Research Article

Museum as Object: From Postcard to Post

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Abstract

Whether it's through sharing picture postcards or visitor-produced photographs of museums on social media, these processes of image sharing, often dismissed as trivial, are acts which create and sustain relationships between the visitor, museum, and a wider audience. This paper positions picture souvenirs as significant, performative media, and understands postcards and Instagram posts as comparable social, objective and subjective mediums which reflect museum values and visitor decision-making.

Using the British Museum as a case study, this paper analyses postcards and Instagram posts within their networks of production, use, and distribution. Visitor messages are analysed alongside imagery, and grounded theory is used to offer an interpretive understanding of decision making and inherent meaning potential. This approach responds to Haldrup and Larsen's (2010) call for greater emphasis on 'photographing' in studies of tourist media and contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of photography in museum visitor experiences.

Photography of the museum transforms 3D spaces into 2D objects, miniaturising the institution, making it mobile, and readying the museum for 'new' social uses, and research indicates that whilst the aims of photography differs between museum, commercial publisher, and visitor, the decisions which underpin production are consistent. Through use, a connection is fostered between museum and person, and institutional and personal messages are read congruently. This connection is heightened online with photographs shared in 'real-time' alongside narratives which more closely reflect lived experiences.

These photo-sharing practices enrich the visitor experience, allow visitors to 'own' the museum, and facilitate and support social interaction.

Keywords: Instagram, Museums, Postcards, Tourism, Visual Culture.

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Araştırma Makalesi

Nesne Olarak Müze: Kartpostaldan Paylaşıma

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Özet

İster kartpostal paylaşımıyla ister ziyaretçilerin müzelerde çektikleri fotoğrafları sosyal medyada paylaşmasıyla olsun, bu görsel paylaşım süreçleri genellikle önemsiz olarak değerlendirilse de, ziyaretçi, müze ve daha geniş bir kitle arasında ilişkiler kuran ve sürdüren önemli eylemler olarak görülmelidir. Bu makale, kartpostalları ve Instagram paylaşımlarını, müze değerlerini ve ziyaretçi tercihlerini yansıtan, karşılaştırılabilir sosyal, nesnel ve öznel araçlar olarak ele alarak, bu görselleri anlamlı, performatif bir medya biçimi olarak konumlandırmaktadır.

British Museum'u bir vaka çalışması olarak ele alan bu makale, kartpostallar ve Instagram gönderilerini üretim, kullanım ve dağıtım bağlamlarında analiz eder. Ziyaretçi mesajları, görsellerle birlikte incelenir ve temellendirilmiş kuram yöntemi kullanılarak karar alma süreçleri ve bu görsellerin içerdiği anlam potansiyeli yorumlanır. Bu yaklaşım, Haldrup ve Larsen'in (2010) turistik medya çalışmalarında 'fotoğraf çekme' konusuna daha fazla odaklanılması gerektiğine dair çağrılarına yanıt verirken, fotoğrafçılığın müze ziyaretçi deneyimlerindeki rolüne dair daha derin bir anlayış sunar.

Müzenin fotoğraflanması, üç boyutlu mekânları iki boyutlu nesnelere dönüştürerek müzeyi küçültür, taşınabilir hale getirir ve onu 'yeni', sosyal kullanımlar için hazırlar. Araştırmalar, fotoğrafçılığın amacı müze, ticari yayıncı ve ziyaretçi arasında farklılık gösterse de, üretimi yönlendiren kararların genellikle tutarlı olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Bu süreçte, ziyaretçi ile müze arasında bir bağ kurulur ve hem kurumsal hem de kişisel mesajlar bir bütünlük içinde okunur. Çevrimiçi paylaşımlarda, fotoğraflar 'gerçek zamanlı' olarak ziyaretçi deneyimlerini yansıtan anlatılarla birlikte paylaşılır ve bu bağ daha da güçlenir.

Bu fotoğraf paylaşım pratikleri, ziyaretçi deneyimini zenginleştirir, ziyaretçilerin müzeyi 'sahiplenmesini' sağlar ve sosyal etkileşimleri destekleyip kolaylaştırır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Instagram, Müzeler, Kartpostallar, Turizm, Görsel Kültür.

