

## The Role of Social Media in Promoting Heritage and Culture: A Case Study of Government Institutions in the Eastern Region of Sharjah

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Submitted: 07/03/2025

Accepted: 22/03/2025

### Abstract:

Social media has become a pivotal tool for promoting the Emirate of Sharjah because of its accessibility and capabilities to reach beyond the conventional media setup in TV, radio, and newspapers. This study investigates the role of social media in enhancing the success of cultural events and its integration into broader promotional strategies within the eastern region of Sharjah, namely Khorfakkan, Kalba, and Dibba Al-Hisn. The study employed a qualitative research design. It conducted 24 interviews with representatives of the three key cultural and heritage institutions, the Department of Culture, Sharjah Heritage Institute, and Sharjah Municipality. The study also explores the challenges in implementing promotional policies and the growing reliance of these institutions on social media. This study found that cultural and heritage institutions in the Eastern region of Sharjah employ various strategies to promote education, awareness, and conservation, and they adopt either a unified or decentralized social media approach to ensure cultural values remain accessible and relevant.

**Keywords:** Cultural promotion; government communication; social media; Sharjah; Heritage.

### 1.Introduction

Cultural and heritage institutions play a pivotal role in preserving history, and in fostering national identity, and promoting cross-cultural understanding worldwide. These institutions safeguard traditions, artifacts, and intangible heritage, ensuring their continuity for future generations (Awad et al., 2022; Kadar & Klaniczay, 2022). In the UAE, they are vital for showcasing the nation's rich cultural and historical fabric, bridging the past and present to strengthen national pride and identity.

The Emirate of Sharjah consists of three distinct regions: Sharjah City, the Central Region, and the East Coast, also known as the Eastern region. This study highlights the Eastern Region's unique cultural and historical significance, distinguished by its ancient heritage, forts, museums, and cultural events. It remains a vital hub for preserving Sharjah's identity and for promoting Arab and Islamic civilization.

This study examines the communication strategies and media promotion policies adopted by cultural and heritage institutions in the Eastern region of Sharjah. Three government institutions were analyzed: the Department of Culture, the Sharjah Institute for Heritage, and the municipalities of the Eastern Region, covering all of their offices in Khorfakkan, Kalba, and Dibba Al-Hisn. The study explores how these institutions use social media to balance

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Emirate-level government policies with their internal and regional strategies to effectively promote cultural heritage, and the extent to which cultural and heritage institutions in Sharjah use social media for promotional purposes by addressing the following questions:

1. Which social media platforms and tools are used for cultural and heritage promotion?
2. What government-directed policies guide media promotion in the cultural and heritage sector?
3. What key messages are promoted by cultural and heritage institutions in the Eastern Region of Sharjah?

By answering these questions, the study showcases how social media fosters national and cultural belonging, educates communities about societal customs and traditions, and overcomes challenges faced by institutions in their promotional policies. The findings contribute to understanding the role of social media in cultural promotion, event management, and audience engagement in Sharjah's heritage sector.

## **2.Literature Review**

The use of social media has surged over the past decade, making it an essential component of organizational communication strategies. This trend is evident in both the public and private sectors, where social media facilitates engagement, information exchange, and more efficient communication (Teodorescu et al., 2022). Studies in the field of information systems indicate that implementing a social media strategy can strengthen marketing efforts and improve organizational performance (Lin et al., 2021). Research in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) context, particularly among small and medium-sized enterprises, confirms that social media supports communication and knowledge sharing within organizations (Ahmad et al., 2018).

Cultural organizations play a critical role in connecting governments and citizens by preserving and promoting local heritage. Comparative analyses reveal how cultural placemaking enriches tourism by reconnecting residents with their cultural roots (Awad et al., 2022; Kadar & Klaniczay, 2022). Government institutions can leverage educational campaigns and strategic marketing efforts to highlight cultural assets. Social media, in particular, has been identified as a practical tool for presenting cultural narratives and influencing public perception (Vineran, 2017 ). However, while social media has been explored as a strategic marketing medium, there remains a gap in understanding how these platforms can specifically promote cultural values and related aspects, such as heritage-focused tourism.

