



# Research on the Development of the Palace Museum Based on Social Media

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**Abstract.** In the modern day, social media-based museums' communication capacities play a significant part in bridging the formation of relationships between the museum and its visitors. In order to study the communication model of museums, academics have taken inspiration from the changing mass communication model. Social media nowadays has steadily impacted all facets of daily life, including the museum sector as a new channel for museums to increase communication. Social media offers benefits that other forms of communication do not, including the addition of fresh components to the museum communication model and the potential for more engaged audience-museum interaction.

The Palace Museum in China is one of them and has made some incredible progress in this area. Compared to other museums in China, the Palace's information on how social media is used in practise is deeper, more thorough, and more accurately reflects the pertinent topics. In order to establish a museum communication model that is appropriate for the social media era—the “multiple interactive communication model”—this paper uses the Palace Museum as an example to summarise its social media strategy. Based on this, it integrates social media as a new and expanded communication medium into the museum's communication system. This approach not only serves as a guide for other modern museums' social media communication strategies, but it also introduces a theoretical innovation to the classic museum communication model and opens up new possibilities for the growth of relationships between the museum and its audience.

**Keywords:** social media · museum studies · communication · The Palace Museum

## 1 Introduction

China has added the most museums worldwide in recent years. In China, museums have developed into a significant platform for urban development and social inclusion. In addition to serving as a location for the collection and display of cultural artefacts, museums provide a window into the growth of social civilisation and assist individuals in assimilating their local and unique cultural memories into the macro historical memory of human culture.

The tasks and responsibilities of museums have been progressively enlarged as a result of the expansion of museum functions and the increasing of public knowledge of museums. In addition to helping the public comprehend culture to enhance their capacity to appreciate works of art, museums serve a crucial role in developing social consciousness and fostering a cultural milieu among the general public [1]. At the same time, museums are a representation of the city's cultural taste and have both regional cultural traditions and peculiarities.

In order to adapt to the fast changing commercial economy of today, to fully exploit the cultural and aesthetic value of museums, and to garner widespread societal attention, it is imperative to incorporate brand awareness in the museum business. The tourist, entertainment, and leisure sectors are also competitors of modern museums, in addition to those in their own sector. The total number of museums in the nation reached 4,510 in 2014, according to the State Administration of Cultural Heritage, although visitor numbers are considerably different from the rapidly expanding museum industry. China's citizens visit museums on average only once every two years, compared to an average of 3–5 visits per person in major developed nations. With innovative exhibition strategies, inventive goods, and strong brand identities, museums need to reinvent themselves in order to capture the public's interest.

The museum business has also seen new changes as a result of the growth of social media, and the benefits of social media for branding are becoming more and more clear as the media landscape, particularly social media, transforms how people work and live. Scholars typically summaries or enumerate the effects of social media on museum communication and the growth of museum-audience connections, but there is a dearth of theoretical explanation for the topic.

The Palace Museum, a Chinese museum that is now using social media with impressive results, is chosen as a case study in this essay. Based on its experience, it summarizes a new paradigm of museum communication. The purpose of this essay is to discuss the significance of museum communication models, their methodology, the widespread use of social media in museums today, and the core concerns of museum communication theory. In regards of theory, the suggested new communication method based on the Palace experience contributes new ideas to the development of museum communication theory and the research of museum-audience interactions, which is supported by interactive communication theory; in terms of practice, the proposed new communication model based on the Palace experience serves as an essential reference for other museums in China to use social media in their communication practices.

## **2 The Inevitability of Social Media Integration with Museum**

### **2.1 Theories Related to Social Media**

The first museums appeared in the ancient Greek world as hubs of learning, religion, spirituality, and creativity. They served the aristocratic and elite, were closed to the general public, and were primarily used for the collection of priceless artefacts for research and education. The debut of the contemporary open museum was signaling by the opening of the British Museum in 1759 and the Louvre Museum in 1793. As a means

of transferring cultural knowledge to the general public, museums continue to play a significant role in urban life.