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INTRODUCTION

Sante (2023) remarks that picture postcards are ancestors of social media. There are many parallels which can be drawn between the two media when reflecting on their use as pictorial-objects which facilitate communication; postcards are visual textual objects which are primarily used for communication (Rogan, 2005), as are Instagram posts (Leaver et al., 2020). As mediums, they are ephemeral in nature (Snow, 2010; Budge & Burness, 2018), and, considered during peak periods of use, they offer quick modes of communicative exchange (Rogan, 2005; Staffs, 1966; Leaver et al., 2020; Frier, 2020).

Museum visitors have shared picture postcards with friends and family since at least 1898, and many museums produced postcards at the turn of the century; the Times reported on new postcard collections released by the V&A in 1920 (The Times, 1920) and the Natural History Museum in 1924 (The Times, 1924), and 1927 (The Times 1927). An estimated 200-300 billion postcards were sent across the world between 1895 and 1920 (Rogan, 2005) and this evidences a widespread desire to record and share personal experiences, but also highlights the cultural significance of postcards as a communication medium during this period.

Today, the desire to share images of museums and their collections remains, but visitors are no longer reliant on museums and commercial publishers to create shareable images. It is common to observe visitors walking around museums and galleries, taking photographs, not only to document their visit but to share with others online (Budge, 2018).

Although integral to many museum experiences, the use of photographs by visitors is relatively underexplored (Larsen & Svabo, 2014; Budge, 2017). Edwards (2022) explains that this, in part, is due to the mass-produced nature of postcards not being considered influential to museum cultures, and Budge (2017) cites the newness of social media as a reason limiting the number of studies which connect museums and Instagram. Budge (2017) says, "This is problematic because assumptions begin to accumulate about what it is that people are doing (or not doing)", and this research responds by considering picture souvenirs as meaningful media, rather than trivial objects.

Reflecting on museums as sites of 'gazing', the paper considers visitor viewing, contrasting the concept of the tourist gaze with that of the curatorial eye. Emphasis is placed on 'behind the scenes' decision making, particularly concerning the development and production of picture postcards, the concerns museums had about producing pictorial keepsakes at the turn of the century, and the choices made by visitors today when sharing photographs.

This research uses the British Museum as a case study and questions the enduring popularity of views featured on historic postcards. Reflecting on Sante's (2023) observation that picture postcards are ancestors of Instagram posts, the research analyses both medium to better understand how the use of key views by visitors might have developed. The media are considered within their networks of production, use, and distribution, and through doing so, it responds to Haldrup and Larsen's (2010) call for greater emphasis on 'photographing' in studies of tourist media. Cumulatively, this approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the role of photography in museum visitor experiences, and the informal use of museums by audiences.

VISITOR GAZING AND MUSEUMS

Visitor viewing practices are as diverse as the museums and exhibitions they take place within. These viewing practices are shaped by an interplay of social norms, cultural backgrounds and individual experiences. Understanding how visitors see, engage with and interpret museums and their exhibitions through the use of photographs offers insight into the broader impact of visitor purchased, used, produced, and shared photography.

This diversity in viewing practices underscores the multifaceted nature of the tourist gaze, a concept which outlines how tourists perceive, interpret and react to their surroundings. Urry (1990) suggested that the tourist gaze was primarily a visual practice, shaped by and informed by social and technological influences. He refers to the 'medical gaze', drawing from Foucault, to describe how medical professionals view the body through the lens of clinical knowledge. Applying these concepts to tourist, Urry (1990) argued that tourists develop learnt ways of looking through consuming mediatised images before their visit, such as advertisements, travel guides and postcards, highlighting their importance in shaping tourist experiences.