Existing research indicates that governments increasingly use social media to strengthen connectivity with citizens. Also , the UAE government has leveraged social media to advance its agenda and engage the public. These efforts align with the shift toward more user-oriented platforms, reflecting the growing freedom associated with digital engagement. ( Arnaboldi and Lema , 2022 ) argues that social media can influence cultural participation within a museum setting, and can prompt changes in institutional practices and enhancing the skills of cultural practitioners to address the evolving needs of democratic audiences. Applying such insights to Sharjah's cultural organizations could help shape residents' cultural perceptions and reinforce governmental initiatives in heritage promotion.

Worldwide, governments and related organizations have increasingly recognized social media's value in promoting heritage and culture. Its interactive nature encourages diverse

audiences to participate, engage, and contribute content. ( Liew , 2014 ) notes that social media inherently fosters interaction, unlike traditional mass media platforms. The emergence of Web 2.0 technology has further transformed content creation, granting users greater agency in cultural activities. Studies thus far underscore the various strategies government organizations employ to publicize cultural heritage, the effectiveness of social media in nurturing cultural engagement, and the opportunities for raising awareness about critical cultural and heritage issues.

In today's digital age, social media stands as a powerful cultural catalyst, forging connections and transcending traditional boundaries. As governments and cultural institutions continue to explore its potential, social media may revolutionize how audiences discover, experience, and preserve cultural heritage. Additional research on its application in cultural promotion, especially in contexts like the UAE, can illuminate best practices and reveal its untapped potential.

## 2.1 Cultural Promotion on Social Media

Social media has significantly transformed how individuals and institutions engage with culture, offering new opportunities for expression, education, and awareness. By leveraging digital platforms, social media enhances cultural communication, enabling individuals and institutions to interact, share content, and collectively shape the cultural narrative. As a result, social media has become a powerful means of consolidating culture and fostering communication between individuals and cultural organizations, relying on modern technology to raise awareness and disseminate knowledge.

A growing body of research examines cultural participation on social media, defined as the extent to which people engage in cultural activities and experiences . Such participation involves creating, consuming, and sharing cultural content, as well as discussing and critiquing cultural phenomena. (Arnaboldi & Lema, 2022) , emphasize that cultural participation allows individuals to express themselves, realize their creative potential, and better understand and influence the world around them. As ( Gronemann et al. , 2015) note that social media platforms alter traditional contexts of cultural engagement, enabling institutions and the public to shape and respond to each other's digital presence. Similarly, ( Liang et al , 2021) suggest that social media fosters an open environment, encouraging diverse participants to engage in heritage protection and cultural discussions regardless of geographical constraints.

Several studies have explored various dimensions of cultural participation online. ( Severo and Thuillas , 2022) identify communication as a critical dimension, wherein users interact through conversations, comments, and content sharing. Cultural institutions often encourage such interactions, prompting visitors to capture images and share experiences on social networks. For instance, young generations in China use social media to disseminate information, meet like-minded individuals, and engage in cultural activities (Liang et al., 2022). This active participation helps cultural institutions reposition their image and enhance their online reputations. Other dimensions include the rhetoric around public involvement in online cultural offerings and the utilization of user-generated content as a tool for engagement.

Beyond participation, social media also facilitates promotion. Government institutions and cultural organizations employ social media platforms to raise awareness about cultural heritage, services, and events. Digital marketing strategies tailored to specific user groups have emerged, adapting to audience needs, the value of the cultural asset, and preferred online platforms

(Ibrahim, 2022). In China, social platforms support cultural heritage protection, nurturing public involvement and encouraging local expression in heritage sites (Liang et al., 2022). Museums worldwide, including those in the UAE and foreign institutions like the V&A Museum in London, utilize platforms such as Weibo to interact with users, promote exhibitions, and share information about collections (Bao, 2018; Duan, 2015).

In today's digital age, both individuals and institutions rely on social media to engage, exchange knowledge, and promote cultural heritage. By encouraging interaction, participation, and the circulation of user-generated content, social media democratizes cultural engagement and amplifies diverse voices. As cultural organizations adapt to these evolving dynamics, they can create more inclusive, interactive, and global cultural communities, ultimately redefining how we experience and preserve culture.

## 2.2 Cultural and Heritage Institutions on Social Media

Cultural and heritage institutions are harnessing the power of social media to promote their brand and engage with audiences. To effectively utilize this platform, they rely on skilled IT teams and specialized tools for content curation, scheduling, and development.

