

The Impact of Social Media in Branding Hazara University Museum of Archaeology, Mansehra (Pakistan)

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Abstract

In this modernistic digital environment, museums, regardless of whether commercial or local, have adopted effective branding strategies to strengthen public visibility, attract diverse audiences, and support long-term sustainability, especially through social media platforms. This article examines the potential of branding the Hazara University Museum of Archaeology through social media by analyzing visitor and staff perspectives gathered through structured questionnaires and survey-based qualitative research. The Hazara University Museum of Archaeology preserves a distinctive collection of artifacts that reflect the rich cultural and archaeological heritage of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in general and of the Hazara division in particular. The archaeological collection of the Museum belongs to the different phases of human cultural history spanning from Iron Age to the British period. This study identifies the museum's strengths, public perceptions, preferred digital platforms, and areas for improvement, while also highlighting how digital engagement can connect the museum to tourism and educational development in the region. The calculated findings of the survey we conducted suggest that strategic use of social media platforms and other technical measures can enhance the museum's identity, increase awareness of its collections, and position it as a significant cultural and academic institution.

Keywords: Museum Branding, Social Media, Hazara University Museum, Mansehra, Pakistan

Introduction

Hazara, formerly referred to as Pakhli Sarkar, represents the largest northern division of Pakistan, strategically situated along the eastern banks of the Indus River in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This region is characterized by its rich cultural heritage and diverse archaeological significance, making it a genuine living museum encompassing multiple religious and ethnic narratives (Shakirullah, 2025). Here in 2001, the University of Hazara was inaugurated in the village of Dhodial, which features a dedicated department and museum of archaeology, established in 2006. This institution has been pivotal in conducting significant archaeological explorations in and outside the Hazra Division. Of these, the Archaeological surveys in Abbottabad, Haripur, Mansehra, Tor Ghar, Kohistan and Chitral districts are worthy to mention (Ali et al., 2009; 2010b; Hameed, 2012). Apart from the explorations, excavations at different sites including Bhamala, (Taxila) (Hameed, 2018), Bado Dheri (Shakirullah et al., 2020); Zar Dheri (Shakirullah et al., 2021), Kandar Bedadi and Guli Bagh (Mansehra) and Singoor (Ali et al. 2010; Hameed et al., 2022), Chakast and Broze (Chitral) (Hameed and Samad 2025) have also been undertaken by the Department of Archaeology, Hazara

University, Mansehra.

Most of the archaeological artefacts collected through these explorations and excavations are now housed in the Hazara University Museum of Archaeology for the purpose of conservation, exhibition, education and promotion of cultural tourism. The facility hosts a distinctive assemblage of artefacts including coins, jewellery, ceramic wares, sculptures and other utilitarian and ritual objects which collectively encapsulate the historical narrative of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province in general and of the Hazara region in particular. Functioning both as an academic repository and a hands-on research hub for students and researchers alike, the museum serves as an invaluable resource for archaeological and cultural studies. Its collection is unique and encompasses a comprehensive chronology of the region's history, traversing from Buddhist influences to post-Islamic cultural developments. The museum's strategic location enables both students and sightseers to engage in a profound exploration of the area's multifaceted history.

In the contemporary context, numerous educational institutions are evolving into recognizable brands to enhance the visibility of their collections and attract visitors. In line with this trend, our objective through this article is to establish the Hazara University Museum of Archaeology as a brand through strategic marketing across various social media platforms. The distinctiveness of this historical institution must resonate with both domestic and international audiences, fostering a greater appreciation for its extensive artefact collection. By leveraging targeted content and engagement strategies, we aim to elevate awareness and understanding of the museum's offerings, thereby cultivating a broader interest in Pakistan's archaeological heritage.