Perkins and Thorns (2001) argue that this conception of the tourist gaze "is too passive to encapsulate the full range of the tourist experience" and advocate for thinking about tourist behaviour more broadly. Haldrup and Larsen (2010) also contrast this visual-oriented perspective and argue that "Photography is an emblematic tourism performance." Both Perkins and Thorns (2001), and Haldrup and Larsen (2010) consider tourism as processes in which photographers are performers that are actively involved in the consumption and production of images and culture.

As part of her study of tourist photography at the Rock of Aphrodite, Stylianou-Lambert (2012) analyses postcards and tourist photographs shared online and reflects on whether tourists simply mimic before-seen images, or create images which are distinctive to the photographers. She considers not only the images, but the behaviours of tourists, affording them agency and acknowledging the performative nature of photography and this incorporates multiple perspectives with regards tourists as consumers, producers, and performers. She concludes that, despite tourists actively participating in photography and creating images with personal significance, these images are influenced by broader conventions, such as established visual norms, photographic etiquette, and social influences (Stylianou-Lambert, 2012). These processes may reinforce the value of particular views, and result in more photographs which mirror the scene, and perhaps communication.

The enduring value of specific views is highlighted in a study by Greenwald (2007). Reflecting on the similarity between early 20th century promotional images at Yellowstone and contemporary visitor photographs, Greenwald (2007) argues that the photographs are similar because there have been few changes to the landscape, and that "the impulse to take a photograph that looks like those encountered before" remains. This desire may be enhanced by the increased availability of tourist-produced imagery shared online.

The Tourist Gaze 3.0 (Urry & Larsen, 2011), published 21 years after the first version, incorporates ideas of increased digital media influence, reflects on the multi-faceted actions of tourists, and acknowledges that tourists not only consume place, but produce and share it through photography, which leads to a more interactive and participatory gaze. And whilst there is no single tourist gaze,

gazing is "structured by culturally specific notions of what is extraordinary and therefore worth viewing" (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

Urry and Larsen (2011) explain that since the introduction of the Michelin Guides in the early 20th century, the tourist gaze has included the museum, but Larsen and Svabo (2014) notes that museums are often overlooked tourist research studies. Museums are full of exhibitions and are made to be looked at, and as photographs allows "the gaze to be reproduced, recaptured and redistributed over time and across space" (Urry & Larsen, 2011), in museums, curatorial decisions shape visitor engagement and teach the audience how to view objects in collections.

Museums produce guides, blogs, they share content on social media, create postcards, and publish other supportive media. Postcards disseminate the curatorial eye (Edwards, 2022), treasure trails teach children how to gaze within museums and promotes "more focused visual engagement" (Larsen & Svabo, 2014), and adverts often support exhibitions, identifying significant cultural objects. Reflecting on the tourist gaze, this process may 'visually objectify' artefacts, transforming 3D objects into 2D pictorial keepsakes which not only show people how to see and what is of value, but also provide a sense of ownership in buildings where it's unlikely visitors can physically touch what they're looking at.

In museums, visitors negotiate spaces and engage with exhibitions using interpretive frameworks which incorporate personal experiences and learnt ways of looking. Visitors consume media but they also produce their own images, and share photographs alongside personal messages. Whether taking photographs to share on Instagram or selecting postcards to send to friends at home, all visitor-produced and visitor-shared imagery reflects moments of decision making and this has value.

PHOTOGRAPHIC SOUVENIRS, MUSEUMS, AND THEIR AUDIENCES

Picture-postcards have had a constant presence in museums since the turn of the 20th century, yet there is little research which considers the picture postcard and its relationship with museums, or indeed the museum audience (Beard, 1992; Edwards, 2022). Edwards (2022) argues that the popularity of the picture postcard in museums, at least during the interwar period, is in part the result of a shift in publicness of museums. During the interwar period sales grew year upon year, with their popularity as a souvenir and as a "symbol of 'having been there'" (Beard, 1992) persisting through until today. Photography miniaturises and duplicates museums and their objects, and once printed as a postcard, the purchase allows visitors to in effect own part of the museum, reflecting the 'publicness' of museums at the turn of the 20th century.

