

THE MUSEUM MARKETING MIX IN ENHANCING CITY BRANDING: A CASE STUDY OF SHANGHAI

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to identify readable marketing attributes and their connotations on museum-driven city branding by applying the theory of the 5P museum marketing mix by Philip Kotler. Methodologically, a comparative study of Shanghai and London was conducted based on the analytic tool and systematic process. The qualitative approach was used by looking at the aspect of museums on the official tourism websites of the two cities. To delve into the research context, the idea of meaning-making was focused in the scope of the research topic. The key findings of the analysis are as follows. Firstly, the examples of museums in Shanghai and London illustrate the diverse range of museum infrastructure. Art museums play a vital role in promoting tourism, while non-art sectors such as transport and fashion design emphasize the industrial strengths of the cities. Secondly, the message of promotion is that well-designed museum exhibition portfolios can help shaping the city's image. Finally, the study found that the principles of museum marketing theory can be strategically used to develop branding strategies for cities, such as positioning.

Keywords: City Branding, 5P Museum Marketing Mix, Product Variety, Exhibition, Shanghai, London

1 INTRODUCTION

The global trend of city branding often involves using landmark museums as a key strategy. This approach has been explored in discussions ranging from city marketing to urban policy. The outcome(s) of leveraging museums to promote cities, such as in London and Bilbao, have been analyzed from various interdisciplinary perspectives, including, sociology, politics, and economics. The theory of product brand has been applied to the creation of brand images for cities, from corporate museums like the Gucci Museum [1] to iconic architectures such as the Bilbao Guggenheim [10]. Research on tourism websites has emerged to analyze the content of these sites from the perspective of multimodal texts [8]. However, socio-economic disparities, the effects of global warming, and the ongoing impact of COVID-19 have all adversely affected museum visits around the world, significantly influencing the tourism profits of global cities [14]. As a result, the museum industry in tourist destinations requires improved and more effective management strategies.

Western museums have built a strong reputation and achieved business success by representing their attractive cities. In contrast, several museums in Asia, located in cities like Seoul, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Beijing, and Shanghai, have recently emerged in the museum and tourism market. This phenomenon reflects the development of city brands in Asia, aiming to compete with other city brands at an international level. As of 2022, there were over 6,091 museums in China [18]. In Shanghai, 162 museums were registered as of May 2023 and the number of visitors far exceeding the national average [20].

Academic research on related subjects supports the recognition of the importance of museum in China. Some discussions highlight key issues in regard to the role of museum industry in the nation, including the following: the relationship between the tourism business and museum development in Chinese history [3]; the construction of identity in museums from political perspectives [13]; the evaluation of Online activities of Chinese museums during the COVID-19 era in terms of social and financial advantages [4]; the impact of exhibition marketing on the assessment of exhibition performance [11]; and promotion of exhibition industry in tourism consumption within the digital economy [12].

Some criteria for assessing a city's brand include studying the city and its quality of cultural institutions such as museums. London has built their strong reputation as one of the leading city brands and global

museum destinations. The record of visitor numbers has proved the international popularity of the symbolic museums in the city such as the British Museum. Based on the research background, the study aims to identify the unique marketing features of museums and exhibitions along with their implications for culture-driven city branding. To achieve this, the study employs the features of the 5P museum marketing mix and conducts a comparative analysis of Shanghai and London by examining their official tourism websites. In theory, Philip Kotler's approach to museum marketing and strategy is utilized to support the analysis.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Museum marketing

The theoretical foundation of the 5P museum marketing mix in this research draws from Kotler's writings [6]. He adapted his product marketing theory for the museum sector, establishing a framework based on traditional marketing principles. A key question in his work is, "How does a museum plan strategically and maximize marketing's value?" [6, xxii in Preface]. He stated that museums have a responsibility to their customers to provide "transformative experiences" [6, pp. 5-6]. To achieve this goal, differentiation is necessary to compete with other cultural facility in the museum market. The theory explores product marketing principles for museums, including target segmentation and brand strategy.