The cultural environment has altered how museums are defined. The idea of museums as non-profit organizations started to shift, emphasizing the notion that they exist for no financial gain. The focus switched from collecting and research to display and dissemination at the same time, further clarifying the orientation of museums. The alteration in the origin of “things” was theoretically supported by the introduction of the New Museology [2]. Traditional object-centered museology was a stage in which museums offered exhibitions and visitors exclusively visited for educational purposes. The new “human-centered” era, which stresses the social and educational functions of museums, downplays the importance of items and the conventional activities of museums and emphasizes the role and status of the visitor.

In museums, the concept of “artefacts” has evolved as well. In order to fulfil the goal of the exhibit through interactive audience engagement, several science and technology museums, for instance, use photoelectricity to demonstrate the advancement and development of modern technology. A focus on the portrayal and conveyance of historical connotations has led museums that gather historical artefacts to no longer restrict their presentations to physical collections. Traditionally, museum artefacts were thought of as three-dimensional, tangible things. As museums have grown and developed, two-dimensional and intangible things have been recognized as museum artefacts and added to the collection. Recorded materials like photos, audio recordings, and video recordings have also been gathered by museums.

## 2.2 The Evolutionary History of the Museum

This paper contends that the term “social media” better accurately describes the social, public, interactive, and participatory aspects of this kind of media. The word “social media” is also defined by academics in terms of these media’s qualities. An new idea, social media enables for user involvement and widespread, efficient, and timely participation, which sets it apart from traditional media. Social media enables everyone to participate in the production and delivery of information, in contrast to traditional mass media, where journalists and other media professionals produce information and then deliver it to the public via TV and radio, with the public merely passively receiving the information. The most distinctive feature of social media is that it gives everyone the right to create and disseminate information, so that the initiative of information production and information dissemination returns to the public.

In the process of “interactive” and “participatory” communication through social media, the audience’s initiative and zeal can be used. Social media based on mobile Internet technology also has apparent advantages in terms of communication content, speed, scope, and reception in addition to “interaction” and “participation,” which are not available in ordinary mass media [3]. The fragmentation, decentralization, personalization, content variety, and ease of interaction of information distribution have all been significantly improved by social media. In comparison to traditional media, social media offer content that is richer and more diverse, communicates information more quickly, covers a greater area, and transcends geography and time to enable audiences to engage in communication activities in sporadic time. Thus, the intimate engagement between

communicators and recipients and the advancement of the communication process in time and place are two of the fundamental features of social media communication.

### **2.3 Social Media in Practice in Chinese Museums**

The number of channels for information dissemination has grown incrementally, and the volume of information has grown massively in the age of mobile Internet-based social media. As a result, there are now more diverse ways for the public to access information and receive content that is more richly detailed. According to the summary and analysis of the social media characteristics in the previous section, I discovered that social media has the advantages of unlimited time and space, low operating costs compared to traditional print publications, television and radio reports, and educational activities of museums, as well as the ability to use mobile Internet to reach a wider audience with museum information.

Additionally, social media offers real-time interactive features that are not offered by the other marketing strategies discussed above. The introduction of social media will diversify the medium of communication in museums, increasing the likelihood of attaining better communication outcomes. Social media is a new type of outreach for museums and provides benefits that previous outreach approaches do not have. Due to their single, linear, closed, didactic, and “physical”-focused communication approach, traditional museums have become less appealing in the age of information explosion and social media [4]. Museums must adapt their communication strategies in light of the rapidly evolving social and communication landscapes. The Smithsonian Institution, in its 2009 Strategic Development Conference, argued that museums should change to adapt to the social impact of social media.

Chinese museums have also been actively utilizing social media in recent years to create a variety of communication methods. Since 2011, the first year for microblogging, hundreds of museums in China have built Weibo and microblogging platforms to share resources and post details on exhibits and artefacts. At the same time, more and more tourists are using social media sites like Weibo and WeChat to learn about museums, post about their experiences, and submit images to share and discuss with others due to the rapid expansion of the mobile Internet. The early social network BBS period, the leisure and entertainment social network era, the micro-information social network era, and the vertical social network application era are the four key stages that social media development in China has gone through. Micro-information social networks like Weibo and microblogs are currently the most prominent social networks for museums.

