pursuits. As public venues, museums welcome individuals from all walks of life, fostering inclusivity by offering accessible spaces and tailored services for individuals with disabilities. Through diverse educational programmes catering to all ages and cultural backgrounds, museums strive to cultivate awareness and appreciation for the rich tapestry of global cultures.

Museums transcend mere custodianship of societal identity and cultural heritage; they serve as multifaceted pillars, embodying educational, cultural, touristic, artistic, scientific, social, moral, patriotic, and national roles. A prime exemplar of this expansive function can be witnessed in UAE museums, which play a pivotal role in preserving the distinctive identity of the local Emirati community amidst the transformative waves the nation has navigated in recent years. These museums help safeguard the cherished traditions of the Emirati population, promoting their significance for generations to come by spotlighting key customs and rituals observed across various occasions and still resonant within contemporary Emirati society. For example, UAE museums stage performances and plays showcasing Emirati customs and traditions during significant events such as holidays, weddings, and other communal festivities. Moreover, museums across the Middle East emerge as epicentres of enlightenment and knowledge, curating temporary exhibitions, workshops, and educational seminars tailored to diverse age groups. Beyond their educational mandate, museums play a pivotal role in bolstering local tourism, championing local cultural and creative enterprises, including traditional handicrafts and arts, thereby fostering both direct and indirect employment opportunities for local residents.

Several notable museums in the UAE further endeavour to underscore the Islamic heritage, presenting a rich collection of images and models that chronicle the trajectory of Islamic civilisation across historical eras. Primary among these institutions is Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization, inaugurated on November 6, 1996, within the Heritage Area. Considered a cultural tourism landmark, it stands as the UAE's pioneering institution of its kind, boasting a vast collection of unparalleled artefacts spanning from the first to the 14th century AH (7 – 20 AD). The museum acquaints visitors with the contributions of Islamic luminaries who spearheaded advancements in diverse scientific and practical domains. Figures such as Al Khwarizmi, the progenitor of algebra, are prominently showcased, alongside intricate miniature models depicting iconic architectural marvels emblematic of Islamic design, including mosques and others.

Museums Promoting Inclusivity

1. Enhancing Museum Accessibility: Museums prioritise visitor comfort and enjoyment through a range of thoughtful services. Firstly, they ensure accessibility by providing communication options in English and other languages. Secondly, many museums offer free or discounted entry on select days or for specific demographics, fostering inclusivity regardless of financial

Author



Minatullah Rabee Hamdi Abdul Jalil Abdul Baqi

Student at Al Shola Private School (Al Falah)

Menatallah Rabia Hamdy is a dedicated student at Al-Shola Private School in Sharjah, UAE. Originally from Egypt, she relocated with her parents and siblings to Sharjah in 2012. At 16 years old, she devotes much of her time to her studies and the memorisation of the Holy Qur'an. She aspires to become a prominent figure in society, aiming to make a meaningful impact and leave her mark in the world.





Images capturing both the interior and exterior of Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization

circumstances. Thirdly, dedicated amenities such as designated parking spots for individuals with special needs, along with easily accessible facilities like elevators and equipped bathrooms, ensure accessibility for all members of society. Fourthly, tailored programmes, including guided tours and interactive experiences, cater to various visitor categories, such as children, the elderly and individuals with disabilities, facilitating deeper understanding and engagement. Fifth, museums often provide translation and guidance materials in multiple languages, accommodating visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds and ensuring information accessibility. Lastly, some museums offer digital services such as virtual tours and interactive online content, which extend museum experiences beyond physical boundaries, allowing easy access to knowledge and culture anytime, anywhere. An example of inclusivity and diversity promotion is the approach adopted by Victoria and Albert Museum in the United Kingdom, which showcases how museums can successfully foster an inclusive environment for all visitors.

