

# Digital Engagement Strategies of State-Run Museums in Marrakech: A Social Media Content Analysis for Audience Development

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.905000201>

Received: 22 April 2025; Accepted: 02 May 2025; Published: 06 June 2025

## INTRODUCTION

This study examines the growing adoption and impact of digital communication strategies in public museums in Marrakech, at a time when cultural institutions are adapting to new digital demands. It explores how these museums leverage digital platforms not only to promote their collections and events but also to enhance their educational and cultural mission for diverse audiences. Central to this inquiry is a key question: How can digital communication effectively support the promotion of cultural heritage while meeting audience expectations?

The methodology combines a qualitative analysis of digital communication strategies implemented by Marrakech's public museums with specific case studies and semi-structured interviews with institutional leaders. This approach helps identify the challenges faced, successes achieved, and potential improvements in digital communication within a specific cultural and heritage context.

Our research was guided by the following questions:

- What key digital strategies are employed by Marrakech's public museums?
- What impact do these strategies have on public engagement and the perception of cultural heritage?
- What specific challenges arise in adopting and optimizing digital technologies for showcasing collections?

Marrakech provides a rich setting for this study due to its vibrant cultural heritage and international appeal. Public museums in the city—such as those under the National Museums Foundation (*Fondation Nationale des Musées*, FNM) or the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs—play a crucial role in preserving and promoting this heritage while navigating the complexities of digital modernization. This research aims to shed light on strategies for effective and authentic digital communication in the Moroccan museum landscape.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A Brief History of Public Museums in Marrakech

The city of Marrakech, with its rich historical and cultural heritage, is home to diverse museums that preserve and showcase the region's legacy. Since the French Protectorate era, Marrakech has served as a key administrative and cultural hub in southern Morocco, giving rise to iconic institutions such as the Dar Si Said Museum and the now-defunct Islamic Art Museum at El Badi Palace.

In recent years, public museums—including the Dar El Bacha Museum of Confluences and the Jemaa El Fna Intangible Heritage Museum—have emerged, reflecting governmental efforts to promote local culture and history. These spaces offer immersive experiences that help visitors contextualize and appreciate the region's heritage.

Between 2017 and 2023, three additional state-run museums were established: two under the National Museums Foundation (FNM) and one managed by the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, significantly expanding the city's cultural offerings.

Table. 1: List of state-owned museums in Marrakech and their establishment dates

Year established	Institution name
1934	Dar Si Said Museum → (2018 rebranding National Museum of Textiles and Carpets)
2017	Dar El Bacha Museum of Confluences
2017	Mohammed VI Museum of Water Civilization (AMAN)
2023	Jemaa El Fna Intangible Heritage Museum

### National Museum of Weaving and Carpets – Dar Si Said

For decades, the only state-owned museum in Marrakech was Dar Si Said, established in 1934 during the colonial period. Housed in a 19th-century palace in the Medina—built by Si Saïd Ben Moussa—it initially served various functions before becoming a museum of traditional arts and craft workshops in 1932.

Following restoration (2001–2004), the building itself stands as a testament to Moroccan domestic architecture from the late 1800s. Originally an ethnographic museum, it displayed an extensive collection of handcrafted objects from across Morocco's regions.

In June 2018, it was reopened as the National Museum of Weaving and Carpets, aligning with the National Museums Foundation's (FNM) strategy to develop specialized museums. While preserving its historical artefacts, the institution expanded its holdings with new textiles and carpets, reinforcing its role in showcasing Morocco's woven heritage.

### Museum of Cultural Confluences – Dar El Bacha

Dar El Bacha is a traditional palace built in the early 20th century by Thami El Glaoui, the Pasha of Marrakech. It is a typical example of Moroccan houses from that era, featuring a central garden planted with orange trees and other fruit trees. Initially, Thami Glaoui resided at Dar Mnebhi before making Dar El Bacha his main residence, which underwent several expansions and modifications. In 1910, the riad was also used to host foreign and national guests, with salons and rooms decorated in an Amazigh style, incorporating European elements. The riad includes annexes such as the douiria for receptions and a hammam built in 1918.

