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The Role of Advertising in Uzbekistan's Museums: A Comparative Analysis with International Experience

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Abstract: This article examines the role of advertising in promoting museums in Uzbekistan, expanding audience engagement, and enhancing the public accessibility of cultural and historical heritage. The study aims to analyze the communication functions of museum advertising, compare existing digital communication practices with international approaches, and develop practical recommendations for improving promotional activities. The research employs document analysis, comparative analysis, and generalization, drawing on the digital initiatives of Uzbekistan's museums, the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the Smithsonian Institution. The findings indicate that digital archives, interactive exhibitions, multilingual audio guides, mobile applications, and augmented reality technologies provide significant opportunities for strengthening museum communication. However, their effectiveness depends on strategic planning, audience-oriented content, consistent digital engagement, and systematic evaluation of communication outcomes. The article recommends developing annual communication plans, expanding partnerships with educational and tourism organizations, collecting visitor feedback, and applying measurable performance indicators. The study concludes that integrating advertising into museum management can strengthen public engagement, promote cultural heritage, and improve the overall visitor experience.
Keywords: museum advertising, museum marketing, cultural heritage, digital communication, audience engagement, Uzbekistan museums, social media, visitor experience, communication strategy, digital technologies.

Museums fulfill functions such as preserving historical memory, popularizing scientific knowledge, and participating in the cultural life of society. However, a museum's rich collection or modern exhibition does not automatically guarantee a broad audience. How information about the museum reaches the public, how communication with visitors is established, and how the museum experience is conveyed to the community are equally important. In this regard, advertising is not merely an auxiliary tool for museum operations but a channel of communication that serves to realize the museum's social mission.

Museum advertising differs from advertising aimed at selling commercial products. Its primary objectives are to articulate the museum's content and value, spark interest in historical and cultural heritage, facilitate visit planning, and build trusting relationships with the public. Consequently, advertising serves not only to drive ticket sales or increase visitor numbers but also to promote educational programs, temporary exhibitions, scholarly events, and the use of digital resources. The purpose of this article is to analyze the role of advertising in Uzbekistan's museums, compare existing digital and communication capabilities with international approaches, and develop practical recommendations. The study employed methods such as document analysis, a comparative approach, and generalization.

Museum advertising can be defined as a communication activity that informs the target audience about a museum's operations, collections, exhibitions, services, and educational

opportunities, while also sparking interest and encouraging visits. It encompasses outdoor advertising, printed materials, media relations, websites, social media, electronic newsletters, promotion through partner organizations, projects with bloggers, and visitor recommendations.

The primary function of museum advertising is to raise awareness. The public should be able to easily find information regarding the museum's location, operating hours, admission fees, exhibitions, tour languages, and visiting conditions. The second function is to popularize the content—specifically, explaining the historical significance of the exhibits in a simple, clear, and engaging manner. The third task is to expand the audience, specifically by engaging with children, youth, families, domestic tourists, foreign visitors, and visitors with special needs. The fourth task is to develop the museum's brand—that is, to strengthen its distinct identity and public credibility.

Advertising must align with the museum's scholarly and ethical mission. Presenting historical artifacts merely as entertainment products, taking images or historical information out of context, or making unrealistic promises to visitors can undermine trust. Therefore, it is advisable to prepare advertising content through the collaboration of research staff, tour guides, the education department, and communications specialists.

Plans have been outlined for the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan to develop digital archives, interactive exhibitions, multimedia installations, a mobile app, and audio-guide services. Digitization at the museum involves high-resolution photography and scanning of exhibits, as well as the creation of digital descriptions and electronic databases. Such initiatives create new opportunities not only for the preservation and scholarly study of collections but also for promotion and public communication: digital content can showcase museum collections to a wider audience, provide a preview of exhibitions, and spark interest in visiting.

The State Museum of the History of the Timurids offers an example of this through the use of the NazzAR app, which provides information on specific exhibits via audio-video guides in Uzbek, Russian, English, and French, alongside the use of AR markers and 3D holograms. This experience illustrates the link between promotion and the museum visit itself: a short video or post shared beforehand can attract an audience, while digital tools within the museum can enrich the promised experience with substantive content.