Museum contents	The museum houses a diverse array of art objects, encompassing ceramics, glasswork, textiles, traditional attire, silverware, jewellery, furniture, sculptures, prints, paintings, and photographic works.
Number of art works	4.6 million pieces
Number of annual visitors	3,290,500

2. Inclusivity Programmes for People with Disabilities: Museums have a vital role in social integration by cultivating an inclusive environment where individuals with disabilities can engage with art, history, and culture on an equal footing with other visitors. For example, museums offer specialised guided tours led by trained personnel experienced in catering to the needs of visitors. Furthermore, museums prioritise accessibility by providing essential facilities such as elevators

3. Educational Programmes for All Ages: Museums play an important role in providing educational programmes tailored to individuals of all ages and cultural backgrounds, fostering awareness, and promoting cross-cultural understanding. These programmes encompass a variety of initiatives, including specially curated school trips, offering students a gateway to explore the arts, history, science, and culture. Students are afforded a special opportunity to engage directly with archaeological artefacts and historical exhibits, enriching their learning experiences through firsthand encounters. Encouraged to pose questions, engage in discussions,





and exchange ideas, students benefit from enhanced interaction and active participation alongside their teachers and museum guides. Moreover, school trips to museums serve as a means for the development of critical analytical skills, as students learn to evaluate and understand artistic, historical, and scientific exhibits critically. In addition, many museums offer interactive programmes, workshops, and hands-on experiences, allowing students to apply the knowledge they have acquired in practical, tangible ways.

Social Media and Museum Engagement

Social media platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram serve as powerful tools for museums to announce upcoming events and exhibitions, disseminating detailed information to attract attention and boost visitor numbers. Furthermore, museums utilise social media to deliver valuable educational content, sharing short video clips providing insights into artistic or historical artefacts, and posting images and text to spark discussions and curiosity among followers. Engaging with the audience, museums look for feedback on exhibitions and events, showcase visitor experiences through the publication of their photos and their personal stories, and promptly respond to comments and inquiries. An essential aspect that museums emphasise is engaging with younger audiences through innovative strategies such as hosting competitions and challenges on social media or curating content specifically tailored to pique their interest and inspire museum visits. Moreover, social media platforms enable museums to connect with a global audience, enhancing awareness of their cultural offerings by publishing multilingual content to attract visitors from diverse linguistic backgrounds. A notable example is the website of Sharjah Museums Authority, which offers information about various museums in Sharjah, including their locations, activities, educational programmes, and contact details for inquiries.



Nordic Museum in Sweden
Designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities, it features wheelchair accessibility and smart sensors for energy compensation.



Louvre Museum in France
Specialised services are available for visitors with visual impairments, offering guided tours and sign language interpretation.



Acropolis Museum in Greece
It offers guided tours, facilities tailored for individuals with disabilities, and sign language guidance.



King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture in Saudi Arabia (Riyadh)
A leading example in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its commitment to serving individuals with disabilities, offering guided tours and facilities specifically designed to cater to their requirements in a welcoming manner.

Challenges of Museum Social Communication Strategies

Implementing effective social communication strategies in museums faces several challenges, the most prominent of which is the lack of cultural awareness among the public, particularly among marginalised groups. This gap in understanding can hinder engagement and inclusivity efforts. Further, the absence of communication programmes tailored to the specific needs of vulnerable and underserved communities exacerbates these challenges. Not to mention that limited funding can restrict the scope and effectiveness of outreach efforts, hindering the museum's ability to connect with audiences and promote cultural awareness effectively, especially for tourists.

My visit to Sharjah Archaeology Museum

My visit to Sharjah Archaeology Museum offered an immersive

opportunity to explore the cultural and historical tapestry of Sharjah. Upon entering the museum, I was enveloped in an ambiance of tranquilly and aesthetic allure, where the interplay of colours and lighting complemented the historical artefacts in the halls. Navigating through the museum's diverse sections, I encountered a variety of artefacts and artworks spanning various eras, each offering a glimpse into the region's rich heritage. I was surprised by the variety of exhibited artefacts. From ancient pottery to exquisite jewellery and captivating paintings, the exhibits showcased a remarkable array of artefacts that spoke volumes about the region's history and culture. Each piece had a story, and I couldn't help but wonder about those ancient eras. I looked with fascination at the details of the inscriptions and decorations on the artefacts and wondered what stories these artefacts stored. The guided tour with the enthusiastic guide was very informative, as she shared valuable information about each piece and helped us understand the historical context in which it originated.



