
Cultural Identity of Museums: Estimation of the Role of Social Media

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Abstract: Social media creates a dynamic forum, in which dispersed audience like youth, old, regional and cultural communities can actively engage with the museums. Social Media as a tool play a major role on the informal learning occurs within the museums. In recent past, the use of social media in outreach and other inhouse activities of the museums has increased and paved way for these cultural institutions to incorporate more active experiences and entertainment. The digital application provides a cost effective, focused and direct communication with target audience. The digital shift and inclusion of social media enabled museums to open up and widen the museum activities and experiences beyond its walls in making museum an inclusive and active heritage space. This paper canvass on creating museum identity with the help of social media. The present paper briefly touches the areas like understanding the social media, leveraging it as a tool for Indian museums to create identity, sustainability and economic upliftment.

Keywords: Museum Communication, Sustainability, Social Media, Digital Strategy, Museum Marketing, Museum Identity, Experimental Models

Introduction

The film trilogy 2006-2014 mentions; “When a magic wand is touched to an ancient object, it becomes alive” just like what is showcased in ‘Night at the Museum’. While trying to understand the present-day digital involvements, technology conduct the magic and the wand is the social media. At present, many museums in the world face two significant challenges; i.e, identity and sustainability issues and COVID times brought in the aforesaid dimension dominantly on the surface. A pre COVID report of the Economic Times (E-Paper, 23 Dec. 2013), mention that many museums in India started to digitize their collection and are trying to establish their online presence in web portals. As COVID became the new normal, in the year 2020, museums as the social institutions in the service of the society also shifted towards adoption of social media for outreach and extension activities which slowly cached momentum and received high scale acceptance from the public. Various types of content are being created to engage the audiences through the online platforms. The prominent government museums in India

namely, National Museum, New Delhi; Indian Museum and Victoria Memorial Hall at Calcutta; CSMVS, Mumbai; and many private museums like Museum of Art and Photography, Bangalore and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art, New Delhi shown their digital social media presence through contents of different flavour through digital exhibitions, virtual tours and storytelling, curatorial talks, webinars, workshops, conversations to connect and engage the audiences and thereby retain and develop the brand identity. The present paper is an attempt to explore the performance of few selected museums on the social media platforms and how the visibility enabled them to generate identity.

It is the common trend that the public get attracted towards faster, instant and economic friendly services. Museums as cultural entities in the service of the society should be in a position to offer the same to generate public interest in its collection and services. Building web of connections can bring museums, their respective partners and audiences together on a common platform for understanding and sharing thereby creating awareness and promoting the culture and heritage while celebrating the flavors of rich Indian heritage. Being in social media is the most significant dimension of any museum's digital strategy and at present major museums are sustaining their identity through informative or educative contents. While some museums of national stature show their strong online presence in social media, large number of smaller museums located in various pockets of India are trying hard to make their visibility online.

Understanding the Social Media

Wikipedia (*Social Media*, 13th July 2021, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media) define the social media as interactive technology that allow the creation or sharing/exchange of information, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks. It is also considered as a collective term for websites and applications which focus on communications, community-based input, interaction, content sharing and collaboration. Different types of forums, microblogging, social networking, social bookmarking, social curation are the main types.

Museums being a social entity in the service of the society could adopt this technology, to attract audience from all segments. The use of this powerful technology can be explored in various ways by the museums in branding, marketing, outreaching and thereby enabling themselves to get identified among the museum sector. The basic law of social media is to attract users and make them stay longer on its platforms, and eventually turn into for revenue generation which is practiced by social media giants like Facebook, Instagram etc. Therefore, museums could leverage this algorithm as a tool to increase their visibility, identity and outreach.

While exploring the web of social media platforms one of the frequently used word is "Algorithm". The social media managing company *Sprout Social* on March 2021, (<https://sproutsocial.com/insights/social-media-algorithms/>) opines algorithms are the way of

sorting posts in the user's feed based on the relevancy instead of chronological published content. Before switching to algorithm social media giants used to display feed in reverse chronological order. As the social media companies switched to algorithm now the content is displayed according to the behavioural patterns of the user.

The study, entitled, "Social media usage in India: Statistics and Facts" (*Statistica*, July 2020) indicates rapid growth of social media use in India in past decade reaching over 680 million active internet users. It has also been found that India is having the highest number of WhatsApp users with 29% of active on social media penetration. Museums of India with their rich collection can create ample contents to keep the user engaged for longer time which eventually earn benefits for both platform (social media) and the content creator (the museum profile). If the museums publish more user friendly contents or create more engagements for audience through social media networks, these will directly generate more visibility for the museums and create positive impacts on the museum's identity. It is significant to understand different social media platforms so as to develop appropriate content for each. The main social media platforms are, Blog, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter with their own sets of theory to put to practice.

Blog, is a platform best for casual dialogue and discussion on specific topic or opinion and the definition of blogging is changing day by day with contents varying from audio, visuals to text. *Facebook* is considered as the world's largest social network, one of the most familiar forms of social media for networking widely used by brands for digital marketing, creates huge amount of scope for the museums all over the world. *Instagram*, a platform for free photo sharing only with time algorithm, but in due course of time it changed and got more complexities.