After independence, the palace was divided into two parts: "la Stiniya," under royal ownership, and Dar El Bacha, managed by the Ministry of Culture. The exhibitions organized there brought some visibility to Dar El Bacha. In 1976, the cultural delegation settled in Dar El Bacha's Douiria, with the student house "Dar Talib" occupying the library and courtyard.

The project to transform Dar El Bacha into an Islamic Art Museum, initiated around 2007 by the Ministry of Culture in collaboration with American philanthropist Patty Birch, did not come to fruition. In July 2015, the palace came under the supervision of the National Foundation of Museums and was renamed the Musée des Confluences – Dar El Bacha.

### Jamaa El Fnaa museum of intangible heritage

The Jamaa El Fnaa Museum of Intangible Heritage opened its doors on February 24, 2023, on Jamaa El Fnaa Square in Marrakech, recognized by UNESCO as a site of oral and intangible heritage of humanity since 2008. Housed in the former headquarters of Bank Al Maghrib, this museum allows visitors to explore the history of

this central Marrakech square. Its goal is to highlight the "halqa" and its various artistic forms, raising public awareness of the importance of this heritage for its preservation and transmission.

The permanent exhibition is dedicated to Jamaa El Fnaa Square and its actors, with sections on the history of Marrakech, the "halqa" and the "hlaiqis," as well as their skills and crafts. The museum also features a numismatic section in tribute to Bank Al Maghrib and a space dedicated to the square's artistic expressions, such as painting, theater, cinema, and photography. Two masterpieces by Jacques Majorelle depicting daily life on the square, along with paintings by prominent Moroccan artists, are also on display.

The Jamaa El Fnaa Museum of Intangible Heritage enriches Marrakech's cultural offerings, contributing to the preservation and dissemination of its ancestral and universal heritage, an integral part of the city's collective memory.

### **Mohammed VI Museum of Water Civilization - AMAN**

The Museum of Water Civilization, inaugurated in 2017 by the Ministry of Endow Ascetic and Islamic Affairs, showcases the relationship between Moroccan civilization and water. Designed for diverse audiences, this 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> museum, spread over three levels, features a permanent exhibition on Moroccan hydraulic ingenuity, covering traditional and modern methods as well as future challenges. The ten thematic sections explore various aspects of water, from its physicochemical properties to the national water strategy. An extension with a three-hectare park is planned, showcasing reproductions of hydraulic heritage and demonstrations of ecological practices. Through its exhibitions and educational commitment, the museum highlights the importance of public communication, a theme explored in the following section.

With this rich history and diversity of museums, it is crucial to understand how these institutions communicate with the public. In the next section, we will examine the typical forms of communication in museums. We will explore how these museums use various means to attract, inform, and engage visitors while highlighting their collections and cultural and educational missions.

### **Typical forms of museum communication**

Museum communication is an essential field of study encompassing various aspects such as cultural mediation, permanent and temporary exhibitions, and the use of traditional communication tools like advertising displays, press releases, media relations, etc.

In the contemporary museum context, cultural mediation plays a crucial role in enriching visitors' experiences through meaningful interactions with collections and themes. This form of communication goes beyond merely transmitting information, aiming to contextualize and make cultural content accessible in an engaging and educational manner. Serge Chaumier notes:

Cultural mediation in museums is an essential activity that goes beyond the simple transmission of knowledge. It involves interaction with visitors, aiming to engage them and spark their curiosity and reflection. Mediators use various tools, such as guided tours, workshops, and digital devices, to facilitate this interaction. (Chaumier & Mairesse, 2013)

At the same time, permanent and temporary exhibitions serve as essential platforms for showcasing heritage and knowledge. They not only present works and artefacts in a structured and thematic manner but also regularly renew the museum's cultural offerings, captivating diverse audiences and fostering dynamic and enriching exploration of historical, artistic, and scientific perspectives.