Picture postcards are message carriers (Rogan, 2005) and in the museum environment, postcards are multifaceted, multi-performative media which connect institution and audience, educate, and entertain. They provide the museum visitor with a symbol of their visit (Beard, 1992), but they also miniaturise collections (Edwards, 2022), and show the audience how to look at exhibits (Edwards, 2022).

Some of Rogan's (2005) picture postcard "pull factors" are evident in motivations for purchasing and using museum postcards, notably, the aesthetics of the card itself, with research suggesting additional reasons for purchase (Beard, 1992; Edwards, 2002). Using the British Museum as a case study and sales ledgers from

the period 1988-1991, Beard (1992) asks why particular postcards come to act as mementoes for a visitors experience. She remarks that some of the consistent best sellers aren't particularly "pretty" (Beard, 1992), suggesting alternate reasons for use and one of her main arguments relates to the postcards being used to make sense of a museum experience. Edwards (2022) offers another angle to this conversation, noting that postcards provide a sense of ownership, of both the postcard as an object, and the artefact on display to the postcard holder. Tracing decision making processes behind postcard production at the V&A during the interwar period, Edwards (2022) argues that the museum utilised existing skills and knowledge to inform object selection and production processes (Edwards, 2022), thus retaining control over the quality of the final product, and in turn, the museum's message. The V&A positioned their "postcard production between educational dissemination and a response to popular interests" (Edwards, 2022), with discussions over the suitability of colour vs monochromatic prints, and the associated "moral qualities" of each. Edwards (2022) notes that for some the use of monochromatic printing rendered postcards as objects of study, whilst for other, the use of colour improved the legibility of objects.

It is important to note that commercial publishers have differing aims in relation to their postcards, with an emphasis on sales, rather than knowledge dissemination. Reflecting on Youngs (2012) study of Grand Canyon postcards, we see that the use of colour can also add a sense of novelty. Youngs (2012) traces decision making at the Curt and Teich Company and says that, "During the manufacturing process, last year's postcard scene could be up-dated with a different palette of colours and subjects, thereby creating a "new" postcard with each printing". Further, this approach enables publishers to react to new fashions and styles, appealing to new and diverse markets.

In today's context, armed with smartphones, museum visitors can quickly and easily respond to and participate with current trends through their own photography. Contemporary museum visitors have an awareness of their digital audience, and this may influence photographic decisions, such as what objects are photographed and how they are portrayed (Suess, 2018). With editing tools and filters at hand, visitors run through a series of editing and production decisions not dissimilar to those made by museums and commercial publishers with postcards. And, as museums curate their collections, generally, social media users 'curate' their photographs online, create "enduring exhibition[s]" and "present content as a compelling *narrative*" (Zhao & Lindley, 2014),

Budge and Burness (2017) argue that there is a strong desire for visitors to share personal perspectives through photography, and that visitor photographs illustrate how objects are perceived in collections, suggesting that visitors are primarily engaging with objects through sharing photographs of them. Through photography, museum audiences become active producers of museum content and Instagram marks a shift for museums, with institutions moving from talking to visitors, to being in dialogue with them.

METHODOLOGY

Using the British Museum as a case study, the research is bounded by defined time periods and is comparative in nature.

Postcards used during the period 1900-1930 were collected and archival records from the same period sourced to determine museum production decisions. This period of study incorporates much of Rogan's (2005) identified "heyday" of picture postcard use, and reflects on the British Museum's production of

postcards from 1912 (British Museum Standing Committee, 1912). This ensures the sample incorporates postcards produced by the British Museum, in addition to those commercially available during the turn of the 20th century.

Instagram posts shared by visitors using the #BritishMuseum hashtag and/or geotag were collected during a 1 week period in 2022 and an open-ended question was asked of a random sample of digital participants to gain deeper insight into visitor perspectives. The period of collection was identified in respect of extant studies (Budge, 2017, 2018; Budge & Burness, 2018; Suess, 2014, 2018), and analysis of visitor upload rates to Instagram.