At the same time, the mere existence of digital technology does not automatically imply the formation of an effective promotional system. If information about an app or audio guide fails to reach the user, its overall impact will be limited. Therefore, a promotional plan must encompass not only the development of the technology itself but also its promotion, the provision of clear usage instructions, the preparation of multilingual information, and the gathering of user feedback.

In international museology, promotion is often viewed as a component of a broader framework comprising marketing, public relations, and audience development. ICOM's materials on museum marketing, communication, and audience engagement emphasize the importance of establishing common terminology and professional approaches[1]. The training program on marketing, audience development, and fundraising organized by ICOM focuses on aligning museums' communication plans with audience needs and stakeholder requirements, establishing new forms of interaction through digital technologies, and identifying opportunities for collaboration[2].

[1] International Council of Museums (ICOM). Museum Marketing, Communications & Audience Engagement Glossary. 29 February 2024.

[2] International Council of Museums (ICOM). ICOM Training Workshop on Marketing, Audience Development and Fundraising.

One key principle drawn from international practice is organizing promotional activities as a pre-planned system rather than merely a collection of isolated posts or seasonal campaigns. In this approach, the museum segments its audience, selects appropriate messages and channels for each group, defines activity objectives, and measures outcomes. For instance, promotional efforts might target school students with educational programs, families with weekend events, foreign tourists with multilingual practical information, and researchers with collection catalogs and scholarly gatherings.

A study conducted in partnership between ICOM-AVICOM and ICOM-MPR examined the digital strategies of 173 museums across 51 countries during the pandemic. It highlighted how museums strove to maintain audience engagement through websites and social media, while also developing formats such as podcasts, digital tours, and online mediation[3]. This experience demonstrates that the role of digital advertising extends beyond merely placing ads: a museum must also create valuable content, engage in regular communication, and address the audience's needs within the online space.

The Smithsonian Institution utilizes social media and video content as measurable channels for reaching a broad audience. Its public engagement dashboard recorded 37.4 million social media interactions and 67.9 million video views for the 2025 fiscal year[4]. These figures do not serve as a direct benchmark for comparison with museums in Uzbekistan, given the differences in organizational scale, financial resources, and audience size. However, this example highlights the importance of the practice of regularly measuring digital communication results and tracking them through publicly available metrics.

Audience research also plays a significant role in international practice. Audience studies conducted within the framework of ICOM CECA focus on examining visitors' behavior, impressions, knowledge, emotional experiences, and their engagement with the museum[5]. Such an approach considers the visitor not only as a statistical unit, but his needs and opinions as a source of improvement of the museum's activities. Museums of Uzbekistan can also learn how understandable and useful advertising messages are through short questionnaires, feedback forms with QR codes, and interviews with schools and tourist organizations.

It will not be correct to evaluate the difference between the museums of Uzbekistan and the considered foreign practice in the manner of "advertising or not". The difference is more in the degree to which advertising is integrated into the management system, the use of audience data, the regularity of digital content and the measurement of results. The local conference suite includes examples of digitization, multilingual audio guides, AR/3D tools, and international exhibitions. These opportunities create a basis for enriching the content of advertising. And ICOM materials emphasize the need for strategic planning of communication and the development of interaction with the audience.

The first comparative direction is communication channels. Traditional posters, booklets, television and press remain relevant to the audience in the area where the museum is located. And digital channels allow to quickly update information, distribute it in different languages and reach

[3] Eulenstein, M. L.; Faber, M. H. The Digital Leap: Museums Adapting to COVID-19 and Beyond. ICOM Voices, 22 August 2023.

[4] Smithsonian Institution. Public Engagement Dashboard: Virtual Smithsonian and Social Media Engagement, Fiscal Year 2025.

[5] ICOM CECA. Surveying Audiences: Visitor behaviours, perceptions, knowledge, emotions and museum relationships.

users in remote areas. The most appropriate model is not to pit all channels against each other, but to harmonize them on the basis of a single content and visual style.