If a content helps to stick the user for longer time, then only the content is showed up for suggestion or recognized, but one of the interesting features is the use of 'hashtags' it is a word or a phrase preceded by a hashtag sign (#), used highly on social media, websites, application to identify specific topic or specific digital content. Instagram is where the young population resides from aged 18-24 and India ranked second in the world list with 100 billion monthly Instagram users till 2021 (*surveyed by Napoleon Cat Stats*, <https://napoleoncat.com/stats/instagram-users-in-india/2021/01/>).

Museums in India could use Instagram for out reaching the segment of young people of the country to be engaged with the collection and activities of museums online which further can boost up later offline visit. *Twitter*, is social networking/ micro blogging platform that allows group and individuals to share short status messages. This can be considered as modern-day notice board where inspiring, intrigued text are uploaded by the creators. India ranked third in the list with 17.5 million till January 2021 (*survey by statistica*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries>). Apart from the above, Snapchat, Pinterest, Flickr,

YouTube, LinkedIn are the other platforms which are creating its spaces in the Indian digital market.

Leading social media networks in India are Facebook with highest traffic followed by Instagram and YouTube. Majorly museums in India use Facebook, Instagram, YouTube with very few museums using Google Arts and Culture. According to the survey conducted by IPSOS, it is found that about 43% of Indians get happiness through social media content. Museums in India started introducing innovative strategies for promoting their identities and should focus on contemporary contexts to promote their collections which in turn will develop brand awareness. Museums in India are experimenting with their contents e.g. National Museum, Delhi has experimented with virtual gallery tours, giving information and facts about collections, collaboration with Google Arts and Culture, webinars, augmented international exhibitions. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaja Vastu Sangrahalaya, Mumbai experimented with storytelling and amalgamated programs to interpret the miniature specially the Ragamala paintings personifying by singing the ragas depicted in the paintings. Museum of Art and Photography, Bangalore is in the process of generating brand identity focused on the content through virtual tours and online conversations between curators entitled “museums without walls” wherein collection-based stories are shared between MAP and other museums across the world. Victoria Memorial Hall, Kolkata and Kiran Nadar Museum of Art are experimenting with online DIYs, events, live featuring, online exhibitions and collaboration with Google Arts and Culture. On the other hand, Indian Museum, Kolkata features heritage talks, webinars and virtually augmented exhibition held by museums which are run by ministry of culture. From the empirical data it appears, there has been a distinct gap of lack of understanding in tapping the potential audiences. The present paper tries to explore, discuss and estimate the ideal mixture of creating successful contents and experimenting the models according to the community of the followers and the impact on the identity making of the museum.

Branding the Museum: The Key Features of Social Media

Wheeler (2006) opines, the companies/institutions look ways to connect emotionally with the customer/community, become irreplaceable and creates lifelong relationships. To establish something as brand, designing brand identity is important. A strong brand stands out in densely crowded marketplace. In that case brand is something tangible, appeals to the senses (Figure 1). Community can feel it, touch it, hold it, watch it move and successful brand identity fuels recognition, amplifies differentiation (Wheeler 2006) which is quite needed for the museums to establish and gain recognition as social entity.

Museum Branding

In the current world scenarios, for the sustainability and growth of museum sector in future, the museums need to compete among themselves and at the same time complement each other and also with other cultural institutions and social entities

which act as socio-cultural entities at the service of the society. Every museum needs to build its brand image and the branding strategy could amplify the museum's positioning. Branding of museums begins with achieving the mission, upholding and maintaining its commitments to community and society it serves. The dimensions of visibility, attention and loyalty are significant at the primary level, the second level focus on vehicles of information, emotion, identity and personality (Kotler *et.al* 2008). Brands continues to build stronger as the museum identity increase and starts gaining more publicity. Finally, the last ingredient helps a brand to be successful when all the museums constitute to hold the same ineradicable image of the institution (Wallace, 2016). Some touch points for museum branding, which effectively helps to increase the brand awareness of the museum among the community (based on Wallace 2016) are illustrated in the diagram (Figure 2).

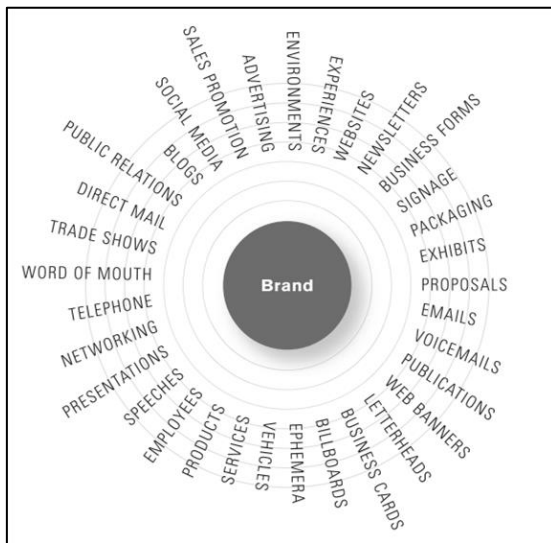


Figure 1: Brand Touch-points
(Wheeler 2006)