In the section of strategic marketing, the five elements are product, price, people, promotion, and place. The notion of exhibition encompasses its role in product variety, price, and promotion within the description. Details of the five elements are as follows. The product element includes product variety, design, features, and brand name; within the sub-element of product variety, the attributes encompass exhibitions, programs, retail, quality are presented; price element includes admission fees, membership fees, special exhibition fees, discounts, and allowances; people element includes board, managers, staff, hierarchies, and teams; promotion element includes advertising, public relations, direct marketing, E-communications, exhibition promotions, and tours promotions; and place element includes channels, locations, transport, inventory, and Internet.

Due to limited data available on the official sites of the two cities, the research concentrated on the content of product for the analytical part. In the analysis sections, the concepts of product variety, design, features, and brand name were applied to construct the context of the findings.

2.2 Competitiveness: City brands and museums

To select cities for the analysis, four criteria were considered: (1) international reputation, (2) city brand assessment, (3) museum popularity, and (4) academic publication. To support the justification for selecting the cities, several references were consulted.

Regarding city brand competitiveness, London ranked first, while Shanghai ranked fifty-fourth according to the City Index 2023 [21]. Shanghai has emerged as a compatible business city brand internationally [15]. From a national perspective, China and the UK rank highest among countries worldwide by the estimated number of museums in 2021 [16].

In terms of museum popularity, the list of the most-visit museums in 2023 [24] highlights the strengths of both China and the UK through their successful tourism products: In China, cities like Beijing, Nanjing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai are key venues for popular facilities, such as the National Museum of China and the China Science and Technology Museum in Beijing, and the Shanghai Science and Technology Museum. The UK, several leading cultural institutions in London made the list, including the British Museum, Victoria & Albert Museum, and the National Gallery. When examining art museum popularity, London demonstrates that its museum industry significantly contributes to the economy and tourism, based on their reputation, quality, and variety; for example, the British Museum ranked second, and the Tate Modern ranked fifth [22]. In contrast to London, Shanghai has not been widely recognized for its art museums within the data.

In research, comprehensive topics have been created on the two cities, covering from art museums to policy in recent years: For Shanghai, the phenomenon of building private art museums and its social and business background [5]; and study on Chinese music heritage from museum management perspectives [7]. For London, multiple dimensions of art museums as a social component of cities [9]; and the value of textile design through the achievement of the Royal School of Needlework [2].

Research question

There is a lack of research on museum marketing, particularly concerning exhibitions and their role in city branding, based on marketing reference. This study aims to fill this gap in knowledge and explore related issues. Based on the key themes identified in the literature review, the research question has been formulated: What are the key elements of museum marketing concerning product variety, and how do these elements relate to branding cities?

3 METHOD

3.1 Data collection

The data was collected from two types of sources. (1) peer-reviewed journals and books, and (2) material from the official tourism websites of Shanghai and London. Additionally, statistics data on city brand assessment and museum visitor; web articles such as newspapers and magazines were used to support the research. Data collection for the sites was conducted between September and November 2024. Following presents the list of the websites and their management organizations. In Shanghai, the official tourism website is Meet Shanghai [17], which is managed by the Shanghai Municipal Administration of Culture and Tourism. On the site, there is also a dedicated section titled Bon App [19], which focuses on museums and exhibitions, and is managed by City News Service. In London, the official tourism website is known as Visit London [23], which is managed by London & Partners, and is supported by the Mayor of London.

3.2 Data analysis

The theoretical framework for this analysis is based on the section of 5P elements of the museum marketing mix as outlined in the book, *Museum Marketing and Strategy*. In this theory, the category of exhibition is clearly detailed with its key aspects. The main elements and their sub-elements including: product (product variety), price (special exhibition fees), and promotion (exhibition promotions). This research specifically focuses on the element of ‘product variety’ as it relates to the research topic. The analysis consisted of three steps: (1) categorizing museums and exhibitions by navigation, types, and fields, (2) examining the genres and themes of exhibitions, and (3) exploring the connection between marketing strategies and city branding. To conduct the analysis, a meaning-making approach was utilized to produce substantial insights for the research findings.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Categorization of museums and exhibitions