### **Cultural mediation in museum communication**

Cultural mediation is a central element of museum communication. It aims to establish a connection between exhibited works and visitors, facilitating the understanding and appreciation of collections. Jean Caune describes cultural mediation as:

An approach that seeks to build bridges between works and audiences. It is based on the desire to make the knowledge, values, and emotions conveyed by the works accessible, using varied tools and techniques to engage visitors in an active process of discovery and appropriation. (Caune, 1999).

Jean Davallon emphasizes the importance of interaction as a fundamental element in museum communication, stating that cultural mediation in museums relies on a logic of connection. It aims to establish a dialogue between works, scientific knowledge, and visitors' experiences. This mediation can take various forms, from explanatory texts to interactive devices, educational programs, and participatory events. (Davallon, 1999). Hugues de Varine also highlights the concept of connections in cultural mediation, asserting that:

Cultural mediation is at the heart of the museum's mission. It involves interpreting collections and creating links between exhibited objects and audiences. This mediation work makes the museum vibrant and accessible, ensuring that every visitor feels involved and enriched by their visit. (de Varine, 2002)

Georges Henri Rivière complements this view, stating that cultural mediation in museums is a practice aimed at democratizing access to culture. It strives to make the richness of collections understandable and accessible to all audiences by employing various strategies to adapt the museum's discourse to the expectations and needs of each visitor. (Rivière, 1989).

### **Exhibitions: Tools for communication and visibility**

Jean Davallon asserts that exhibitions play a crucial role as a means of communication in museums. Beyond merely presenting objects, they narrate stories, construct discourses, and encourage reflection. By structuring objects within a specific space and temporality, exhibitions connect them through scenography, texts, and multimedia supports, creating an interpretive journey. (Davallon, 1999). For his part, Serge Chaumier emphasizes that:

The museum exhibition is an essential communication tool that makes heritage visible and understandable. It is designed as a scenographic device that combines objects, texts, images, and interactive elements to offer visitors an immersive and educational experience. (Chaumier & Mairesse, 2013).

Joëlle Le Marec considers that an exhibition represents a communication space where the intentions of curators, the expectations of visitors, and the potential of displayed objects converge. It is meticulously designed to encourage interaction and public engagement, using narrative and immersive devices to make content both accessible and captivating. (Le Marec, 2007).

Temporary exhibitions amplify this communication dynamic by introducing elements of flexibility and innovation. Unlike permanent exhibitions, temporary exhibitions allow museums to continually renew their offerings, attract new audiences, and address contemporary themes. They provide museums with opportunities to experiment with new museographic approaches and collaborate with other institutions, thereby reinforcing their role as dynamic cultural hubs. Pierre-Yves Catel notes that:

Temporary exhibitions play a key role in the communication strategy of museums. They help renew visitor interest, address contemporary themes, and foster collaboration with other institutions. These exhibitions are often accompanied by educational and mediation programs that enhance their communicative impact. (Catel, 2015).

Jean Davallon underscores that temporary exhibitions are specific communication tools that enable museums to diversify their programming and address a wide range of topics. They offer flexibility and creativity, allowing the exploration of contemporary themes, new museographic methods, and the attraction of new audiences. (Davallon, 1999). Serge Chaumier adds that: The temporary exhibition is an essential strategy for museums. It revitalizes programming and enriches cultural offerings while serving as a laboratory for testing innovative museographic approaches and new forms of mediation. This device plays a key role in retaining and expanding audiences. (Chaumier & Mairesse, 2013).

For François Mairesse: Temporary exhibitions play a vital role in museum communication. They offer a unique opportunity to present works in a new light, introduce lesser-known artists or movements, and create events that attract media and public attention. These exhibitions are often drivers of dynamism and innovation for museum institutions. (Mairesse, 2011).

### **Digital communication in museums**

With the advent of digital technologies and online platforms, museums are increasingly relying on digital communication strategies to reach new audiences, enhance visitor experiences, and promote their collections in innovative ways.