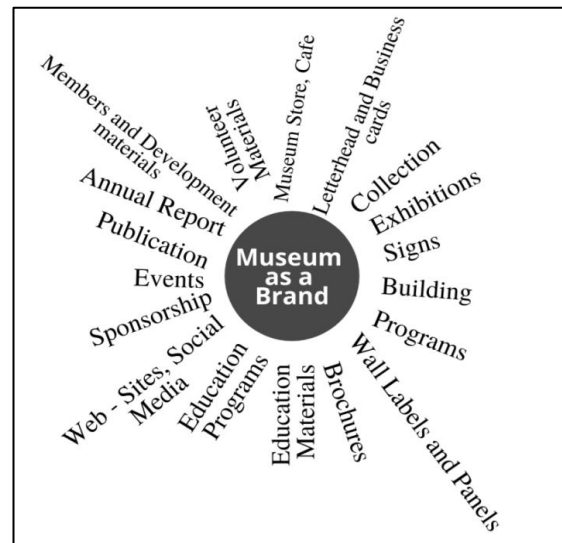


Figure 2: Museum as brand touch-points
(Wallace 2016)

The Content

A powerful content can keep the users engaged for longer period of time and hence the companies/institutions strategize on strong branded content. Content marketing is a type of inbound marketing techniques which includes the process of planning, creating, distributing, sharing and publishing content via channels such as social media, blogs, websites, podcasts, applications, press release, print publication etc. The goal is to reach the target audience and increase brand awareness, sales, engagement and loyalty (Hubspot 2021, August 2021, <https://blog.hubspot.com/marketing/content-marketing>). As in the case of museums, content has the power to turn the museums popular among the audiences. The museum must identify its specific goals, create valuable content posts that complement its goals, distribute the contents in correct platforms, assessing the contents and should fine tune the strategy over the course of time. The process involves digging deep into the values of branding the museum as well as researching of the audience. It has been established that social media marketing

is the practice of using social media platforms to sell its products from museum shops, promote museum as a brand, product or service to its community. The key points to be kept in mind while turning museums as cultural brands on virtual platform are, increasing museum brand awareness, building engaging communities; understanding its own niche of potential audiences; measuring brand sentiment through social listening; proving audiences customer service; (Figure 3).