Research reflects on Latour's actor-network theory, and Postcards and Instagram posts were considered within their networks of production, use, and distribution. Analysis examines the socio-cultural contexts within which images of the British Museum were used by visitors, and this responds to Haldrup and Larsen's (2010) call for greater emphasis on 'photographing' in studies of tourist media. By contrasting 'ready-made' postcards with visitor-created Instagram posts, the research aims to identify museum-values inherent in the personal messaging, and to explore how these values are expressed, and used by visitors in their communication. It further seeks to understand how photographs of a public museum come to support personal communication, and how similar views can convey different meanings for different people.

Analysis considers picture postcards and Instagram posts as semiotic-objects, incorporating visitor messaging alongside photographs to provide a wholistic understanding of the media in use. This ensures that visitor messages are read, understood, and analysed alongside photographs of the British Museum, as they would be by those receiving a postcard, or viewing an Instagram Post.

Analysis makes reference to Ledin and Machin (2018) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), to 'open up' the postcards and Instagram posts prior to analysis using grounded theory method. A series of questions were asked of each data to identify their denotive attributes alongside their meaning potential, this information was coded alongside transcripts of postcard messages and Instagram captions, and other visual markers, such as postmarks, hand written annotations, hashtags, and geotags, and each data was analysed in its entirety. Analysis progressed iteratively through open, axial and selective coding to ensure the resultant conclusions were reflective of the data, with an aim to offer insight into the meaning-potential of the shared visual media.

To retain participant anonymity, the reverse side of postcards have been edited to remove identifying information such as names and addresses. Further, the Instagram posts included in this paper are examples of 'typical' photographs present in the dataset and are not visitor-produced. Instagram posts have been recreated by an author (Simpson) to prevent back-searching and this approach is congruent with existing studies using visitor-created Instagram posts (Budge, 2018).

DOMINANT SCENES

60 British Museum postcards which were used between 1900 – 1930 were collected. The dataset is largely comprised of architectural views, and 'spatial' images account for 91.7% of the dataset, with only 8.3% of the postcards collected showing objects from the museum collection.

All views of the British Museum are of the south elevation on Great Russell Street. The majority of photographs are taken from elevated locations, looking across and over the boundary wall and railings, or are taken at ground level looking obliquely towards the British Museum, again from behind the railings. The dataset does include views within the boundary of the museum's forecourt (21.8% of elevations), but these are less frequent than those from outside the boundary wall of the museum (78.2% of elevations).

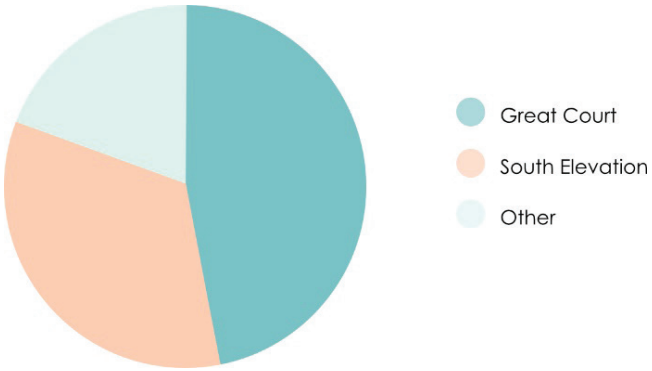

Figure 1. Pie chart showing spaces evident in shared photography of the British Museum. Data includes selfies where the architecture remains a significant feature of the image.

Source: Author's work (Simpson).

Although there have been significant changes to the British Museum, notably the development of the Great Court, however, the south elevation of the museum is still fairly frequently shared by its visitors today through personal photographs on Instagram. During a 7-day period in 2022, 4,768 individual images and videos of the British Museum were collected, the data was reviewed and posts which did not represent visitor photography, i.e. advertisements, were removed. A random sample of 10 posts per day were selected, which resulted in a total of 70 posts encapsulating 239 photographic data. Within this, 10.9% of the photographs were primarily architectural, an additional 16.7% of photographs including significant views of elevations and/or spaces as part of self-representational photography. In total, 66 of 239 photographs prominently feature the museum building; the Great Court is the most dominant view (31), but the south elevation (22) remains prominent in the data set. An additional 13 photographs feature other spaces, including the Kings Library, the Egyptian sculpture gallery, and others.