A school trip to Sharjah Aquarium

At the end of the tour, I opted to spend some time in the park next to the museum. The setting was perfect for unwinding and reflection, allowing me to enjoy the natural beauty surrounding me and bask in the tranquillity of the environment. Reflecting on my enriching experience at the Sharjah Archaeology Museum, I came to appreciate the importance of preserving our cultural and historical heritage. I also realised that the journey of learning and exploration is a continuous one, with endless opportunities for discovery. This visit was truly an unforgettable educational and historical experience, and I am deeply grateful for the invaluable opportunity offered by Sharjah Archaeology Museum.

I can say from my trip that the visitor



A school trip to Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization

experience can be developed through technology and interactive means such as tablets, and virtual and augmented reality to provide new educational and interactive experiences. Museums that offer family-oriented programmes and activities that include workshops, games, competitions and interactive activities designed to encourage learning and interaction between individuals in an enjoyable family atmosphere attract more visitors. Interactive activities such as practical experiments, games and creative activities help visitors learn and understand topics in a fun and useful manner. Furthermore, some museums offer virtual programmes that allow individuals to learn and explore online wherever they are, making knowledge accessible to a wide audience. These museums often gain attention and get the spotlight.



A school trip Sharjah Archaeology Museum

Conclusion

Museums serve as important platforms for preserving cultural heritage and fostering educational and cultural exchange. In this context, the role of social media in promoting inclusivity cannot be overlooked. Leveraging social media effectively allows museums to engage with a wider and more diverse audience, including individuals with disabilities and culturally varied communities.

Through the dissemination of diverse educational and cultural content on social media platforms, museums offer learning opportunities that are accessible to a diverse audience, irrespective of location or time constraints. Additionally, social media serve as channels for ongoing communication with the public, facilitating open dialogue and enabling museums to listen to comments and feedback. This aids in the continuous improvement and enhancement of the museum visiting experience. ■

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Muhammad Issa Jaqdul is a Sudanese writer, storyteller and journalist. His literary repertoire includes texts, short stories and articles published in various newspapers and magazines. Notably, he penned "A Worn Memory," featured in Literary Affairs magazine by the Emirates Writers Union. Beyond writing, Jaqdul has contributed to editing numerous artistic, cultural and intellectual publications. He participated in the Arab Future Forecasters Challenge, an initiative by the Arab Strategy Forum and the Good Judgment Foundation. Recognised for his cultural contributions, Jaqdul holds a golden residency in the United Arab Emirates as a content writer and the recipient of the Short Story Award at the Omdurman Short Story Festival, Sudan.

Museums and Virtual Augmented Reality:

Opportunities for Access and Acceptance

The Impact of Technological Developments on Museum Art Displays

Since their inception in the 17th and 18th centuries, museums have served as custodians of human memory, preserving and safeguarding it from disappearance. They showcase invaluable artefacts that document the collective evolution of mankind and their cultural heritage. Over the decades, museums, like all institutions that serve human civilisation, have evolved to better serve their purpose.

A closer examination of the museums in the UAE shows notable advancements in recent years. This progress stems from two primary factors: firstly, the evolving perception and significance of museums within society (collective consciousness), as they become increasingly recognised as pillars of culture and civilisation. The rich cultural landscape in the UAE accommodates diverse tastes and preferences within the nation's multicultural fabric and diverse nationalities, contributing to cultural richness and varied perspectives.