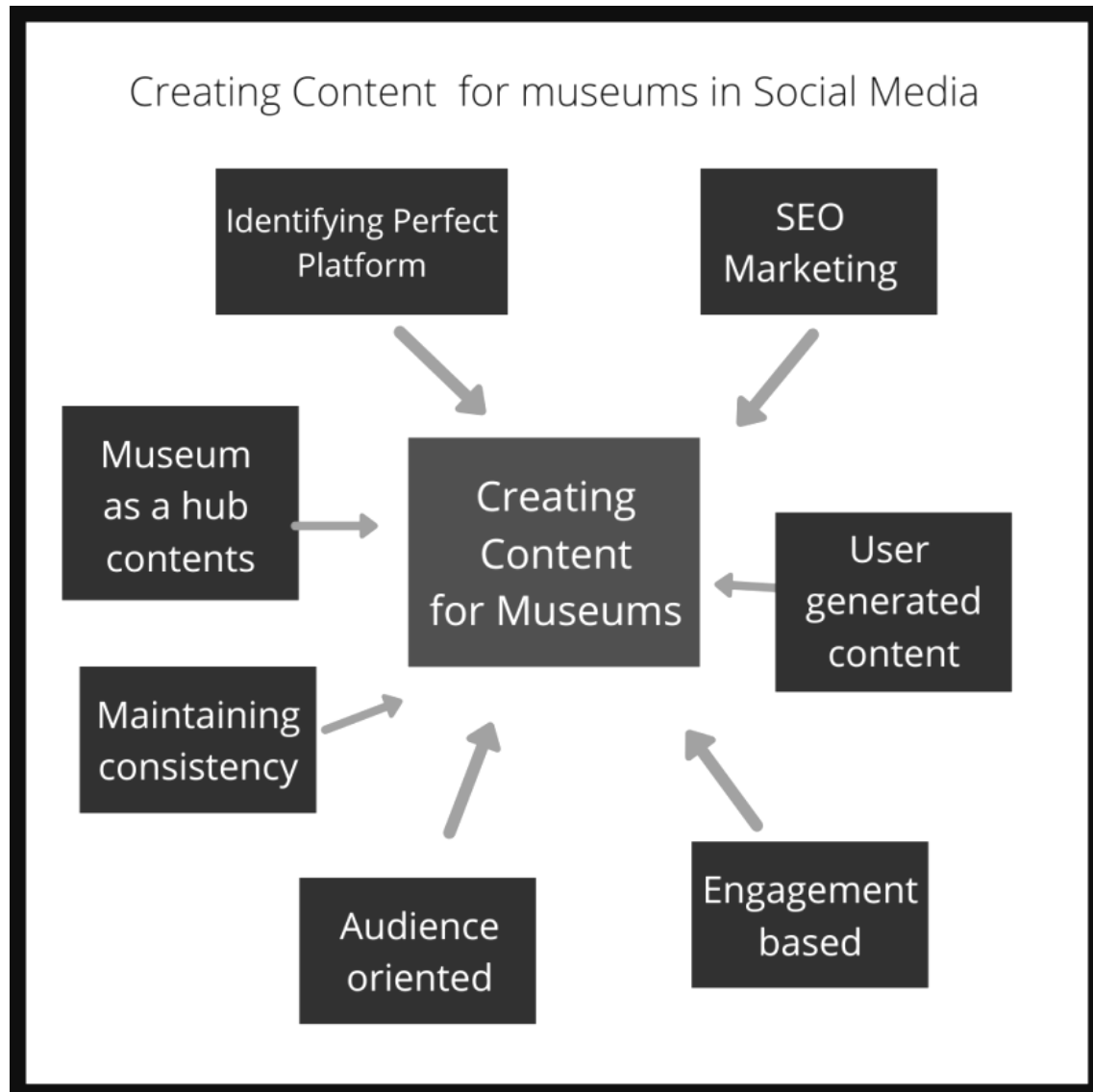


Figure 3: Elements for Museum Content Creation (Mondal 2021)

Case Study Experiments

Two museums, namely Gurusaday Museum, Kolkata under the ministry of Textiles (which is directly under Government of India) and the Museum of Department of Museology (which is under the university administration of The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda) were chosen as case studies to estimate their identity and presence in the social media.

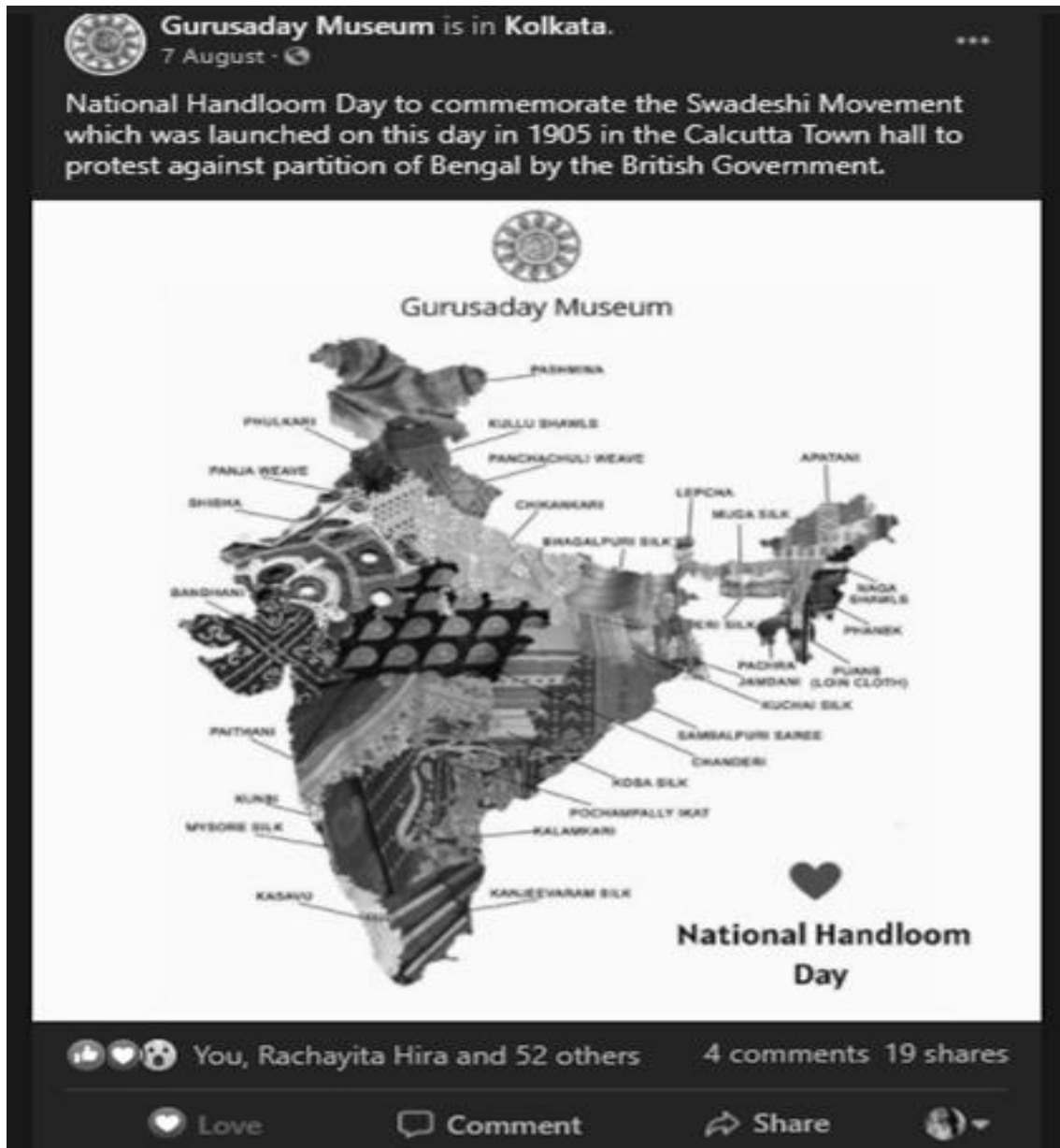


Figure 4: Content Published on the National Handloom Day

Case Study 1: Gurusaday Museum, Kolkata

Experiment Proposal 1: Publishing of social media content according to contemporary time and context will create more engagements among the visitors/audience which can have direct influence and boost on creating museum identity. The time chosen was June-August, 2020 and the social media platforms used were Facebook & Instagram.