Due to its dominant presence in both historic postcards and contemporary Instagram posts the south elevation is the focus of this study. The values inherent in the façade and the meaning-potential of the elevation is first discussed, visitor image use is then explored, with reference to these values.

THE SOUTH ENTRANCE AND MUSEUM VALUES

Unlike other museums in the 1700s, the British Museum wasn't formed from a royal collection, but through the will of Sir Hans Sloane and an Act of Parliament. In 1753 the government passed a Parliamentary Act establishing a Trust for Sir Hans Sloane's collection of objects, and this required the Trustees to find a suitable building for display, whilst also preserving the objects for "public use, to all Posterity" (Timbs cited in Sanders, 1984). The collection was to be accessible and free of charge to all citizens (British Museum, 2020); a public museum.

The construction of the museum, as we see it today, began in 1823. The building was constructed in the Greek Revival style, with the façade of the south entrance completed in 1852. The British Museum materially represents an enlightenment principle (British Museum, 2020), and as a building, it encapsulates and represents "an early nineteenth century ideal – the unity of human knowledge" (Sanders,

1984). Sanders (1984) argues that "it was natural" for the British Museum to be constructed in the Greek Revival Style, "in order to assert its direct descent from Athens and Alexandria", and this decision grounds the museum in the past, providing a suggestion of historical authenticity, even at the onset of its construction

Figure 2. The left photograph shows the British Museum south elevation, the right photograph shows the stepped entrance beneath the central pediment.

Source: Author's work (Simpson).

The design of the British Museum follows a classical model (Merkel, 2002) and is monumental in scale. The south entrance is elevated above a series of steps and an entablature extends continuously along the length of the south portico, which is supported by 44 Ionic columns with distinctive capitals. The museum has a flat roof, but the main elevation has a pediment, the narrative of the tympanum, the sculpted space within the pediment, is therefore a significant element of the museum as this is an aesthetic addition, rather than structural. The sculpture represents the "Progress of Civilisation" (British Museum, n.d.1), it indues the museum with an association with law, the sacred, and cultures of the past (Merkel, 2002) and firmly situates the British Museum within enlightenment principles. And, for those visitors who may not 'read' the pediment, the aesthetics of the tympanum and the buildings architectural style will likely still bring about perceptions of power and authority, which are terms (Martins, 2021) describes neo-classical museums typically embodying.

Although informed by the preceding Monatgu House, the general footprint of the British Museum's southern elevation 'opens up' to the visiting public, 'enveloping' them as they approach the entrance. This elevation combines a sense of authority alongside a welcoming and sweeping entrance sequence, with the approach "still likely to impress a visitor now as it did a commentator on London in the 1860s" (Sanders, 1984).

Whilst there have been significant changes to the British Museum since the early 1900s, notably the development of the Great Court, the south elevation remains largely unchanged. A platform lift has been constructed to the west of the stepped entrance and the façade has been cleaned (British Museum Standing Committee, 1969-1971), but other changes are relatively minor and include changes of paint colour of railings, for example.

The museum has had an enduring presence on Great Russell Street. It has witnessed many significant moments in human history, from suffragette protests

in 1914 (British Museum Special Standing Committee, 1914), the evacuation of its collection in 1939 (British Museum Podcast) and the closure of the museum during the pandemic. The British Museum "is driven by an insatiable curiosity for the world, a deep belief in objects as reliable witnesses and documents of human history" (The British Museum Story, n.d.2) and, as an 'object', the museum, as a building, reflects this. The use of the Greek Revival style firmly roots the British Museum in history, and positions the museum within a pre-existing framework of philosophical, scientific and cultural ideas. We see, that as a piece of architecture, the museum communicates many of the foundational values of the British Museum, both at its time of construction, and today, and consequently, these are encapsulated in shared visitor photography.

SHARED POSTCARDS OF THE SOUTH ENTRANCE

Figure 3. Historic monochromatic postcard of the British Museum south elevation.