Institutions that aspire to excel in utilizing social media for various purposes, including promotional objectives, must possess a technical division responsible for managing relevant tools that facilitate innovation. These institutions acknowledge the value of employing content curation tools, which involve aggregating social media posts by sharing pertinent information or content. Institutions employ software such as Feedly, which provides users with an effective method to locate and preserve relevant content for dissemination through social media platforms (Okonkwo and Awad, 2023). Furthermore, institutions utilize social media scheduling applications to maintain a consistent flow of posts while allocating time to respond to comments and feedback. Institutions employ content development tools that enable the creation of novel and visually engaging content to maintain brand vitality on social media. However, institutions must possess competent IT teams to achieve optimal performance in these areas.

An analysis of diverse cultural and heritage institutions reveals widespread adoption of social media for promotional purposes, with most organizations implementing guidelines to govern their engagement with these technologies. The Sharjah Heritage Museum, for example, recognizes the value of social media in its promotional efforts. This institution leverages platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram to engage stakeholders and promote its activities. The museum's website encourages visitors to connect with the organization through these channels (Sharjah Museums Authority, 2022). The institution's IT Department is responsible for developing social media policies and overseeing their implementation. Similarly, Bait Al Naboodah, operational since 1995 with a period of closure before reopening in 2018, also utilizes social media (Sharjah Commerce & Tourism Development Authority, 2022). However, the absence of publicly available information regarding Bait Al Naboodah's social media policies on its institutional website indicates a potential gap in their social media strategy. This deficiency must be addressed for the organization to make substantial progress in implementing and optimizing its social media innovation.

Extant literature has also offered insights into the methods and approaches utilized by government institutions to promote culture and heritage on online networking sites. According

to (Liang et al, 2021), approaches involving social media use by museums and urban heritage sites have been growing rapidly in recent years, with some agencies and authorities making significant efforts and progress in data programming and extraction to enhance communication among participants. Furthermore, digital storytelling through the collection and analysis of narratives on certain cultural collections and artifacts is a prevalent approach employed by government institutions (Psomadaki et al., 2019). Such narratives are disseminated on popular social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and collective memory websites. Indeed, numerous social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and Snapchat, possess features that facilitate the sharing of digital stories in pictorial or video format (Ibrahim, 2022). Notably, Instagram provides a means for sharing photographs and videos to exhibit collections within a brief timeframe. Audiences can subsequently relate to these visual contents and develop an interest in other collections (Ibrahim, 2022). Additionally, institutions employ mapping to gain insights into the community mechanisms and expectations of users. Some other studies have also identified the use of online surveys from selected platforms as a method utilized by institutions to disseminate and strengthen the rights and ability of diverse voices on social media platforms (Cochrane, L., & Corbett, J., 2018). Therefore, existing research has provided substantial evidence of cultural participation on social media platforms and the approaches and methods that government institutions employ to promote culture and heritage on these online networking sites.

Cultural and heritage institutes tend to enhance their social media presence with an intent to connect meaningfully with their audiences. With a touch of innovation and skill, they promote their cultural heritage and maintain relevancy in a digital-leaning contemporary world.

### 2.3 Government Communication Strategies on Social Media

The UAE has witnessed a major revolution in the channels of communication by institutions with Sharjah leading this digital change. Graded use of various platforms allows institutions to develop effective ways of reaching their target audiences and promote their activities. Social media thus represents a major tool for marketing, outreach, and interconnectedness of the institutional terrain in Sharjah.

The International Government Communication Forum has had a vital role in restructuring the mode of communication in Sharjah. The recommendations made continue to place pressure on institutions to form adoptions that mix in the use of social media and other digital channels. As a result, Sharjah has emerged as a leader in digital transformation within the UAE. Institutions there employ social media extensively to connect with the public, reflecting strategic collaborations between government entities and influencers. For example, in 2021, the Forum's recommendations emphasized enhancing social media platforms by strengthening influencer-government partnerships, introducing targeted media training for youth, modernizing school curricula to align with future requirements, and developing charters to regulate online content (igcc.ae, 2021). These measures have enriched communication networks, enabling more effective message delivery.

Radcliffe et al. (2023) note that Sharjah's institutions maintain a high rate of social media adoption, signifying the growing importance of such platforms. Across the UAE, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube hold strong prominence, while messaging apps like WhatsApp, Messenger, Telegram, and Viber facilitate private, direct communication (Igloo, 2022). Around 70% of institutions using social media employ multiple platforms, underscoring the breadth and sophistication of their digital engagement strategies.