Navigation

The purpose of this analysis section is to examine how the websites position their selected cultural items to attract audiences in relation to the visual portrayal of a city. In Shanghai, the system for navigating museums and exhibitions on the site is organized as follows: The museum introduction titled Top Museums X Bon App! and is prominently displayed on the first page. The exhibition dates range from fall 2024 to summer 2025. Museums are categorized under Service as a sub-category of Art & Culture, while exhibitions are listed under the title Events, which falls under the sub-category of Exhibition. In contrast to Shanghai, London employs a different approach to showcasing its key museums and exhibitions. For museum introductions, it uses the sections of Sightseeing and Top London Attractions. The exhibition section is categorized under Leisure and What’s On (the latter being a sub-category under Art/Exhibition). To gather sufficient data for analysis, the three categories were selected for the research including: All art and exhibitions in London, 10 best museum exhibitions in November, and 10 best art exhibitions in November. The total number of museums and exhibitions promoted in the selected categories on the websites of both cities is as follows: Shanghai has 102 museums and 33 exhibitions, while London features 139 museums and 55 exhibitions. (Note: The count of exhibitions in London includes those categorized under the section of art/exhibition.)

The findings show that both city websites employ distinct approaches to design the navigation system and present the city’s cultural offerings to wider audiences. In Shanghai, there is an individual source that provides preliminary information about the city’s museums and exhibitions. In London, the

approach involves positioning key museum products across various categories and reiterating specific examples.

Types and fields

In Shanghai, defining types of museums reveals a variety of purposes aimed at wider target segmentation. Attributes of creating the art and entertainment infrastructure in the city include: complex cultural spaces such as museums and historic sites, and cafés and furniture stores; theme parks; experience places such as virtual reality and DIY; and focus on kids such as playgrounds. Additionally, presenting a category of library in the section implies an expandable concept of museums from arts to books.

The key fields represented by these museums include: arts such as photography and music; design such as aminated miniature, metal toy, and propaganda posters; science/technology such as aerospace, tunnel, and flight; socio-culture such as public security; product such as tobacco and automobile; history such as Jewish refugees and natural history; and finance such as bank. From a design perspective, the fields of animation and miniature stand out as distinctive. Additionally, the internationally franchised museum brand, Madame Tussauds Shanghai, is emphasized.

In contrast to Shanghai, London presents various ways to define its representative urban facility. Four titles of the categories are included: London Museums and Galleries, Our Top Picks, Museums in London for Kids, and Quirky Museums. The classification of museum type presents a diverse array of marketing opportunities, include: outdoor activity such as sport, sightseeing, walking, and theme parks; cultural space such as cafés and book stores; history such as historic sites and houses, and statues; theatre performance such as pantomime; and entertainment venues. The variety allows for creative approaches to engage different audiences effectively. London also highlighted their landmarks, Madame Tussauds London, and London Transport Museum as one of the leading attractions.

The findings show that both city websites utilize a detailed segmentation of museum positioning and introductions. Shanghai emphasizes the creation of a complex cultural space, while London showcases its iconic landmarks, ranging from residential houses to unique items displayed in small museums. The summary of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Categorization of museums and exhibitions

Attribute	Shanghai	London
Navigation	Simplicity of presenting museums and exhibitions.	Enhancing the visibility of museums and exhibitions.
Types and fields	Developing versatile venues for cultural experiences.	Transforming the concept of museums into the cityscape.

4.2 Genres and themes of exhibitions

In Shanghai, the city's achievement in the international museum market is presented within the strategic portfolio including the following. The vitality of the exhibition content clearly reflects the city's vision to be a prominent global player in the art market. For example, the highlighted promotion examples showcase the masterpieces of Turner, Picasso, Mathieu, Pittman, and Rodin. Presentation of the distinctive photography by African artists and graffiti by American artists reflects the expansion of exhibition genres. The exhibition of films presented the historical exchanges between China and Serbia. The introduction of the local and young generation known as Bluerider implies a niche market for paintings. Furthermore, thematic curation that draws upon the city's history, such as Shanghai in National Day, connects to the city's identity.