The Hazara University Museum of Archaeology is situated between the Karakoram Highway and the newly constructed CPEC road. Apart from the easy access, the museum is also nested with important archaeological sites and historical/religious monuments such as the Shiva temple in Gandhian (Samad, 2008), the Ashokan Rock Edicts in Mansehra City, Guli Bagh and Naukot Monuments (Shah and Hameed, 2012), Zar Dheri Buddhist complex (Youshihide, 2011) and the ancient settlements of Kandar Bedadi that have substantial potential to attract tourists and pilgrims. By promoting the Hazara University Museum of Archaeology, we may pull in a significant number of visitors both local international, which would help mark the institution as a vital site and give the museum a unique identity. Once branded, this small but unique museum will become known to many scholars and tourists including religious pilgrims. Establishing the museum as a recognized brand will provide valuable opportunities for the preservation and promotion of these important sites. Furthermore, the unique blend of Hazara culture will be showcased to the world, inviting visitors to experience the local food, scenery, and traditions.

Concept of Museum Branding

In terms of museum branding in Pakistan, the Lok Virsa Museum of Islamabad, Nasreen ki Haveli in Karachi (which has housed many regional textile collections), and the Sethi House in Peshawar have created a new concept of branding museums on the local level. A brand creates a strong bond, trust, and regularity among its customers; this was much needed by institutions like museums to survive. To have repeated visitors who appreciate the collections it contains would generate sufficient income that would help support the museum to sustain itself (Stallabrass, February 2014). We have many examples of museums turning into brands, among them the most common instances being the Tate Modern Museums in England (Rosso, 2023). They have turned themselves into a recognizable brand that attracts millions of visitors over the years, generating millions, and have created trust, which in the long run helped these museums remain sustainable and, in combination, a famous visiting spot for the public. (Pusa, 2014)

In previous eras, museums survived with the funding of patrons, scholars, and a special set of visitors. Gradually, this narrative changed into curiosity, and people started visiting museums for fun and entertainment, but this attribute also shifted towards personalized experiences, technological integration, such as apps, cinematic titles, and a greater focus on emotional engagement (Rosso, 2023). Modern trends show a push for broader, more diverse audiences, but due to recent challenges like economic downturns and Covid, attendance by visitors has been affected. Hence, a marketing

strategy was applied to many institutions, such as the British Museum, the New York Met Museum, and many more museums around the world, to keep the museums running and keep the public engaged (Povroznik, 2024).

Importance of branding in a museum

The emergence of COVID-19 in 2020 presented another significant challenge for museum curators regarding visitor engagement and organizational financing in the absence of physical attendance. In response, various digital media platforms, including official museum websites/accounts on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, played a crucial role in bridging this gap. These platforms not only facilitated interactions with diverse audiences spanning all age groups but also fostered interest driven by motivations beyond mere education (Povroznik, 2024). Museums experienced a revitalization through the consistent updates of their artifacts and historical exhibitions shared on social media. This aspect of digital media painted a new picture for these institutions, ultimately aiding their recovery in the post-pandemic environment, as individuals returned to experience exhibitions from a refreshed perspective. (Vasiliki G. Vrana, Dimitrios A. Kydros, Evangelos C. Kehris, Anastasios-Ioannis T. Theocharidis, George I. Kavavasilis, 2019)

Museums have gained a new digital identity through these technological advancements. Several programs, such as web histories, virtual museum tours, and historical channels, are now being made to gain the public's attention towards museums and their artifacts (Wang, 2024) (Povroznik, 2024). These progresses have made countless unknown old and new museums into brands, the best possible local example being the COMO Museum of Art in Lahore.

Developing the Museum's Social Media Presence

Modern times call for modern measures, as we have previously discussed, that the integration of technology is deemed very important nowadays. Digital tools, apps, and multimedia enhance experiences, catering to different generations' comfort levels with tech and allowing for global engagement. Museums are actively working to attract more diverse visitors, including younger people and underrepresented communities, moving beyond traditional audiences (Pusa, 2014). Through AI (Artificial Intelligence) and AR (Augmented Reality), many museums, in collaboration with computational sciences, have generated supposed faces of several historical figures and cinematic titles to attract visitors and audiences online and in person. The young generation needs information beforehand about the places they visit, and a hands-on experience when they arrive at the museum. To achieve this objective, many museums arrange exhibits for a certain time period for audiences to closely examine them (Stallabrass, February 2014). These exhibitions are often announced on social media for all to see; the most common platform nowadays is Instagram. (Vasiliki G. Vrana, Dimitrios A. Kydros, Evangelos C. Kehris, Anastasios-Ioannis T. Theocharidis, George I. Kavavasilis, 2019)