Cultural and heritage institutions recognize social media's value as they modernize communication and marketing approaches. By installing supportive infrastructure and integrating advanced technologies, these organizations can reach wider audiences, promote their offerings, and remain relevant in the digital age. This aligns with a broader shift: as online tools have democratized information access; individuals can independently explore cultural content. Consequently, cultural centers now rely on websites, digital publications (Indah et al., 2024), and platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to maintain global audiences and preserve their cultural narratives.

Social media's potential extends beyond simple promotion. In Europe, for instance, institutions use hashtags like #MuseumWeek to engage international visitors and local communities simultaneously (Cui et al., 2023). The incorporation of user-generated content and emerging technologies like AI further enriches the cultural experience. AI supports image restoration and can estimate cultural value (Sander Münster et al., 2024). These advancements strengthen cultural promotion, making heritage more accessible, interactive, and sustainable.

While new possibilities are unlocked by artificial intelligence, social media are still the bedrock of public engagement, allowing institutions to promote their cultural messages. By adopting these platforms, cultural and heritage organizations maintain their contemporary relevance and resilience in a rapidly changing digital landscape. With the refinements to their strategies, these institutions are able to take full advantage of the social media potential, creating more open, participatory, and dynamic cultural communities.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are crucial in providing a conceptual foundation for understanding a particular principle or phenomenon. In this situation, social media continues to play a vital role in communicating other people's cultures, including sharing practices that help the world appreciate the beauty of diversity. The Eastern region of Sharjah is known for its commitment to art and culture, and the city has done well in preserving its local heritage (SCTDA, 2023). This characteristic was noted by UNESCO, which branded the city as the 'Cultural Capital of the Arab World' (Grinstead, 2023). This title exemplifies the people in the area's pride in their region. Social media has played a role in conserving the local culture and traditions and communicating the practices of the Arabs to the world (SCTDA, 2023). This has attracted tourists to the region who are curious to see the lives of the locals. This study focuses on the social marketing theory to explain social media's role in promoting the culture and heritage of the people in the Eastern Region of Sharjah.

#### 3.1 Social Marketing Theory

Social marketing theory divides marketing into four specific elements: price, place, product, and promotion. The theory encourages social marketers to consider society as the primary target audience so that health information can be distributed through advertising (Akbar et al., 2021). In this case, the world's population is the audience. Information about attractive tourist places in Sharjah constitutes the health information that should be conveyed through social media advertisements. This theory helps explain that promoting institutions via social media platforms has gained popularity, given that Instagram has contributed to achieving the required promotion. Events and initiatives have also been considered unique products that include all aspects of Arab culture and heritage to encourage the public to access the events and the main goal of holding such events. Finally, the concept of promotion was achieved through social

media marketing. Pictures and videos are spread of various activities in the Eastern Region of the Emirate of Sharjah, including the promotion of heritage through heritage events and the culture of wearing their own clothes, and also through cultural events through poetry and literary sessions, and these pictures make visiting the region attractive for people. Social media has played an important role in enhancing promotion in the Emirate of Sharjah.

The social marketing theory is beneficial to the research question because they help explain the role of social media in marketing the culture to the people in Sharjah. Social media has helped the global population understand the activities that exist in Sharjah, including the benefits of touring the place through the social marketing theory. Social marketing theory also serves as a powerful framework for influencing social behaviors and offers a strategic approach to promote heritage and culture. The application of marketing principles to social issues discloses considerable potential of this theory in influencing public engagement with cultural sites, events, and traditions. More recent literature indicates that social marketing can be effective in influencing behaviors by developing directed campaigns for immediate or specific community issues (Akbar et al., 2021).

#### 4. Methodology

This study employed in-depth semi-structured interviews, using a flexible guide that allowed for modifications in question order and language to align with the natural flow of conversation (Berg, 2005). Participants were selected through purposive sampling (Patton, 2002), with criteria emphasizing extensive professional experience and close involvement in culture industry decision-making. The research involved a total of 24 participants from three heritage and culture institutions based in the Eastern region of Sharjah: Department of Culture, Sharjah Heritage Institute, and Sharjah Municipality. This study covered all offices in Khorfakkan, Kalba, and Dibba Al-Hisn. This composition ensured the inclusion of individuals who were well-informed and experts about the topic. Interviews were conducted individually and privately for each employee in the organization. By involving participants from these three prominent entities, the study captured a comprehensive understanding of policies, practices, and strategic communication approaches relevant to cultural and heritage promotion within the Eastern region of Sharjah.