Secondly, the government's pivotal role in enacting frameworks governing museums, establishing a well-structured system, providing both moral and material support, and adapting them to global changes. The UAE has excelled in this endeavour. There is a surge in the number of museums, and their programmes are expanding to fulfil their cultural mandate. Moreover, some museums actively engage in social initiatives, such as mentoring youth and students, organising community-focused events to foster engagement, and facilitating workshops and courses aimed at promoting appreciation for the special cultural and civilizational heritage inherent to each region, country, or specific identity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, some museums adapted by taking advantage of modern technologies. The process of transforming art exhibitions into a visual product emerged through virtual and augmented reality technologies (VR and AR). Museums remained alive despite the lockdown, giving the public the opportunity to view works of art and tour virtually. This process attracted an audience that had not previously paid attention to museums.

Amidst the rapid advancements in the technology sector, particularly the surge in artificial intelligence (AI), museums stand poised to broaden their appeal to a diverse array of audiences. Given the widespread integration of these technologies into daily life, coupled with the increasing adoption and competition among major tech firms, museums are positioned to innovate and adapt. The challenge lies in these cultural institutions' ability to devise a future-proof formula for translating visual and technical innovations into museum offerings, ensuring their preservation and transmission across generations. It's foreseeable that modern communication tools, including social media platforms with their abundance of images and videos will evolve into vast electronic archives. It wouldn't be surprising to witness the emergence of virtual human museums in the future, allowing people to explore the electronic legacies of their ancestors. This notion underscores an inevitable outcome arising from swift technological advancements. Notably, as of the time of writing, Neuralink, a company founded by American billionaire Elon Musk, had achieved a significant milestone by successfully implanting the first brain chips in humans, signalling a potential paradigm shift towards virtual realms.

Modern Technology Integration and Museums

Initially, it's essential to understand the nature of modern technologies that have significantly influenced human progress. Factors such as population growth and urbanisation have led to increased urban and rural densities, prompting a broader audience to contemplate their cultural and artistic heritage—a task unattainable for many. Consequently, numerous technology firms have endeavoured to innovate solutions catering to diverse societal segments, spanning the natural and social sciences. In the area of visual presentation, there is a plethora of applications for handheld smartphones and virtual reality headsets, fueled by fierce competition in AI. This technology, in particular, holds promise for revolutionising museum engagement, facilitating educational interactions for both children and youths, and offering virtual tours accessible via modern mobile devices.

Other Technologies:

1. Graphics:
Graphics aim to simplify, communicate, and interpret information clearly and effectively. In museums, graphics are used to aid viewers in appreciating artworks or conveying specific perspectives. This can be achieved through digital optical displays utilising various surfaces such as glass panels, display walls, or even ceilings within exhibition pavilions. Typically, these devices showcase artistic works in the form of films and optical slides. The application of graphic technology extends beyond art to encompass commercial and humanitarian domains.

2. Interactive Screens:
Interactive screens, like any other technology, have been experiencing significant advancements in form, storage capacity, and display quality on a daily basis. Notably, they offer many features that enable public interaction and direct illustrative engagement. In museums, these screens are used to convey the museum's message with added special effects. Illustrating this, C. Seed Electronics recently unveiled a luxury screen valued at approximately USD $400,000. The screen can be folded and concealed within the ground when not in use. Comprising five separate micro LED panels, the screen easily emerges from the floor at the push of a button, uniting to form a singular display.

Such innovation provides museum administrators and curators with many options to showcase artworks and enhance the artists' message. Moreover, it opens avenues for the creation of artwork that uses these constantly evolving technologies to their fullest potential.

3. Virtual Reality
Virtual reality, by common definition, is a modern technological innovation capable of immersing users into simulated environments through computer software and specific devices. It projects real-world objects into artificial settings, unlike augmented reality technology, which overlays virtual elements onto the real world. Personally, I encountered virtual reality during the opening of the Abu Dhabi Art exhibition on Saadiyat Island in 2018. It was a captivating experience that transported me into the creative process of artists. From the preparation of tools to setting the scotches and finalising the work, every detail felt incredibly real. Such experiences are offered by numerous artistic institutions across the UAE, with virtual reality evolving into a medium embraced by many contemporary artists, particularly those specialising in installations and modernist works.