The shift toward digital communication in museums represents a major strategic turning point, offering unique opportunities to engage visitors, share enriching content, and increase the visibility of cultural institutions. By integrating digital tools, museums can create immersive and participatory experiences that transcend the physical boundaries of museum spaces. But what exactly are we talking about? Thierry Libaert defines digital communications as: A set of digital communication strategies encompassing the use of internet technologies, social media, and mobile devices to disseminate information, engage audiences, and establish interactive relationships. (Libaert, 2016)

For his part, Michel Serres emphasizes that: Digital communications constitute a global network for transmitting and sharing information, transforming traditional communication methods and fostering greater interactivity between individuals, organizations, and communities. (Serres, 2011).

Serge Proulx adds that digital communications encompass all interactions mediated by digital technologies, including information dissemination, online collaboration, and collective expression through digital platforms. (Proulx, 2016). Dominique Cardon's definition focuses on content flows and interactions, stating that digital communications refer to the exchange of content and interactions circulating through computer networks, thereby transforming communication methods and social interactions. (Cardon, 2008).

Digital communication in museums enables the diversification of mediation formats by offering multimedia content, personalized thematic journeys, and online interactions with collections. This innovative approach opens new perspectives for making culture more accessible, inclusive, and interactive, adapting to the expectations and habits of today's connected audiences.

According to Serge Chaumier, digital communication in museums focuses on leveraging digital technologies to enhance visitor experiences, facilitate access to collections, and encourage interaction with cultural content. (Chaumier, 2013). Susana Bautista and Rafael Tarragó note that:

Museums today use digital communication tools to transform their relationship with audiences, promoting participation, education, and the valorization of collections. (Bautista & Tarragó, 2015)

Raphaëlle Bats adds that digital communication in museums employs interactive devices, augmented reality, and online platforms to improve visitor experiences and increase engagement during museum visits. (Bats, 2019).

By exploring digital communication in museums, it is possible to analyze how state museums in Marrakech integrate digital technologies into their communication strategies, how they interact with their audiences through digital channels, and how they leverage the potential of digital tools to enrich the museum experience and strengthen their cultural presence.

Thus, the transition to digital communication in museums represents a major challenge for the future of cultural mediation, offering new perspectives for rethinking communication practices, enhancing audience engagement, and valorizing cultural heritage in the digital era.

Having established the framework for digital communication in museums, we will now address the methodology adopted to analyze how these institutions integrate and leverage digital communication. This



section will explore the methodological approaches used to assess the effectiveness of digital communication strategies in Marrakech's state museums, with a focus on specific case studies.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted to study digital communications in Marrakech's state museums is based on a rigorous and multifaceted approach. First, an exhaustive literature review was conducted to explore current trends and best practices in museum digital communication. Next, semi-structured interviews were held with museum managers and curators to understand their existing strategies, the challenges they face, and their future perspectives on digital communication. This methodological approach examines how these institutions integrate digital technologies to enrich visitor experiences and strengthen their cultural presence, focusing on online platforms and interactive devices. Finally, a comparison between museums managed by the National Foundation of Museums (FNM) and those under the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs was conducted to contextualize the observed practices. This integrated methodology aims to deepen the understanding of digital communications in Marrakech's state museums.

### Results and Analysis: The role of digital communication in Marrakech's museums Synthesis of

The evolution of museums in Marrakech reflects a significant transformation in their communication approach, marked by the increasing integration of digital strategies. The rise of digital communication has profoundly influenced how state museums, such as those under the supervision of the National Foundation of Museums (FNM) and the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, connect with their audiences and promote their cultural heritage. Through the strategic use of digital platforms such as social media, these institutions seek to reach a broader and more diverse audience, thereby reinforcing their educational and cultural mission.

#### National Foundation of Museums (FNM)

The FNM oversees four museums in Marrakech, playing a central role in implementing national cultural policies and coordinating museum activities. However, the digital communication of these museums is not managed centrally; it is instead supported by the communication team at the FNM headquarters. Museum teams, particularly curators and cultural mediators, are responsible for managing social media and other aspects of digital communication. These digital platforms are used to promote exhibitions, events, and collections, providing in-depth details and educational resources while facilitating direct interaction with potential and current visitors.

#### Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs

The AMAN Museum, under the supervision of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, has its ministerial communication limited to a basic presentation on the ministry's website. This presentation remains vague, offering little practical information about the museum, with no mention of the permanent exhibition or cultural programming. It dates back to when the museum was still a developing project. However, the museum has its own website, though my last visit indicates it is currently offline. Social media thus represents the museum's primary communication channel, used to share interactive and engaging information with the public.

#### Digital communication operated directly by museums Museums under the National Foundation of Museums (FNM)

The National Museum of Weaving and Carpets - Dar Si Said maintains a moderate digital presence with 115 posts on Facebook and 1,100 followers, as well as 28 posts on Instagram with 381 followers. This online activity allows the museum to share images of exhibited carpets, sparking interest among potential visitors. Visitor testimonials highlighting the impact of Instagram posts underscore the effectiveness of digital communication in attracting audiences. By showcasing the quality of objects and scenography through online posts, the museum strengthens its image and encourages the discovery of Moroccan culture.

In comparison, the Musée des Confluences - Dar El Bacha boasts a strong online presence with 15 posts on Facebook and 3,300 followers, as well as 88 posts on Instagram with 8,118 followers. This robust digital activity demonstrates well-structured and regular communication. The use of Instagram to regularly inform about new exhibitions helps maintain visitor engagement and builds anticipation.

The Jamaâ El Fna Intangible Heritage Museum has an Instagram account with 49 posts and 779 followers. It uses these platforms to share information about intangible heritage, events, and museum activities. Visual content and online interactions focus on promoting the intangible heritage of Jamaâ El Fna and the history of the building.

To better understand the digital communication strategies adopted by Marrakech's state museums, we have compiled and synthesized the available data in the table below. This table highlights the main metrics of their online presence, particularly the number of posts and followers on Facebook and Instagram.

Table 2: List of digital platforms used by FNM museums

Museum	Facebook Posts	Facebook Followers	Instagram Posts	Instagram Followers
National Museum of Weaving and Carpets - Dar Si Said	115	1100	28	381
Musée des Confluences - Dar El Bacha	15	3300	88	8118
Jamaâ El Fna Intangible Heritage Museum	Not specified	Not specified	49	779

To better visualize the data previously presented in table form, we have created a comparative chart. This chart highlights the key figures of the digital communication of the three state museums in Marrakech on the Facebook and Instagram platforms. It clearly illustrates the reach and online engagement of each museum, showcasing their respective strategies in terms of posts and followers.