As this study identifies how government institutions in the Eastern Region of the Emirate of Sharjah work with regard to social media and online communication strategies in the culture and heritage sector, we explored the ways in which the events promotion department works, the methods of promotion and what policy each institution follows in promoting and reaching a larger segment of society and whether there is a fixed plan for promotion or not. Using this approach, it is possible to understand the extent to which cultural and heritage institutions use social media for promotional purposes.

The interviews were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, following (Braun and Clarke's 2006) six-step process. This process involves familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, identifying and refining themes, defining them, and finally, compiling the findings. Thematic analysis was chosen for this study due to its flexibility and ability to systematically identify, analyze, and interpret patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach is particularly beneficial for examining complex phenomena, as it enables a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences and perspectives.

#### 4.1 Sampling

This study followed a purposive sampling approach combined with snowball sampling to increase the likelihood of selecting the most competent participants. Representatives from three cultural and heritage institutions across the Eastern region of Sharjah participated in the research. The sample, drawn from the social communication department and the promotion section, was selected from each institution's three branches (Kalba, Khorfakkan, and Dibba Al-Hisn). These interviews aimed to determine the policies followed by each institution and whether social media was employed for cultural promotion.

Participants are as follows (Table 1):

|                                   |                        |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|
| <i>Department for Culture</i>     | 7 participants         |
| <i>Sharjah Heritage Institute</i> | 7 participants         |
| <i>Sharjah Municipality</i>       | 10 participants        |
| <b>Total</b>                      | <b>24 participants</b> |

#### 4.2 Research Ethics

Since this research involves human participants, ethical approval was obtained from the University of Sharjah's Research *Ethics Committee* (REC) before conducting the study. Ethical standards in qualitative research help protect the subjects, promote fairness in the research process, and enhance the reliability of the results. Participants must be aware of the nature of the investigation, the processes involved, and their ability to withdraw from the study without facing any repercussions at any time (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the principle of respect for persons extends to maintaining confidentiality and protecting the privacy of those involved. Researchers have a duty not only to safeguard personal data of participants but also information obtained about them. This may involve removing all identifiers from the data and/or storing sensitive data in restricted areas accessible only to qualified personnel (Liamputtong, 2007).

In this research, particular ethical principles have been carefully followed, starting with obtaining informed consent from each participant individually, without any coercion or exploitation. Therefore, the interviews were conducted face-to-face in a private setting within the institution. The right to withdraw, even after the interview has concluded, was upheld. Participants' wishes and privacy were respected at all times. Ensuring privacy is crucial to maintaining trust between participants, stakeholders, and the public, thereby ensuring that all processes are carried out ethically. This is specifically important when dealing with government institutions as in the cases in this study. Therefore, these interviews will be conducted directly, face-to-face, in a private location within the institution.

### 5. Results and Discussion

The following research questions guided the analysis, which employed a thematic analysis approach:

1. Which social media platforms and tools are used for cultural and heritage promotion?
2. What government-directed policies guide media promotion in the cultural and heritage sector?
3. What key messages are promoted by cultural and heritage institutions in the Eastern Region of Sharjah?

### 5.1 Tools and Platforms for Cultural and Heritage Promotion

The interviewees confirmed that in the Eastern region of Sharjah, cultural and heritage institutions rely heavily on social media platforms like Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, YouTube, and Facebook for promotion, complemented by other tools such as billboards, email, and influencer partnerships. This multi-platform strategy ensures both broad visibility and interactive engagement with diverse audiences.

According to ( O'Regan, T., & Carah, N. 2021) , interactive digital platforms where information is exchanged within virtual communities are crucial for cultural promotion. In this study, all interviewees reported using social media as their primary vehicle for outreach, mirroring the global shift toward digital engagement in cultural sectors . Aside from the use of social media, the other tools include street advertisings such as billboards and posters, emails, the chat messages, the influencers and the celebrities, brochures and the invitation cards, TV and the radio stations, and newspapers. Each is designed to accomplish a specific objective, with social media being used to gain immediacy and the public feedback, while the traditional channels are offering a wider audience (Bao, 2018).