Currently, we are aiming to introduce Hazara University Museum of Archaeology on different social media platforms for the public to see. This will enhance its brand visibility around the world as a university museum. As it is one of a kind, it will also attract many researchers and students to study the objects that the museum houses. Academically, it will yield a positive outcome and exposure to the Department of Archaeology, Hazara University, Mansehra. Its presence on social media is warranted, as it would regularly inform viewers about distinct projects, different digs stories, and new findings that the institution's Department of Archaeology carries out. The museum has many exceptional traits that we could post online to captivate the audience, such as its building, the priceless collections of artefacts it contains, and most importantly, the fascinating stories related to these objects.

Being easily accessible to the students, staff and local community, the Hazara University Museum of Archaeology has substantial potential to thrive on social media. Active participation of the visitors on the Museum's digital platform will contribute to further improve and expand its reach.

Research Methodology

To effectively cultivate the brand identity of the Hazara University Museum of Archaeology, it was essential to thoroughly assess its current attributes through targeted inquiries. Building a robust brand

relies on establishing trust, compatibility, and relatability with visitors. Our inquiry framework has been meticulously designed based on existing practices, perceptions, and stakeholder feedback, rather than through experimental methods or interventions.

The research focuses on two primary stakeholder groups critical for brand recognition: the museum staff and its visitors, encompassing both the local community and the student body. By engaging these populations, we aim to gather insights that will inform the museum's branding strategy and enhance its overall appeal.

The study utilized a survey-based approach to explore how the museum would likely be promoted on social media, examining perspectives from both visitors and museum staff. Adopting a qualitative methodology, we conducted surveys with a variety of questions targeted at different age groups within the university, including both students and faculty from multiple departments. The questionnaire was thoughtfully crafted to capture the current state of the museum and its visitors. It included thirty-two (32) questions for students/visitors, whereas a total of four (4) staff members who are currently working in the museum were given thirty-seven (37) questions. This allowed us to pinpoint the museum's strengths and weaknesses, as well as areas that could use improvement. The questionnaire was straightforward and written in simple, relatable grammar to ensure accessibility for all readers. They contain a mix of opinion-based, ordinal, nominal, and open-ended questions.

The IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 32.0.0 was used to analyze the data.

- After entering the data with the responses given by the audiences and staff members, we performed descriptive statistics to analyze the frequencies and percentages of all the answers we received from different ages, genders, no of visits, preferred social media platform, and preferred content.
- The second command we executed in the SPSS was the cross tabulation, in which we determined the relationships between different ages and their preference for social media platforms. Then, gender versus their willingness to engage, and the role of staff versus the branding awareness among them.
- We also used the pie charts to conclude the strongest patterns of the survey.

Objectives

- To understand the current status and perception of the Hazara University Museum.
- To identify the core elements that can shape its brand identity.
- To propose branding strategies for enhancing its visibility and public engagement.
- To connect museum branding with tourism and educational development in the region.