Postcard Production and Decision Making

Just as photographs of the south elevation incorporate museum values, the postcards produced by the British Museum do so too through the institution's decision making, which is integrated into the design and production processes of the cards themselves.

Postcards of the British Museum have existed from at least 1899, but the museum itself didn't start selling postcards until 1912 (British Museum Standing Committee, 1912). The British Museum had little control over the postcards produced by external publishers besides refusing permission to photograph within the museum grounds. The museum could not prevent photography proximate to the site, and consequently, all of the postcards in the dataset used before 1912 are images of the south elevation of the British Museum. Most of these postcards are taken from elevated locations nearby, looking across and over the railings on Great Russell Street. There are also a significant number of postcards with photographs taken besides the museum, on the pavement, looking obliquely down the street, again, showing the museum behind walls and railings.

Within museums, the photography of objects followed established 'rules', encompassing the curatorial eye. Edwards (2022) says that "photography made for publication followed the parameters established 'as effective object photography' which was established in the museum, and this, is translated into

the images shared on postcards." However, there were no established 'rules' with regards the spaces of the museum. Snow (2010) suggests that early amateur photographers took great influence from commercial photographic studios, effectively mimicking their styling in their own photographs, and with limited museum-produced spatial imagery, one of the few sources of guidance were the commercially produced postcards. Might the British Museum have reflected on externally postcards produced when creating their own collection?

The first set of postcards released by the British Museum included 182 photographs, 5 of which were views of the Museum (British Museum, 1912). However, unlike the postcards produced by external publishers, none of the views produced by the British Museum were external. The postcards were all internal views, and included the Reading Room, 'Iron' Library, King's Library, Mausoleum Room and the Egyptian Gallery. This decision outright rejected the 'popularised' views produced by commercial publishers suggesting a determination of the British Museum to position their postcard series as objects of education rather than entertainment. However, the internal views were new to the market, and these may still have instilled a sense of 'novelty', regardless of whether or not that was the intention of the museum.

Between 1912 and 1920 the original postcard series was expanded with 2 additional, external views of the British Museum recorded in the 1920 'Stock of Publications'. The two views are described as the "Main Entrance" and the "Front Portico"; reflecting the views printed by external, commercial publishers. Yet still, differences with presentation remain between commercial publishers and the British Museum; whilst commercial publishers largely released coloured cards, the British Museum opted to continue to print their architectural postcards (as part of a larger series) as a monochromatic set with the scenes framed in white space, rather than full-bleed images.

The British Museum did consider the use of colour plates, and during this period, Edwards (2022) notes a conversation between the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum regarding colour production of postcards. The British Museum responded stating that the use of colour was, "out of the question for this particular purpose". Noting the implications of colour, namely, suggestions of entertainment, it may be that the British Museum Trustees resisted colourising the original series to instil museum values in the cards, but also to emphasise their cards as distinct from those commercially produced.

Figure 4. Historic monochromatic postcard of the British Museum south elevation.

Young (2018) argues there was a colour revolution during the 1920s, saying that the use of colours transformed from "being merely a consumer choice to a fundamental idea about ordering and classifying the world". Colour then, was no longer simply associated with ideas of entertainment, and with pressure from the Treasury to increase profits (British Museum Standing Committee, 1921a), the British Museum began to produce coloured sets from at least 1919 (Standing Committee, 1919).

The 1935 coloured postcard series included 426 individual postcards (British Museum, 1935), more than double the original monochromatic 200 series of 1912. The south elevation of the British Museum however remained in the monochromatic series, along with all other spatial and architectural images, maintaining this distinction between the Museum and external publishers.

Whilst we cannot be certain whether the Director, Board of Trustees and Department Keepers, hoped to focus visitors attention on the collection, rather than the building, or felt that images of spaces didn't align with the museum's aim to disseminate knowledge, continuing to produce the south elevation as a monochromatic postcard at a time when the use of colour was cost effective and almost presupposed represents a significant decision. This suggests that the British Museum, as an institution, were making postcard production decisions which reflected the values of the museum, even when under financial pressure from The Treasury.