In Bangkok, for instance, or any other place of such kind, the means by which cultural promotion is conducted has a lot to do with Facebook, which is the main source of public communication. It involves the promotion of local culture, which is achieved by frequent updates and community dialogues (Lunchaprasith & Pasupa, 2021; Liang et al. 2022). For instance, community-based social media promotes heritage preservation in a unique way and makes it possible for professionals and audiences to interact continuously. Types of platforms include Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Reddit, and TikTok, which involve global cultural exchange and interaction (Severo & Thuillas, 2022). Among these, Instagram emerges as a leading platform due to its visual focus and extensive demographic reach (Liang et al., 2022). As one participant noted, "Instagram is one of the most prominent platforms because of the audience's interaction and the diversity of age groups that use it." This observation aligns with ( Arnaboldi and Lema's 2021) .findings that emphasize Instagram's broad appeal and its effectiveness in cultural outreach. Another participant stated, "promotion is done in the Department of Culture through Instagram, X, and WhatsApp. Now we are working on YouTube...for easy reference by everyone." This multi-platform approach resonates with ( Gronemann et al , 2015) , who highlight how employing multiple digital channels ensures access for varied audience preferences.

The Eastern region's strategies, exemplified by the Khor Fakkan Municipality, underscore innovation and adaptability. As a participant explained, "we enhanced the reel feature on Instagram, creating promotional clips about events. We also conduct interviews with committees and personalities before events begin, putting them on Instagram stories to attract the audience." These short, dynamic videos are particularly effective at capturing interest, in line with ( Arnaboldi and Lema's 2021) . research on short-form visual content. Such personalized, behind-the-scenes glimpses resonate with studies showing that authentic engagement fosters deeper cultural connections (Gronemann et al., 2015). A complete story told digitally, short video snippets, and real-time transmissions are the factors that make up a narrative full of cultural ideas.

This finding confirms a major fact in the literature that social media contributes to the meaningful cultural engagement and helps in the visibility of heritage offerings ( Liang, Zhang, and Wang , 2021). posit that interactive platforms become important when it comes to building

virtual communities, and our research shows that these platforms allow cultural institutions to interact or connect with the audience in a more effective way. The findings ( Marta Severo , Olivier Thuillas 2022 ) . Argument on the potential of social media to facilitate the participation of diverse groups and to deepen cultural expression.

The findings show Instagram’s ability to connect with a wide range of demographics. The strategies seen in Sharjah’s Eastern region—such as using reels, conducting interviews, and collaborating with influencers—support the idea that digital platforms make cultural promotion more accessible, allowing both institutions and audiences to collaboratively shape cultural stories (Arnaboldi & Lema, 2022 ). According to ( Liang et al , 2022), promoting community-driven social media engagement enhances the appreciation of heritage and sparks global conversations.

## **5.2 Government Policies and Planning for Social Media Promotion**

Based on the interviews, government-oriented legislation in the Eastern region often follows either a centralized model, where directives come from a main authority, or a decentralized approach, where individuals provide guidance. These frameworks aim to maintain consistent messaging and ensure compliance with governance standards. Whether centrally managed or locally adapted, such strategies help preserve brand identity, prevent the commercialization of culture and heritage, and align with the strategic objectives of government institutions in the cultural and heritage sector. Social media policies play a crucial role for these institutions, as they facilitate the management of their online presence. These policies outline the entire content process, from creation and formal approvals to audience engagement. By implementing such guidelines, the institutions can meet public expectations, support their organizational goals, and maintain regulatory compliance (Smith et al., 2023).

The participants said that there are two primary policy approaches, decentralized and centralized. In a decentralized model, each branch or department establishes its own social media policy. As one participant explained, “each branch has a policy and mechanism that is separate from the other institution,” allowing flexibility to tailor content and strategies to different audiences . According to another participant, “the policy followed in the Department of Culture, Kalba Branch, is not a unified policy. We also have a special department for social media, with specific policies for editing, advertisements, and event photography.” This approach enables branches to respond dynamically to local interests and situational contexts.