4. Holograms [2]
A visual display that recreates and projects images in three dimensions with remarkable clarity. The resulting image appears to hover in mid-air, resembling a tangible, multi-coloured form of the object being displayed.

5. Augmented Reality
A technology based on projecting virtual objects and information into the user's real environment to provide additional information or serve as a guide. Unlike virtual reality, which immerses users in entirely virtual environments, augmented reality allows users to interact with virtual elements overlaid onto their physical surroundings. This interaction can occur through various devices, including smartphones or wearable gadgets like glasses.

Sharjah Art Museum: Adapting to the Future

Allow me to share an immersive experience I had at Sharjah Art Museum, which falls under Sharjah Museums Authority (SMA). Established in 2006 by His Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al Qasimi, Member of the UAE Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah, this museum is among the 16 institutions in Sharjah under SMA. Renowned for their vast and diverse array of exhibitions, the museums cover art in its varied forms, Islamic heritage, culture, archaeology, heritage, science, aquatic life, and the rich history of Sharjah in the UAE. Notably, the museums offer educational programmes tailored for all ages, a hallmark feature enriching the visitor experience.

Since 2017, my proximity to Sharjah Art Museum through my work has granted me great insights into the

[2] International Journal of Tourism, Archaeology and Hospitality (IJTAH) 2022,Vol.2 Issue 2

museum's operations. I've closely observed the efforts of various departments and explored the technologies adopted by Sharjah Museums to navigate the fast-paced landscape of modern developments, alongside the inevitable challenges that accompany any enterprise. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 brought about unprecedented challenges and cultural institutions, including museums and galleries, were forced to close their doors. Life almost came to a standstill. However, this adversity sparked a remarkable response, with swift awareness campaigns and innovative strategies emerging to mitigate the threat posed by the pandemic. Educational institutions and businesses swiftly adapted, leveraging the rising power of social media and digital platforms to engage with the public.

However, I believe the primary challenge facing museums today is how to transcend physical boundaries and transport viewers behind their smart phones into the museum experience, offering them the full immersion and interaction with artworks through virtual reality. In response to this challenge, in April 2020, SMA launched a virtual tour initiative at Sharjah Art Museum. This initiative provided an invaluable opportunity for all segments of UAE society and global audiences to explore the works of local and regional artists from the comfort of their homes.

What distinguishes this virtual experience is the meticulous attention to detail by SMA, ensuring a visually immersive and high-quality encounter for viewers. They had access to detailed information about the artworks, accompanying booklets, and avenues for direct communication with relevant museum departments for inquiries or acquisitions. This initiative democratised access to museum artworks, reaching community groups who may otherwise have been unable to engage with them. The pandemic presented an unexpected opportunity for SMA and similar institutions to reach new segments of society and expand their impact.

Conclusion

This article highlighted the ongoing quest of artistic institutions, particularly museums, to establish a presence amidst the ever-evolving landscape of technological advancements permeating every facet of life. Today, individuals are inundated with a vast array of information via social media platforms, where attention-grabbing advertisements, primarily commercial in nature, vie for their attention. This commercialization trend has even infiltrated humanitarian domains, creating significant disparities within society.

Hence, it is imperative for museums, particularly those in the Middle East and North Africa, to prioritise their educational endeavours and allocate resources towards reaching all segments of society, starting with the youth. It's noteworthy that some museums are embracing forward-thinking narratives that mirror the potential of modern technologies. This trend underscores the pivotal role of museums as comprehensive and inclusive custodians of the human legacy, a role that has been recognised since the dawn of humanity. ■

Museums in the Middle East and North Africa are Crafting a Digital Dream

A passionate art aficionado and multidisciplinary artist with over 20 exhibitions and two solo shows to her name wrote this article. She graduated with a master's degree in digital culture and humanities from University College Cork in June 2023. She is particularly interested in technological breakthroughs and is actively researching techniques such as virtual reality and digital art platforms to create fresh contemporary work that crosses the gap between traditional and digital mediums.