The second direction is advertising content. Just announcing opening hours or the name of the exhibit may not be enough. A short story about the history of the exhibit, an expert's explanation, the restoration process, a question and answer for children, a tour recommendation or a visitor's impression will arouse meaningful interest in the audience. Such materials convey complex historical information to the public in an understandable form, while maintaining the museum's scientific credibility.

The third direction is evaluation of results. The number of social media followers or post views are useful indicators, but they alone do not prove the success of an ad. Visits to the museum website, event registrations, tour bookings, source of visit inquiry responses, return visits and audience satisfaction should also be tracked. These indicators help to allocate advertising costs and labor resources appropriately.

The fourth direction is organizational capacity. Digital communication requires a regular content plan, a responsible person, the ability to prepare photos and videos, a fast approval process, and the skills of employees. It is not always possible to establish a separate marketing department in small museums. In this case, it is possible to combine resources through a common specialist for several museums, cooperation with the regional cultural department or an internship program with universities.

First, every museum should develop an annual communication plan. The plan should define the main audience groups, the exhibitions and programs to be promoted, the channels to be used, the responsible personnel, the costs and the evaluation criteria. It is desirable to coordinate the plan with the museum's scientific, educational and tourist tasks.

Secondly, essential visitor information on the museum’s official website and social media channels must be regularly updated. Details such as the address, opening hours, ticket prices, public transport options, tour languages, photography rules, accessibility features for visitors with disabilities, and contact information should be clearly displayed. In addition to Uzbek and Russian, this information should also be provided in English for museums that attract a significant number of international tourists.

Thirdly, the content plan could include exhibit-based stories, an "exhibit of the week" feature, short videos, expert interviews, behind-the-scenes preparation footage, questions for children, and materials explaining the features of audio guides and mobile apps. Each post should offer clear value to the visitor, provide necessary practical information, and include a call to action.

Fourthly, museums can strengthen partnerships with schools, higher education institutions, travel agencies, hotels, local media outlets, and cultural organizations. Announcements regarding joint exhibitions or educational projects can thus reach the audiences of these partners as well. Such collaboration need not be limited to the exchange of advertisements; it can also encompass joint events, lectures, competitions, or educational programs.

Fifth, it is essential to regularly gauge visitor feedback. A brief survey at the exit or a QR code can be used to ask about the reason for the visit, the channel through which the visitor learned about the museum, which services were useful, and what could be improved. Surveys should be voluntary, concise, and designed to avoid the collection of excessive personal data.

Sixth, it is recommended to evaluate advertising effectiveness using several indicators: online reach and engagement; visits to the museum website's visit-planning pages; sign-ups for tours or events; visitor responses regarding how they learned about the museum; participation in

educational programs; and post-visit satisfaction. Establishing goals prior to each campaign makes it easier to compare results later.

Seventh, advertising content must adhere to standards of historical accuracy and cultural sensitivity. Copyright and usage permissions for images must be verified, historical figures and communities must be discussed respectfully, and the provenance and historical context of exhibits must not be oversimplified. Digital innovations should reinforce the museum's core scholarly mission rather than overshadowing it.

Analysis indicates that promotion is a vital tool for Uzbekistan's museums to popularize cultural heritage, connect with new audiences, and enhance the visitor experience. Digital archives, interactive exhibitions, multilingual audio guides, mobile applications, and AR/3D solutions—highlighted in the 2026 conference proceedings—form an essential foundation for enriching museum communication. However, these tools can only yield significant results when integrated with promotional strategies, accessible content, and an understanding of audience needs.

ICOM's approaches to marketing and audience development, along with the example of the Smithsonian Institution, demonstrate the importance of strategic communication planning, the consistent use of digital channels, and the measurement of outcomes. It is essential not to simply transplant these practices directly into the context of Uzbekistan, but rather to adapt them to the scale, resources, audience, and local cultural environment of the museums. Accordingly, it is advisable for each museum to develop an annual promotional plan, create multilingual and audience-oriented content, expand partnership networks, and regularly analyze results. Future research should involve conducting empirical monitoring of the official websites and social media channels of Uzbekistan's museums, comparing advertising expenditures with visitor figures, and evaluating the effectiveness of various communication channels based on visitor surveys. Such studies will help transform conclusions regarding advertising activities from general recommendations into evidence-based management decisions.

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