Aim: (1) Creating brand identity, awareness of museum among the community. (2) Creating engagements of visitors/audience with the museum online by social media. Based on the abovementioned objective, published a content on 'National Handloom Day' 7th August 2020 with an objective to promote, educate and create engagements with the audience.

Subject: Different types of textiles found all over India (Figure 4) representing different zones. Gurusaday museum identity assign to undivided Bengal with its arts, crafts and textile (kantha, handmade sewed quilt with patterns and motifs of 19th century collection)(<https://www.facebook.com/GurusadayMuseumIndia/posts/2717117155201260>).



Figure 5: Content published for Tree Data Bank

Audience Reactions: People responded positively and shared the content on their social media timelines which eventually increased the public reach and identity boosting for the museum.

Experiment Proposal 2: Proposal for developing a tree bank since Kolkata was badly affected by the cyclone *Amphan* and lost most of its greenery. To help the society with an objective to create a bank of trees for the common people who wants to plant trees and adopt them & raise them to increase the green environment, a content was published on social media after the natural disaster (cyclone *Amphan*, WB, 16 - 21st May 2020).

Subject: Donation of trees, awareness of tree plantation (Figure 5) (<https://www.facebook.com/GurusadayMuseumIndia/posts/2660306894215620>).

Audience Reactions: This initiative was appreciated by the museum fraternity and public started donating plants. As this content performed well in social media it also got recognition in e-Paper and newspaper (<https://www.anandabazar.com/calcutta/cyclone-amphan-uprooted-trees-of-joka-museum-logs-to-be-handed-over-to-the-artisans-1.1167603>).

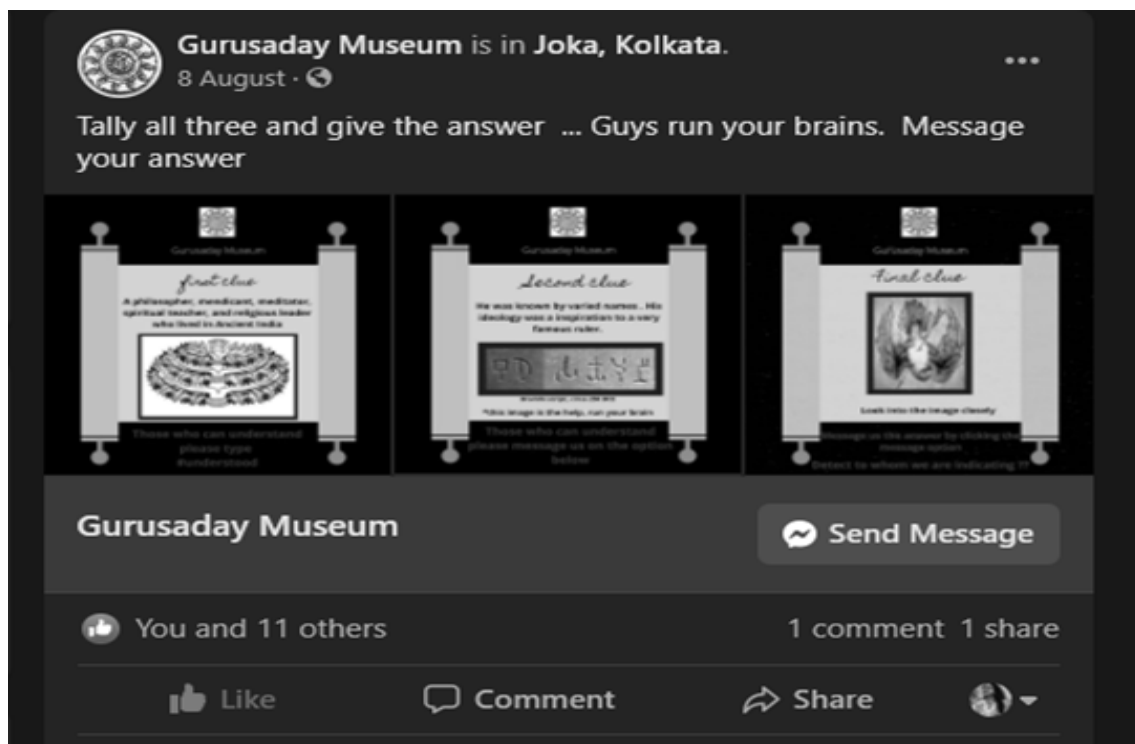


Figure 6: Treasure Hunt

Experiment Proposal 3: Proposal for publishing an online treasure hunt activity with an objective to develop engagement with audience and there by managing brand identity and spreading knowledge to the community (<https://www.facebook.com/GurusadayMuseumIndia/posts/2717670738479235>) during COVID lockdown time. Various cultural institutions and museums all over the world started conducting

events and activities online. The proposed treasure hunt was based on one of the museum masterpieces and is designed as a part of #museumfromhome in such a way that, the participant has to identify an image with question and follow specific hash-tags till the end of the game to get the treasure. The treasure hunt (Figure 6) activities conducted for three weeks and the answer was declared on fourth week.