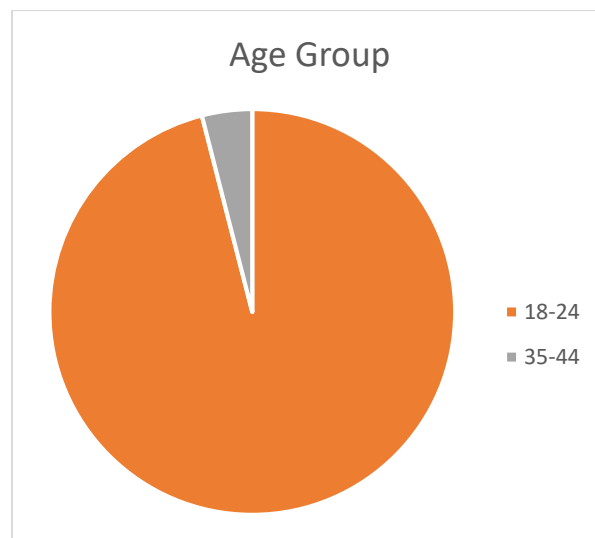
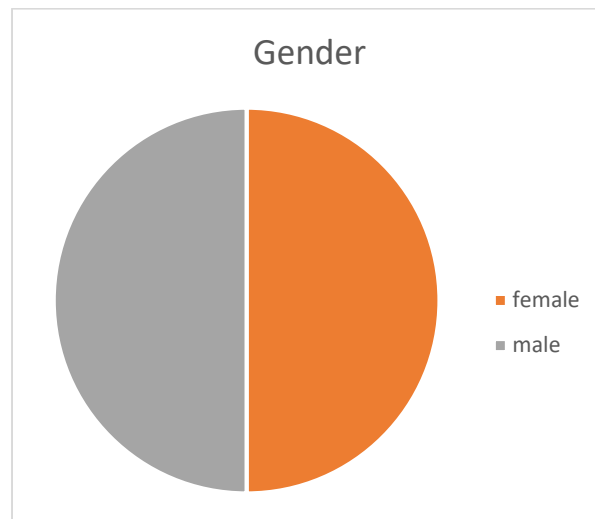
Surveys

Two structured questionnaires were meticulously crafted for this research: one targeting the general visitor/audience and the other aimed at museum personnel. These questionnaires were specifically designed to gather comprehensive data on various dimensions, including visitor experiences, perceptions of the museum, branding strategies, social media engagement, and the staff's perspectives on institutional identity and communication frameworks. The survey was conducted within the Hazara University premises with the objective of identifying strategies to enhance engagement among students and staff from diverse academic departments. The insights gleaned from this study have facilitated a critical examination of the myriad suggestions and sentiments regarding the museum, enabling us to strategically refine its features for branding purposes.

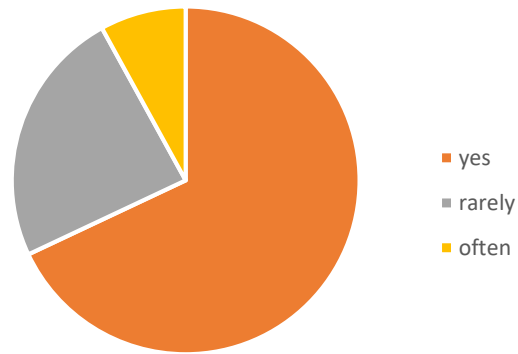
Survey Findings of General Audience/Visitors

The questionnaire for the general audience consisted of four sections. Section A gathered demographic information such as age, gender, profession, and education. Section B focused on museum visit patterns, motivations, overall experience, exhibit clarity, and the most interesting objects observed. Section C explored barriers to museum visitation, preferred visiting time, group behavior, and satisfaction with facilities. Section D examined digital engagement, including preferences for social media platforms, content type, communication tone, video length, and willingness to participate in museum-related online activities.

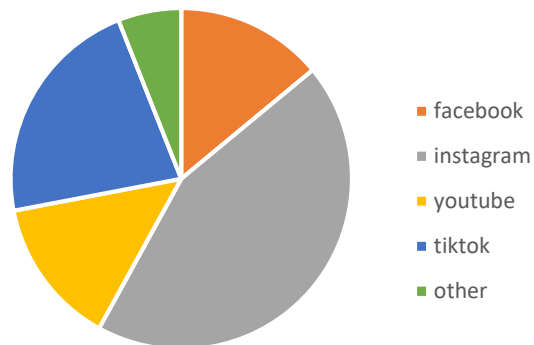
The survey of the general audience/visitors included students, mostly in the age range between 18 and 25. They were selected from different departments to collect distinctive views on the museum visit and how we could represent it to attract them. As all of the surveyors were youngsters, they were eager to see the museum and its collection on social media with regular updates. Below are the pie charts from the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS):