In contrast, some institutions employ a centralized or unified policy managed by a main branch. Under this system, promotional content is prepared at the branch level but reviewed and approved centrally. As one participant noted, “there is a unified working mechanism for using social media sites for the Eastern Region Administration.” This method ensures consistent messaging across all branches and strengthens brand identity and compliance ( Roy et al. , 2020). Similarly, another participant stated, “we follow a unified policy in promoting through social media... Pictures and videos are photographed and edited by us, then sent to the main branch for publication. It is a joint mechanism between the branches and the main institution.” Even though centralized policies foster coherence, they can decrease the autonomy of individual branches.

The plans for organizing events also vary. Some institutions rely on a predetermined plan that sketches out the main stages, encompassing brainstorming, designing promotional

materials, selecting media channels, and assessing outcomes. A participant said, “our plan is fixed.... We establish the event, its goals, and its message at the media department promoting it.” This programmatic method ensures clarity and consistency, which makes it the best choice in the field of cultural marketing ( Bonacini and Giaccone , 2021)

Other institutions have the view that tailored strategies to suit a particular objective for each of the events are also practical. Such customization can be associated with event size, signification, or target audiences. Considering the event’s specific plan, the same participant concluded that “we did not have a fixed plan but instead held a meeting with all the responsible media and the industry we are promoting for, to lay out the event, its target, and its message.” This flexible approach seems the most rational and culturally comprehensive way to integrate stakeholders in a community . ( Holtzhausen and Zerfass 2013)

The findings indicate that government institutions strive to balance regulation with mutual respect when formulating social media policies and event promotion strategies. The interplay between bottom-up and top-down governance determines whether divisions have the autonomy to create personalized content or whether standardized communication is maintained under a central authority. This dynamic shapes the approach to cultural promotion, which must be adaptable, context-specific, and effective. For instance, Liang, Zhang, and Wang (2021) stress the importance of tailoring communication strategies to foster authentic citizen engagement, while ( Arnaboldi and Lema , 2022 ) highlight the need for policies that encourage proactive public participation.

The combined use of both structured and flexible plans aligns with the importance of strategic preparation and adaptability. Fixed plans help organizations maintain consistency in messaging and brand identity, while adjustments tailored to specific events enhance engagement with diverse communities. This aligns with the findings of ( Liang et al. 2022), who highlight the role of social media in fostering community commitment. In essence, the observed models and mechanisms of policy development and strategic planning contribute to the dynamism of cultural institutions, enabling them to balance overarching objectives with the unique characteristics of cultural practices.

### 5.3 Cultural Messaging and Community Engagement

Cultural and heritage institutions located in the Eastern region of Sharjah concentrate on the themes of education, awareness, and preservation in their messaging. Additionally, one participant observed the main focus is on “educating the community and reaching their interests.” This illustrates the importance of engagement and resonance with the public.

Beyond historical foundations, traditional artworks, and established cultural practices that shape the region’s identity, educational messages play a crucial role in allowing audiences to explore and engage with the culture. Through community education initiatives, institutions expand cultural awareness and ensure the preservation of heritage for future generations. Awareness campaigns highlight unique aspects of local culture, encouraging both residents and tourists to appreciate multiculturalism. As one respondent noted, “our primary goal is to raise awareness and educate the community about heritage and culture.” These efforts support research indicating that fostering informed audiences strengthens cultural pride and social cohesion ( Nam et al. 2022).

Preservation-focused messages aim to foster a sense of national responsibility and promote values centered on environmental stewardship. As a respondent stated, “the most important messages encourage patriotism and highlight the importance of heritage and the preservation of the environment and public property.” This approach aligns with recent studies demonstrating that cultural messaging can enhance both heritage conservation and environmental awareness (Lang, Wang, and Ma, 2021). Through exhibitions, workshops, and educational campaigns, these initiatives actively engage communities in preserving traditions, natural resources, and historical sites.

In line with global trends, the Sharjah Institute for Heritage and the ICCROM Sharjah Regional Office focus on promoting Arab and Emirati heritage. They employ educational programs, cultural events, and social media campaigns to deepen public understanding, reflecting the findings that such initiatives effectively strengthen cultural identity and encourage community involvement (Hobbs, 2017).

International examples reinforce this perspective. In Bangkok, social media initiatives raise public awareness about cultural sites and encourage their contemporary use. By leveraging digital platforms, institutions have successfully engaged citizens in heritage conservation (Lunchaprasith, 2021; Liang et al., 2021). This strategy mirrors broader efforts worldwide, where social media not only disseminates knowledge but also stimulates sustainable interaction with heritage environments.