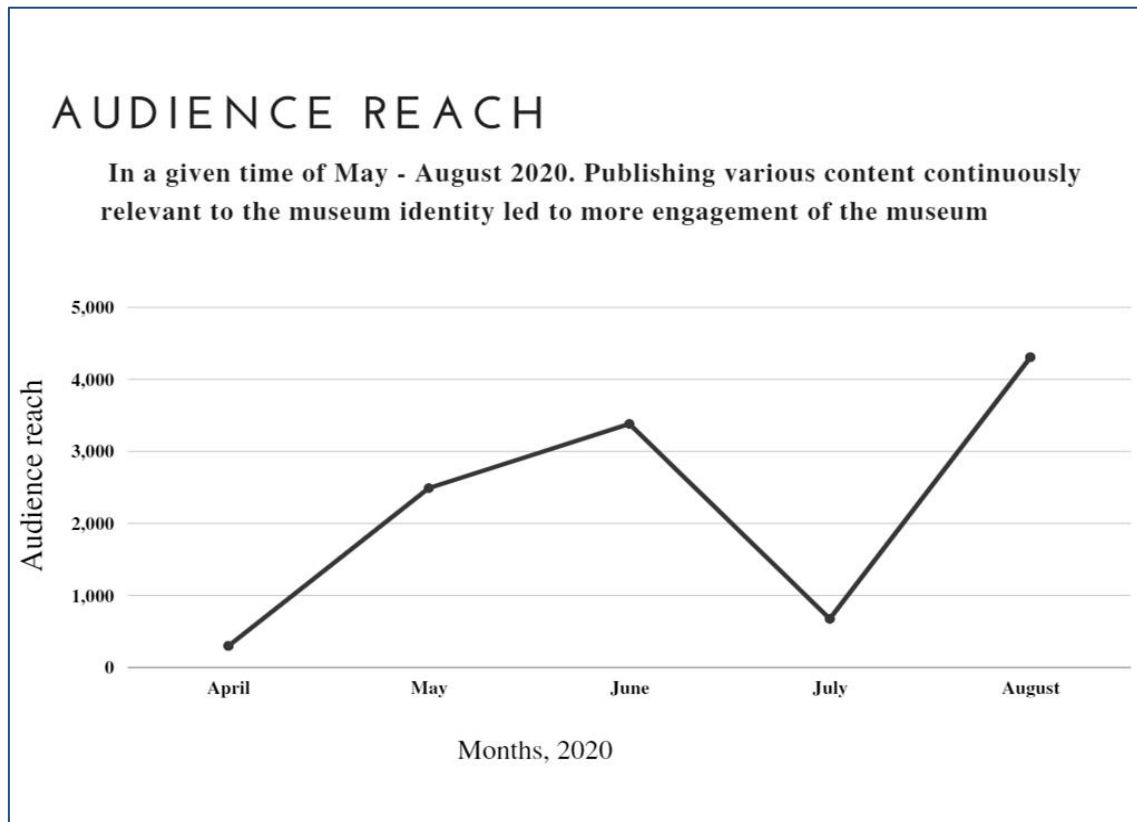


Figure 7: Audience reach on social media (Facebook and Instagram)

The Observations

People were informed about activities and events through social media organically (nonpaid way, without auto ads). Positive response from number of people demonstrated the indication of engaging with the content, following proper rules and hash-tags. The audience engagements and reach increased from May to August 2020. In the beginning at the launch April 2020, engagement was 0, but when the events started to publish relevant to the contemporary time and context, audience started to acknowledge it. In figure 7, in the month of July social presence has dropped due to less relevant posts and less innovative content, and announcement based.

Case Study 2: Museum of Department of Museology

Museum of the Department of Museology, Faculty of Fine Arts, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda) has created its Instagram account as @museology_msubaroda to conduct experiments to see the impact of social media on identity creation.