Abstract: In recent years, new technologies have become increasingly prevalent. Digital media, including virtual reconstructions, artefact representations, and internet recordings, are becoming more popular. As smartphones and internet access become more prevalent, social interactions and face-to-face museum discussions are shifting to digital mediums. Museum communication strategies, such as exhibitions, public events, outreach, and education, seek to present culturally immersive experiences. Social media challenges established communication paradigms. The social role of museums has shifted considerably over the last decade, but communication and design principles are still catching up.

BACKGROUND

Museums no longer follow the nineteenth-century model of authoritative storytelling but instead, provide participatory and open-ended experiences.

Museums and memorial places, where visitors are frequently exposed to varied history, are increasingly exploring creative approaches to awaken visitors' emotions and stimulate their emotional reactions.

Online access to famous sites employing an advanced Immersive Virtual Reality (IVR) programme benefits academic staff, students, tourists, tour agents/guides, and historians alike. Museums use such tactics to foster democratisation, engage various audiences, and encourage diverse interpretations of their collections. But what are the key elements of this new communication style? What are the characteristics of virtual visitors, their motivations, and how do they interact with heritage content? Should these messages be monitored and filtered, and who will do so? Should curators intervene in the free and democratic flow of information?

Social media has transformed the way museums interact with their visitors. Museums may now extend their reach globally and communicate with people from diverse backgrounds via various digital channels, rather than just visiting a physical venue. By curating narratives online, they may generate conversations, offer insights, and welcome engagement from people who may not be able to attend in person.

The usage of social media platforms is common to all of these museums in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Social media is an effective tool for these institutions to reach a wide range of audiences, share collections and exhibitions, and engage in meaningful debates about history, art, and culture.

Museums can present their holdings in distinctive and imaginative ways, attracting those who may not have previously been interested in typical museum experiences.

Author



Merna Elkasaby

Multidisciplinary Artist

An accomplished visual/conceptual artist and printmaker who graduated from the Fine Arts Class of 2020, Merna Elkasaby holds a Master's in Digital Culture and Humanities from the prestigious University College Cork in 2023. Her artwork has been showcased in over 20 exhibitions, earning her numerous awards and accolades from various reputable organisations. Her style blends traditional and digital art techniques. She lives by Jim Varney's sentiment, "the odds are good, but the goods are odd," which serves as a personal motto that guides her creative work.

Digital Awakening Museums: Pioneering the 21st Century Experience.

It's truly inspiring to see that the Louvre Abu Dhabi has a significant presence on social media sites such as Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. They frequently publish amazing photographs of their collections, behind-the-scenes looks, and updates on planned shows. They also use social media to promote virtual tours and online events, allowing visitors from all around the world to explore the museum's contents remotely.

Adding to our prestigious museums in the Middle East and North Africa The Egyptian Museum in Cairo has used social media to highlight its extensive collection of ancient artefacts. They publish photographs and videos of iconic pieces like Tutankhamun's riches and the pharaoh's mummies. The museum engages with younger audiences on platforms such as Instagram and TikTok by presenting history in a visually appealing and interactive format. Without a doubt, we must emphasise Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art (Qatar).

Mathaf, based in Doha, Qatar, specialises in modern and contemporary Arab art. They use social media to showcase artwork from their collection, provide artist interviews, and promote forthcoming exhibitions and events.

The museum also promotes discourse and involvement by holding virtual discussions and Q&A sessions with artists and curators, which allow visitors to participate and learn more about Arab art and culture.

It's truly remarkable to have such a diverse array of museums across the Middle East and North Africa, including the Tunisian National Bardo Museum in Tunisia, the King Abdulaziz Centre for World Culture in Saudi Arabia, the National Museum of Beirut in Lebanon, the Moroccan Museum of Contemporary Art in Morocco, and the Jordan Museum in Jordan. Each of these institutions represents a proud testament to the rich cultural heritage and history of their respective regions.

Without the use of social media, digital marketing methods, or concentrated efforts to promote what they offer, many museums would stay hidden, known only to a small number of people in their geographic region.