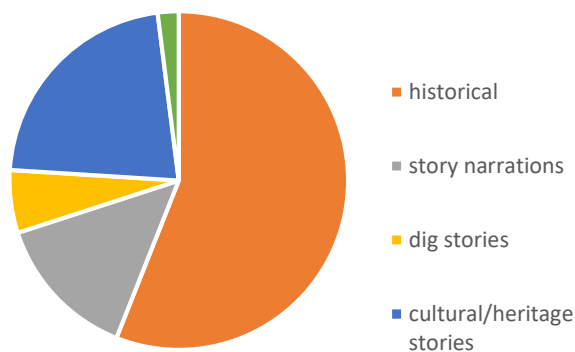
Is it your first time visiting the museum?



Which social media platform do you prefer?



Which type of content would you prefer?



Survey Findings of Staff

The staff questionnaire was divided into five sections. Section A collected background information, including age, gender, profession, education, and work experience in the museum sector. Section B assessed staff awareness of the museum's mission, values, brand identity, and institutional pride.

Section C examined staff interaction with visitors, communication of brand identity, and views on museum display quality. Section D focused on internal branding, visual identity, cross-departmental collaboration, and training needs. Section E addressed social media strategy, staff confidence, willingness to share content, and challenges in promoting the museum online.

The staff demonstrated a notably enthusiastic and proactive attitude in response to the majority of inquiries. They expressed a clear willingness to engage with visitors and are amenable to undergoing professional development to enhance the museum's brand identity. Their insights aligned closely with those of the students on campus regarding the implementation of social media strategies and other technological advancements aimed at establishing a strong brand presence for the museum within the region.

Conclusion

To synthesize the branding of Hazara University Museum of Archaeology, we identified many significant potentials for its trademarking. While suggestions from the general audience are abundant, we propose several strategic recommendations to elevate the museum's profile. Firstly, crafting a distinctive cultural logo is imperative. We suggest adopting a design that incorporates Hazarvi handicraft motifs, such as the Khamak or a Phulkari flower, characterized by specific local color schemes. Furthermore, we recommend producing specialized brochures for the museum's various collections, readily available outside the main entrance. These brochures should narrate the stories behind each collection and their significance to the region of Hazara.

If we are to attract an audience/visitor from outside the University, the museum's remarkable collections, including coins, Buddhist sculptures, a variety of figurines, along with other utilitarian and ritual objects present significant opportunities for strategic marketing initiatives. We propose developing high-impact banners that prominently feature these key items for installation in major urban centers such as Abbottabad, Peshawar, Islamabad, and Mansehra. Given that the Hazara region attracts millions of tourists each year, particularly in the summer, the strategic placement of digital billboards and banners will be crucial in effectively guiding both scholars and visitors to the museum. These measures will give the exposure the museum needs for branding.

Incorporating technology into the museum's branding strategy is also crucial. We propose the installation of a digital display within the university that broadcasts documentaries on recent excavations, interviews with faculty from the archaeology department, and testimonials from international visitors. This initiative aims to enhance visibility and provide valuable context for both prospective academics and tourists interested in the museum's offerings. By implementing a range of targeted marketing strategies, the Department of Archaeology can collaborate with other related arts and cultural sciences departments to develop extensive outreach programs.

For younger audiences, such as school and college students, programming could include interactive storytelling sessions, pottery-making workshops, and competitive painting events. At the college level, we could facilitate structured discussion groups, skill-development workshops, and in-depth research projects focused on specific artifacts, along with student-led guided tours. This will not only enrich student interest in the museum but will also promote interdepartmental research and collaborations.

Additionally, a significant component of community engagement should involve cross-departmental seminars held within the university. These seminars would allow students from various disciplines to participate in podcast sessions focused on the museum's themes. Finally, students from relevant fields should have opportunities to engage in ongoing research initiatives within both the Department of Archaeology and the museum, fostering a deeper understanding and interdisciplinary collaboration.

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