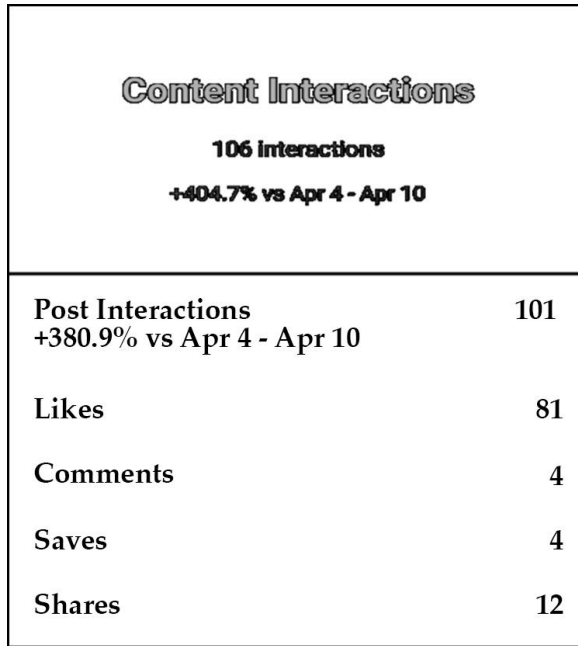


Figure 8: Total number of content interactions

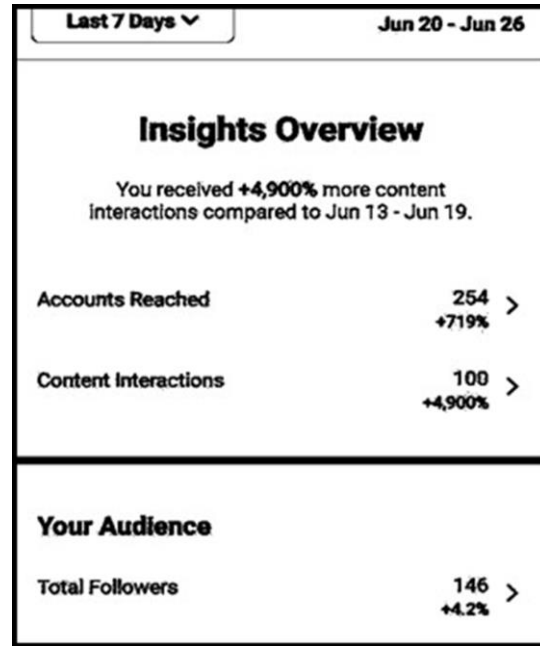


Figure 9: Growth of the page (data collected from Instagram Insights)

Experiment 1 - Engaging and Audience based Content Publication: Contents: i) Instagram Reel contest; ii) Online Quiz; iii) Webinar iv) Interesting Fact Post.

Experiment 2 - Audience Oriented and Shareable content Publication: Contents: Organizing virtual Talks, discussions and streaming them on their social media pages. It is observed that this type of contents helped to engage with the audience niche of the museum community.

Experiment 3 - Maintaining Consistency of the Posts: Contents: In this experiment the contents were created to interact with the audience, understanding the community niche. It included publishing social media stories (Interesting content available for 24 hours).

Observations

Experiment 1: Two kinds of contest one webinar and one shareable content events involved in this experiment. The quiz got around 300 responses and followers also put it in the story which created more publicity. Webinar (Museum through the lens of heritage) 100 people attended the event, which is around 4 times than usual. Instagram Reel and Interesting fact content was highly shared among the followers. The results of the first experiment were completely based on the quality of the content which was published on @museology_msubaroda instagram page.

The data in figure 8 is derived from the Instagram Analysing tool named *Insights*. It is the great feature to collect the basic data analytics of the contents and the followers, It show variety of different data like profile reach, engagement reach, audience

demographics, etc. This feature is only available in the business profiles of the Instagram.

Experiment 2 was focused on audience oriented and shareable content, it was observed that engaging contents was shared among the followers which eventually led to the growth of the profile (Figure 9).

Experiment 3 was all about maintain consistency of content, which was achieved by publishing interactive Instagram Stories (a feature by Instagram used for sharing photos or videos, that appear like slide show, which will disappear after 24 hour). This type of content helps to engage with the profile's audience niche and leads to growth of the profile.

Results

After performing all the experiments from April to June 2021 the evaluation of the result achieved on the terms of Reach rate, Impression rate and Engagement rate of the Official Instagram Profile of Department of Museology, Faculty of Fine Arts, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda (@museology_msubaroda) is as follows.