This will guide us through a crucial step in digital museum management.



Museum of the Future in Dubai

From Dust to Limelight, The Art of Museum Promotion

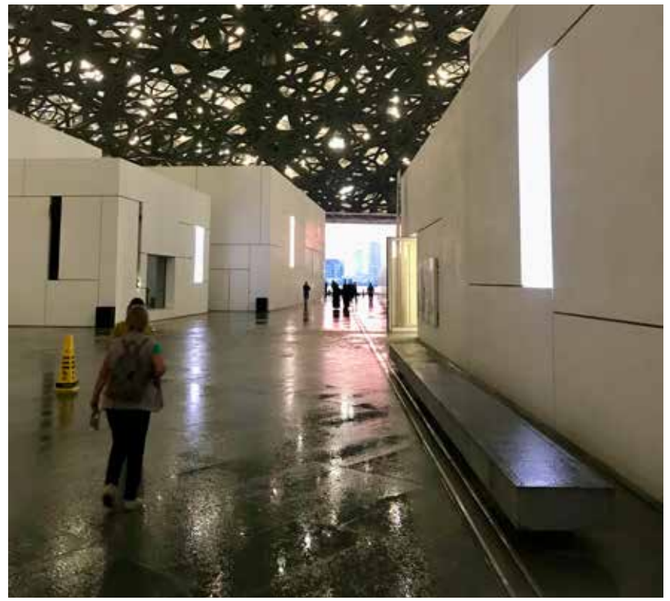
Digital marketing has been extremely beneficial, revolutionising how we interact with audiences. We've taken a meaningful trip through museums, elegantly incorporating their stories into our daily lives. Rather than viewing our audience as simply guests, we welcome them as valued members of our extended family. In the Middle East, museums use a creative method to foster a link similar to that between nurturing parents and their adored children. This method cultivates not only sponsorship but also a deep sense of loyalty and belonging, ensuring that our audience grows alongside us and becomes an important piece of our collective history.

While public museums around the world face closures and budget constraints, the Middle East offers a unique story. Museums stand out for their diversity and uniqueness, combining local legacy with global significance. The Museum of the Future in Dubai stands as a testament to the UAE's commitment to leading the way into the future, showcasing a remarkable blend of sustainability, technological advancement, and innovative design. This is an important time for the UAE, which has around 55 government-run museums and 115 privately owned museums, including the Etihad Museum, Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilization, and the much-awaited Guggenheim Museum.

Not only has the Middle East Museum implemented digital technology, platforms, digital marketing, and social media for advertising, redefining how we perceive artworks and exhibits in museums, but a new wave of digital museums dedicated solely to digital art has emerged, generating excitement and gaining prominence. The region's digital art galleries showcase modern digital artists' work. The Theatre of Digital Art Dubai (ToDA) provides an immersive experience by displaying NFTs in physical form with digital frames. Dubai also has other creative digital art locations, such as the Infinity des Lumières, where tech-driven artists can present their work while replacing the venue with famous artworks for each exhibition.

In the galaxy of new stars, a museum shines in the form of Team Lab Borderless, Jeddah's breakthrough digital art destination. This new museum, created by the visionary art collective Team Lab, features works that defy conventional bounds. It challenges convention by providing an immersive experience in which artworks move smoothly between rooms, participating in discussion, interaction, and fusion. Visitors are welcome to enter this limitless art universe, where they can meander, explore with purpose, and work with other lovers to discover and create a new galaxy of artistic wonder.

Gazing at the stars used to necessitate a telescope, as well as a lot of time and thought. We admired their beauty, unsure whether we'd ever touch, see, or actually experience them up close. Similarly, visiting museums frequently required substantial travel, including reserving flights and traveling from one location to another merely to see our favourite artworks. However, with the arrival of new stars, a dream has come true in Middle Eastern museums, allowing visitors to visit virtually. You can now see your most cherished dreams and reach out to touch your own star anytime and wherever you choose. The only limit is the profundity of our dreams, which is inexhaustible.