## **3 The Utilization of Social Media for Museums – The Palace Museum**

The Palace Museum has launched relevant WeChat and microblog columns as well as “the Palace Taobao” microblog platforms specifically for the marketing of cultural and creative goods. With the aid of these social media platforms and mobile applications with social features, the Palace has experienced a previously unheard-of innovation in communication. A social media communication pattern with an approachable and

elegant positioning, interconnected and unique platform content, and a combination of online and offline is gradually developed by The Palace using social media like WeChat and Weibo along with a number of mobile applications with social features. The Palace's overall communication model now includes a significant amount of social media communication, which presents both new opportunities and problems for the Palace's development.

### **3.1 Clear Division of Functions Among Platforms**

The official microblog and WeChat of the Palace Museum and its offshoot platform "the Palace Taobao" microblog and WeChat, both have a clear division of labour, each with its own characteristics, but are also interconnected.

While "the Palace Taobao," microblogging, and WeChat are focused on the selling of cultural and creative products, the official microblogging and WeChat of the Palace Museum primarily disseminate information on the collection, exhibitions, and activities of the Palace. To further serve the public's varied cultural demands, specialist sub-numbers have been opened, making information distribution by the Palace more targeted and efficient [5]. The Palace has created a number of mobile Internet apps in addition to social media sites like Weibo and WeChat. With a heavy emphasis on aesthetic, educational, and social aspects, these mobile applications provide in-depth information about a specific collection or series of collections in a thematic manner.

However, in terms of communication style, substance, and structure, the Palace's primary social media platforms and socially enabled mobile applications are also connected and collaborative. We can see that the Palace's social media platforms have largely maintained a pro-people character in the section on "pro-people and elegant style positioning" in terms of overall style. In terms of communication content, the official microblog and WeChat are linked, "Palace Taobao," microblogging, and WeChat, especially the content of the higher degree of attention. Visitors can communicate with museum employees on social media sites like Weibo and WeChat and share their thoughts and wants through retweets, comments, and likes. Additionally, viewers can play games using mobile applications that offer in-depth information about a specific collection or type of collection while also having the option to share it with others via the app's integrated social capabilities, drawing in additional viewers. The link between the platforms is therefore still very strong in terms of overall style, substance, and form even if the Palace has launched various sorts and positioning of social media platforms. Together, these platforms have the enormous duty of disseminating the Palace's culture.

### **3.2 Online to Offline (O2O) Corporation**

The primary goal of the Palace's usage of social media platforms for communication is to increase the visibility of offline exhibitions and information on cultural artefacts in order to fulfil the Palace's communication goals and contribute to society. As a result, WeChat and microblog content from offline exhibitions and objects not only enables viewers to visit the Palace on mobile devices, offering a more considerate offline experience for viewers visiting the site, but also extends and expands information about the site's

exhibitions or objects and expands the social impact of offline exhibitions and objects, attracting more potential viewers.

The official Palace microblog displays its historical collections in a thematic way. For instance, the microblog displays the historical collections and culture of the Palace in relation to the theme of spring by featuring paintings, adornments, jewelry, silk weaving, official women's hair buns, etc. The mobile application also organizes the ceramic museum's collection in the Palace in accordance with its historical collections [6]. The social media platform also offers viewers expanded information about the Palace buildings and exhibitions to make up for the limited number of objects on display or information content due to exhibition space constraints. Visitors can scan the QR code of an object on site to learn more about the object or share information about their favorite objects through social media.

## 4 Conclusion

Since museums have been more widely known, there has been a progressive widening of the gap between them and their visitors, and modern museums in particular have started to see their visitors as the social foundation for their growth. The study of museum communication is crucial for the development of modern museums since "communication" has a significant role in the growth of the relationship between museums and its audiences. However, the development of social media will also serve as the foundation for the creation of new communication media in the future due to its advantages of transcending time and space, interactivity, participation, and sociality. Although social media has helped to enhance museum communication practices, it has also increased expectations for offline displays, service quality, and departmental cooperation. The social media era in Chinese museums has continued to advance the communication model. One of the most significant ways that museums are modernizing their management structure, corporate philosophy, and development strategy is through the study of communication models in Chinese museums.

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