In the digital age, government agencies increasingly rely on social media to communicate cultural content. By showcasing festivals, performances, and workshops, these institutions capture their audiences' attention through visually appealing posts and immersive narratives. Social media thus emerges as a powerful tool for nurturing identity, building community connections, and supporting dialogue around cultural values.

Cultural and heritage institutions in Sharjah integrate a variety of platforms and channels—ranging from Instagram and other social networks to street advertisements, emails, and traditional media—to ensure their messages reach diverse audiences. Such features highlight the need for different types of marketing which not only target the characteristics of each culture specific festival but also track the changes in the polarities of interest of the society.

These organizations build a multi-faceted culture by concentrating on education, awareness and preservation of specific values, which appeals to both the citizens and outsiders. Their narratives help develop appreciation and stronger socioeconomic engagement with the ethnical aspects of the society.

These findings confirm the existing literature that reveals that social media and strategic messaging create meaningful community engagements and social awareness. (Liang, Zhang, and Wang, 2021), for example, emphasize the strengths of interactions among platforms for audience participation, communication of ideas, and appreciation for cultural heritage.

The focus on education, awareness, and advocacy aligns with research indicating that well-informed communities are more likely to appreciate and safeguard their cultural heritage. Studies suggest that by utilizing a range of engagement channels—including digital platforms and traditional media—institutions can expand their outreach, strengthen communal ties, and ensure the transmission of cultural identities across generations. Incorporating interactive

elements, storytelling, and relatable narratives reflects the evolving nature of cultural communication, emphasizing inclusive and user-centered engagement.

Sharjah's cultural institutions exemplify this approach. It offers a model for effectively conveying regional heritage within a globalized landscape. By integrating both theoretical insights and practical applications, these findings highlight the impact of cultural messaging in shaping public awareness, which foster collective cultural identity, and promote heritage preservation through informed and active participation.

## 6 . Conclusion

The use of social media is a key player in promoting heritage and culture in the Eastern Region of Sharjah. It is a popular online interactive platform that allows institutions to share their core messages-elucidative, awareness, and preservation-with all sorts of audiences. Their promotion can come via Instagram, X (former Twitter), Facebook, and YouTube, helping showcase local traditions, engaging communities in dialogues, and developing cultural pride. This way, they help link disparate generations and locations. (Liang et al., 2022).

Government policies, whether centralized or locally based, work as a channel for institutions to manage the branding and messaging in a consistent manner, enhancing their credibility and respect for formal standard regulations (Arnaboldi & Lema, 2022 ). Both fixed and flexible promotion plans should be combined so that organizations are able to modify their efforts in proportion to the size of the event, the type of audience, and the cultural significance of the activities. Various content formats, such as images, videos, and short stories, allow the messages to have a pretty straightforward and authentic delivery, which ensures persistence in audience attention.

Social media is doing more than just news distribution in this context. It is enhancing cultural participation, fostering careful use of heritage resources, and spanning the facets of community connection. Consequently, the Eastern Region's rich cultural heritage is rendered accessible, appreciated, and safeguarded for future generations.

With government policies and structured planning approaches resembling a social marketing perspective, institutions are able to shape the outreach strategies they adopt based on the preferences of their audience. Education, awareness and preservation as above are the key aspects of ensuring that the community's values are guided while stimulating cultural engagement. These findings combine to show how the blending of innovation adoption and social marketing principles may help reinforce efforts in promoting culture in dynamic digital environments.

This study discusses the role of social media in promoting culture within several opportunities for further enhancement. For instance, focusing on audience engagement metrics—like likes, retweets, comments, shares, click-through rates (CTR), and time spent engaging with cultural content—would aid organizations in determining the effectiveness of their messages with the public. These gain of insight from these indicators will assist future research in determining if the use of social platforms truly provides avenues for deeper interactions and connections with target audiences. Continuous training and development for the social media teams in cultural institutions will also ensure that they are always kept up-to-date with the latest skills and practices. Workshops, collaborations, and knowledge exchange can nurture their ability to promote cultural heritage effectively. These recommendations would

allow cultural and heritage institutions in Sharjah to further develop their virtual existence, provide opportunities for audience involvement and assure the sustained appreciation of their cultural legacy within the digital age.

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