The exhibition titled Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto demonstrates Shanghai's recognition as a global destination. This show was previously launched in the iconic museums in New York, Los Angeles, and Paris before arriving Shanghai [25]. The promotional descriptions, such as "Shanghai for museum landmark" and "From Shanghai to Paris" imply that the city aims to position itself as a culturally vibrant international venue.

Collaborations, such as the introduction of the masterpiece collections from the Tate Britain to the Museum of Art Pudong in the exhibition titled Dialogues with Turner: Evoking the Sublime, and the joint exhibition between the Hong Kong Museum of Art and the Shanghai Museum on the fragrance culture in Chinese history titled The Hong Kong Jockey Club Series: Fragrance of Time, are valuable initiatives [26], [27].

In contrast to Shanghai, London's examples address cultural trends and scientific innovation, from the digital-based multisensory art of Seoul titled Hello, Delight! to the display of the plastination technique titled Body Worlds. In fashion, a couple of eye-catching events present the city's leadership in the related industry such as NAOMI: In Fashion and Vogue: Inventing the Runway. A global success entertainer, including Taylor Swift London Mural, was introduced. In terms of historical figures of the city, from Churchill in politics to Jack the Ripper in crime were focused to present the city. The exhibition featuring David Hockney, a London-based prominent contemporary artist was also a highlight. From social perspectives, the change of British in 1970s and gender issues of South Africa were presented.

Regarding place branding, the city and its cultural facilities serve as a showcase that reintroduces lesser-known locations for street art, multicultural cuisines such as Polish and Japanese, and unique bookstores offering diverse literature from Africa to Asia titled New Bacon Books. The emphasis on the value of artists and architects influences how cities are portrayed like Norman Foster's design work of the Gherkin, and the grand exhibition titled Monet in London at the Courtauld Gallery. Kensington Palace and Japan House London in Kensington area are prominently featured for city marketing.

In terms of the city's identity, the Transport Museum London serves as a compelling illustration of the city's innovative character in the field of industrial design. The promotional texts support the analysis, "The showcase of transport icons and their groundbreaking design, from the iconic red London bus, first ever Tube map design and the world's first underground steam train."

The findings show that both city websites offer creative dimensions through thematic curation and a cross-genre approach. In Shanghai, the events exemplify the city's rapid growth as a compatible art museum destination, while London highlights its visible identity as an international city brand in terms of marketing cultural material. The summary of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Genres and themes of exhibitions

Attribute	Shanghai	London
Genres	Fine arts to cosmetic culture	Fine arts to fashion events
Themes	Art-based cultural vibrancy Reintroduction: city's story	Multicultural inspiration Iconic figures and trends

4.3 Connection between museum marketing and city branding

This section of the analysis focuses on synthesizing the key marketing ideas from the previous discussions. In the table, the horizontal axis represents elements of city branding, while the vertical axis indicates the key elements of product. The design category in this analysis refers to the genres and themes of exhibitions (4.2). The summary of the analysis is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Connection between museum marketing and city branding

Attribute	Shanghai	London
Product variety	Growth: City positioning	Visibility: Portfolio asset
Design	Heritage/technology-driven	Cross-disciplinary approach
Features	Building city competitiveness	International city leadership
Brand name	Collaboration strategy	Reputation: City-based icons

5 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the key findings of the analysis, a couple of further topics for meaning-making were developed to contextualize the answer to the research question from product variety perspectives. Firstly, the examples of museums in Shanghai and London represent the diverse range of museum infrastructure. Art museums function as a key component in promoting tourism, whereas non-art sectors, including fashion and transport design, focus on showcasing the industrial strengths of their cities. Secondly, the message of promotion is that well-developed museum exhibition portfolios can support enhancing the image of the city. Lastly, the study found that the principles of museum marketing theory can be strategically used to develop branding strategies for cities, such as positioning. Consequently, this paper can provide insights into the contemporary museum marketing practices of the city, thereby contributing to urban governance. The study limits the provision of sufficient data from the selected sites to draw significant conclusions about city branding. Further study can be conducted through visitor surveys and interviews with related stakeholders.

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