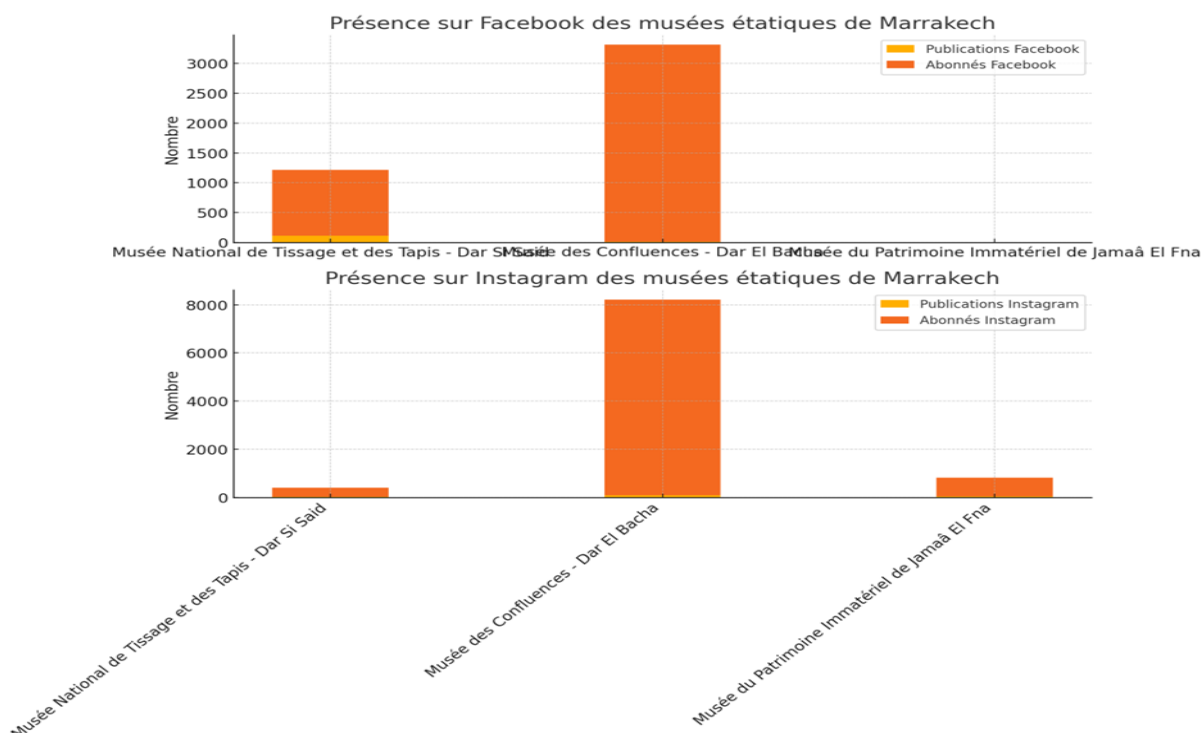


Fig. 1: Chart of social media statistics for FNM museums

## Museum under the supervision of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs

The presence of the Mohammed VI Museum of Water Civilization - AMAN on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter represents a positive strategy for maintaining active digital communication. On Instagram, the museum has 215 posts and 697 followers, indicating a solid presence. This visual platform is ideal for sharing captivating images of exhibitions, artefacts, and special events. However, the relatively low number of posts compared to the number of followers suggests an opportunity to increase posting frequency to enhance engagement. Content should be strategically planned to reflect the diversity of the museum's exhibitions and activities.

On Facebook, the museum has 3,400 followers, indicating a broader audience. This platform allows for sharing various types of content, such as articles, videos, and events. However, it is important to monitor actual engagement through likes, comments, and shares to assess the relevance of the content to the audience.

In contrast, on Twitter, the museum has only 45 followers, making it the least developed of the three platforms. Twitter is effective for sharing real-time news, but the low number of followers may limit the reach of these posts.

The analysis of statistics shows that the Mohammed VI Museum of Water Civilization maintains an active presence on social media, particularly on Instagram and Facebook. However, opportunities for improvement exist, such as increasing the frequency of posts on Instagram, monitoring engagement on Facebook, and developing the presence on Twitter. The goal would be to strike a balance between the quality of shared content and the frequency of posts to sustain public interest and engagement.

Table 3: List of digital platforms used by the museum

Platform	Number of Posts/Followers
Instagram	215 posts / 697 followers
Facebook	3400 followers
Twitter	45 followers

## Assessment of digital communication strategies

The museums under the supervision of the National Foundation of Museums (FNM), such as Dar El Bacha, Jamaâ El Fna, and Dar Si Said, demonstrate a varied but consistent approach to digital communication. They primarily use social media to share information about exhibitions and events, with particular attention to aesthetics and public engagement.

In contrast, the Mohammed VI Museum of Water Civilization, under the supervision of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, adopts a more informative and collaborative approach. The museum's digital communication focuses on providing practical information and promoting exhibitions via social media while leveraging local partnerships to enhance visibility.

Focus groups and discussions with the audiences of these museums revealed three main impacts of the digital communication strategies of Marrakech's state museums. These strategies significantly affect public engagement and the perception of cultural heritage. The use of social media allows museums to reach a broader and more diverse audience. Regular posts and engaging content foster ongoing interaction with potential and current visitors, thereby increasing their engagement. Additionally, digital content makes collections and exhibitions more accessible, even to those unable to visit the museums physically. This helps raise awareness among a wider audience about the richness of Moroccan cultural heritage. Digital communication also modernizes the image of museums. By adopting modern technologies and innovative communication methods, museums manage to move away from the traditional and sometimes out-dated image of museum institutions, attracting a younger, more connected audience.