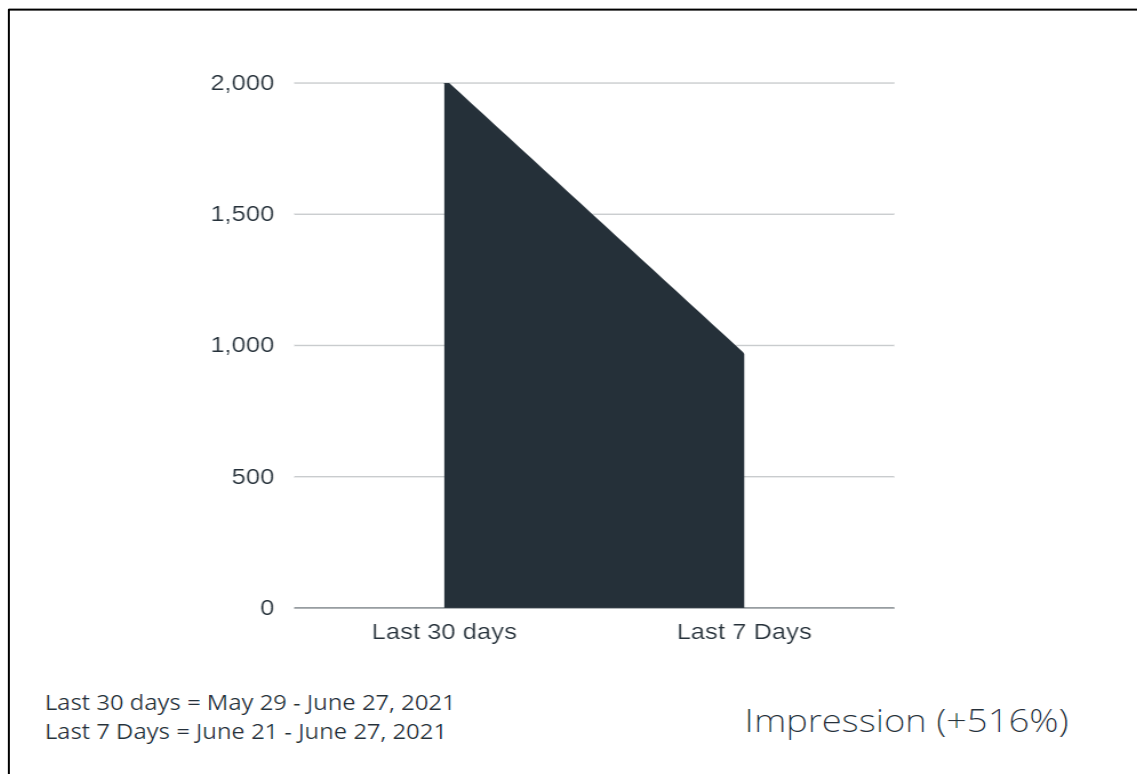


Figure 10: Impression rate @museology_msubaroda IG page (29th May-June 27, 2021)

Reach Rate: It is an Instagram terminology which means the number of unique users that saw your Instagram or given story a day. Reach tells us how many unique users are served your content. To create more brand awareness, one must maximise its reach rate. To measure reach rate of the profile the formula used is as below.

Reach of the profile = (Total number of people seen the post/story ÷ Number of followers) x 100. The reach rate of the @museology_msubaroda (IG Profile) was 91.7% on the Posts and 55.4% on the stories as per calculated from the above formula. According to *Instagram*, ideal reach rate of the Instagram of 2021 on Posts is 36% and 7% on stories of smaller profiles which have followers under 10k. As the reach rate of @museology_msubaroda exceeds the ideal parameters, it can be said that huge no. of unique users is receiving @museology_msubaroda's content, eventually helping to create brand awareness.

Impression Rate: It is an Instagram terminology which defines, the number of times a particular content for e.g posts or stories has been only viewed by the users but not reacted or engaged with that content. If the impression rate is higher than the reach, then users are only viewing the content, that with eventually after a span of time the profile will reach down. After the experiments and continuous analysis, the impression rate of @museology_msubaroda (Figure 10) is +516% (+ sign denotes ongoing growth of the profile and distribution of content among the unique users).

Engagement Rate: This is a must track metrics for social media marketers and defines how much the followers have engaged with the published content. According to *Hootsuite* (social media management company) the ideal engagement rate of 2021 has been divided into three sections (Table 1)

Table 1: Ideal Engagement Rate of 2021

Number of Followers	Engagement Rate
>10K	1.18%
10K - 1M	0.94%
<1M	0.74%

Typically, higher the followers, lowers that engagement rates because in larger community there is a large part of followers include potential users, various bots and other irrelevant users that are also included in the profile.

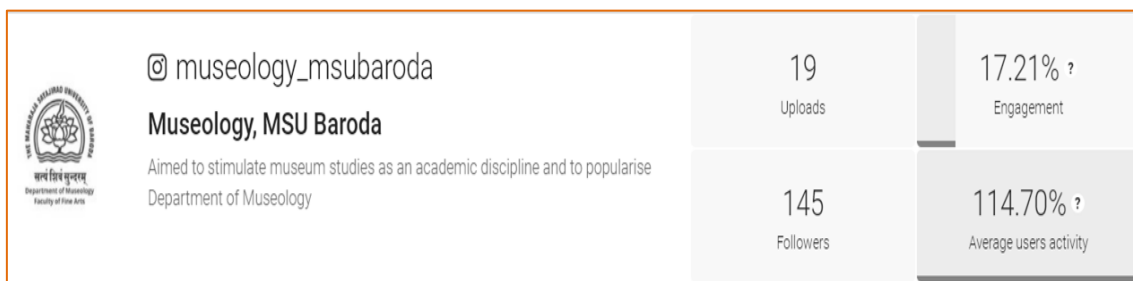


Figure 11: Source - Instagram Analyzing Tool

The engagement rate of @museology_msubaroda is 17.21% with 145 followers (Figure 11). Hence the achieved results have exceeded parameters of ideal engagement rate, through this the social marketer can draw a conclusion that the above experiments are actually working on brand awareness, driving good amount of traffic and published audience engaging content.

To sum it up, if a museum uses the above models to establish themselves online, as the results of the experiment suggests that these models will not only help to create brand awareness but it will also help in creating engaging content and which in turn will lead to profile growth and end up in finding more unique users. According to its goals, mission and vision a museum has to decide the correct platform, to engage with its own community. A museum is a hub of contents, hence once the platform has established, museums should keep experimenting with the contents of the feed and to keep the users to stick longer.

To establish digital brand awareness one museum must always focus on its analytics (a scientific process of discovering and communicating the meaningful patterns which are found in the data) on what type of content is relevant to its followers/community, continuous focus on SEO (search engine optimization) marketing, means the practice of increasing the *quantity* and *quality* of traffic to the website through *organic search engine results*. This can be deciphered as a museum attracting all of its potential visitors through site, because the search engine tells the user to do so, hence it attracts visitors who are genuinely interested in the museum. Finally focusing on publishing various types of audience engaging content, that will eventually help the profile to find more unique users. The above model is one of the patterns, that any museum can follow to establish itself online. Continuous experimentation and consistency can lead to develop a better model for the followers of its profile.

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