Visitors Louvre Abu Dhabi

The Envisioned Future of Museums in the Middle East Has Already Shown Up, Exceeding Expectations and Making Fantasies a Reality

Recent advances in museum culture have resulted in a dynamic and diverse landscape, highlighted by the implementation of outstanding concepts such as data museums. The "Jordan Museum" in Amman is a pioneer in using data-driven exhibits to tell the story of Jordan's rich history and cultural heritage. Visitors can learn about archaeological discoveries, historical artefacts, and cultural treasures through interactive exhibitions and immersive digital tales.

With the rise of game museums, Puppet & Toy Museum, you can experience the unique thrill of games and play, an important cultural medium worthy of preservation and celebration.

In Lebanon, the "Beirut Digital District" houses the "Digital Museum of Lebanese History," an innovative institution that uses virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies to bring Lebanon's history to life. By recording historical documents, images, and artefacts, this museum provides visitors with a dynamic and unique journey through Lebanon's rich history and cultural legacy.

These new extraordinary ideas have transformed the standard museum experience, providing visitors with immersive and engaging encounters that break conventional bounds.

A new chapter in our history begins with each stroke of our pens and brushes. We are at the forefront, shaping the future of art and culture. Our efforts go beyond creating masterpieces; they also include opening doors to boundless creativity and investing in emerging artists inspired by the dynamic energy of the new art scene. We are building a path that values creativity, diversity, and the transformative power of artistic expression.

How Might We Ensure the Preservation of Our Heritage?

If you've ever wondered how museums digitally archive their materials and protect our past, let me lay those questions to rest. The Digital Library of the Middle East (DLME) is designed to provide global access to extensive collections of cultural heritage

resources from around the world. Essentially, it serves as a virtual library, collecting digital resources such as manuscripts, pictures, maps, artworks, and historical documents. By bringing these artefacts together, the DLME encourages scholarship, investigation, and appreciation for the Middle East and North Africa's rich and diverse cultural legacy.

Directly supports the global effort to combat looting and the illicit trade in cultural heritage objects by providing inventories, cataloguing and documenting objects, and digitising records, as well as pushing back against the forces that would plunder our culture to fund terror and oppress people.

Inventory records allow museum and library curators to know exactly what they have in case of a catastrophic loss. Digitization and federation into the DLME make global records available to law enforcement partners. Cataloguing provides provenance data to investigators and the art market. Furthermore, visual and 3D documentation allows for the identification of lost assets as a result of illicit trafficking. The DLME helps secure collections and assists international law enforcement in protecting artefacts from trafficking by making objects easily recognised and records available.

A technical team from CLIR (Council on Library and Information Resources) and Stanford Libraries collaborated on this endeavour.

In summary

In the Middle East and North Africa, museums have embarked on an incredible journey through the digital realm. This odyssey transcends the boundaries of time and space, engaging a global audience. These museums have adopted innovative online plans, morphing into digital storytellers through interactive live streams, virtual tours, and multimedia content.

In this dynamic environment, invention has no limitations. Every day offers new ideas, tactics, and strategies that transform the museum experience. Middle Eastern museums' digital transformation has been nothing short of amazing, from the creation of innovative virtual reality exhibitions to the incorporation of artificial intelligence for personalised tours.

Furthermore, the introduction of new museums heightens the excitement of this voyage. These cultural hubs not only display traditional artefacts but also push the bounds of creativity by engaging visitors in novel ways and transforming them into active participants.

They weave narratives of heritage and identity that resonate worldwide, connecting generations and cultures in the process. The digital realm becomes a vibrant marketplace for knowledge, fostering discussions on history, art, and culture. Virtual participation, once a dream, has become a reality. The region's museums embrace the digital age, ensuring inclusivity through contactless experiences that ignite curiosity, facilitate learning, and nurture empathy. Social media weaves a tapestry binding hearts and minds, celebrating diversity and the importance of heritage preservation. Where the past gracefully meets the present, cultures converge to craft a luminous future for all. ■

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