Regarding the specific challenges encountered in adopting and optimizing digital technologies for the enhancement of museum heritage, our interviews with stakeholders from Marrakech's state museums revealed three major challenges these institutions face in their digital communication efforts:

The first challenge relates to staff training. There is a critical need for on-going training to enable museum teams to master new information and communication technologies, as well as storytelling and video production tools. These skills are essential for developing engaging and high-quality digital content. The museum sector has seen increased specialization in communication roles, with positions such as Community Manager becoming more common.

The second challenge is limited resources. Implementing and effectively managing digital communication strategies requires substantial human and financial resources. However, museums often face constrained budgets and a lack of specialized staff, limiting their ability to undertake ambitious digital initiatives. In comparison, some private museums in the city, with greater resources, invest more heavily in digital communication.

The final challenge is the rapid evolution of technologies. Digital technologies evolve at a fast pace, requiring museums to constantly adapt their strategies to remain relevant. This demands on-going technological monitoring and the ability to quickly integrate new practices and tools into daily operations. These challenges must be overcome for museums to fully harness the potential of digital technologies and enrich their audiences' cultural experiences.

Although Marrakech's state museums have made efforts to integrate digital technologies into their communication, they have not yet fully exploited the range of digital tools available in museums in developed countries. Tools such as mobile applications, virtual tours, video guides, and similar technologies remain largely underutilized. Our observations reveal that many visitors, particularly tourists who have experienced these tools in other museums, express a growing desire for such features. These expectations highlight a significant gap between the current practices of Marrakech's museums and international standards in digital communication. Integrating these technologies could not only meet visitors' needs but also enrich the museum experience by offering opportunities for deeper and more diverse engagement.

## **Analysis of results**

The analysis of digital communication in Marrakech's state museums highlights several key aspects:

The National Foundation of Museums (FNM) does not directly centralize the digital communication of its museums but supports and enhances the communication of those under its supervision by relaying their information through its own communication channels, such as its website and institutional social media. It mobilizes its communication department to increase the visibility of the museums, including those in Marrakech, and leverages its press relations to boost their recognition. Museums under the FNM actively use social media to share captivating images of their collections, sparking the interest of potential visitors and reinforcing their reputation through regular posts. They maintain a strong digital presence with structured and consistent communication.

Under the supervision of the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, the AMAN Museum also employs sophisticated digital communication. Its website and social media aim to promote Moroccan cultural heritage, focusing on educational and interactive content to attract a young, connected audience.

The data analysis reveals opportunities for improvement, such as increasing the frequency of posts on Instagram, actively monitoring engagement on Facebook, and developing a presence on platforms like Twitter for certain museums.

## CONCLUSION

Through the exploration of digital communication practices in Marrakech's state museums, it is clear that these institutions play a crucial role in preserving and promoting Moroccan cultural heritage. The National Foundation of Museums and the Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs, each in their own way, use digital tools to enrich visitor experiences and strengthen engagement with collections and exhibitions. Strategies vary, from the centralized management of the FNM, which ensures consistency in communication across its institutional platforms, to the relative autonomy of the AMAN Museum, which actively uses social media to reach a broader and more diverse audience.

Social media plays an essential role in enabling museums to share their cultural wealth in an interactive and engaging manner. Despite significant progress, several challenges persist in the realm of digital communication for Marrakech's museums. One of the main obstacles lies in the need to train museum teams in new information and communication technologies, as well as advanced storytelling and video production techniques tailored to digital platforms. Such training is essential to maximize the impact of content shared on social media, making cultural information not only accessible but also appealing to a diverse and increasingly connected audience. Digital communication in Marrakech's museums represents a constantly evolving field, where the creative integration of digital tools can not only preserve cultural heritage but also make it vibrant and relevant for current and future generations.

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