Postcards in Use

Postcards of the British Museum's south elevation have been used for a variety of communication, including sharing museum visits and experiences, activities in and around London, and sending cards as gifts to one another.

The postcards are also used as part of ongoing communication, with some senders using cards to organise travel for the following day, request the recipient brings particular items with them when meeting, or, to share a new address. Phatic communication is the dominant use of the postcards, with all of the used cards conveying elements of social function, with several not imparting any information besides a simple greeting.

Many of the postcards state "British Museum, London" on their fronts and the south entrance has been used to support messages which 'locate' the sender in London, with examples of cards describing the sender being "here" but discussing activities spread across the city, rather than at the British Museum itself. In the 55 spatial postcards, only 6 messages make direct reference to the British Museum, either by simply stating that the sender has visited or through describing an experience, but through association, all postcards, regardless of written content, suggest a connection between sender and museum.

50.9% of used postcards of the south elevation include messages which have been written upside down or at 90 degrees to the address, presumably to prevent those handling and delivering the cards from reading the messages. In these examples, we see a contradiction between the publicness of the museum and the privateness of the shared messages. Whilst it could be argued the decision to support 'banal' messaging with views of the British Museum diminishes the museums significance, regardless of how 'every-day' some of the messages may first appear, efforts to privatise these messages suggests this type of messaging does have value, and that the views of the British Museum may support the meaning-making activities of the postcard sender.

Described as an "ephemeral" mode of communication which "often had a very short shelf life" (Snow, 2010), during the early 20th century postcards offered a fast and visual mode of communication between people. Staffs (1966) says that "Anyone wanting to notify a friend in the town or near-by village that he or she would be coming over for a cup of tea in the afternoon had only to send a postcard by the morning's post to be sure of its delivery in time". There are examples in the dataset of senders organising activities for the following day, and in one case, letting the recipient know that they are "coming in with the fox tonight", exemplifying this speed of communication. Noting the speed of communication and associated volume of postcards exchanged during the early 20th century, the mere fact that views of the south elevation were used at all, is significant.

Contrasting this ephemerality is the enduring nature of gifts with people noting cards are "for" someone in their message, with one sender remarking that this was due to the recipient "collecting them". This actively demonstrates the sender was likely considering their recipient in making the postcard selection, perhaps reflecting on the aesthetics of the card, or the British Museum itself, and the combined relevance to their audience. There are also examples in the dataset of recipients retaining the card. This is evidence with a note "Went here Saturday 29th Sept 08" penciled on the image-side, and in this instance, the postcard was sent as part of continued communication, with no reference to the British Museum in the senders messaging.

The use of the British Museum's façade as a pictorial object that is versatile enough to support and accompany a breadth of messages, which are often unrelated to the British Museum, and their use as object by both sender and recipient is important to highlight.

Although there may be a disconnect between visual and verbal messages, and whether cards are used as part of continued communication or are a gift, the two sides of the card are read collectively; the values, principles and associated perception of the British Museum tied up with the image are understood alongside the stories, meanings and context of personal messages. Elements of the sender's message are layered onto the message conveyed by the façade through 'reading', and this process may imbue the museum with a sense of personalisation in the eyes of the recipient. The reverse may also occur, with values evident in the museum's south façade enhancing and lending authority to the sender's message.

We have offered reasons for selecting the south elevation as a postcard, with purchases made because of aesthetic responses, a consideration of recipient tastes, to support personal messages, and, to share museum experiences. Beard (1992) conducts a study using postcard sales ledgers between 1988-1991 at the British Museum and considers motivations for purchases. Evaluating which cards are the most 'popular', the south elevation consistently ranked in the top 10 cards for all three years, some 60-90 years after those used in this paper's dataset. Beard (1992) offers insight into why this scene is so frequently chosen, suggesting that the elevation acts as a symbolic "treasure chest", the "(mystical) container of that totality, the frame that gives sense and order to the baffling array of the incomplete remnants of all the past civilizations that lie inside".

And thus, we see a return to the notion of the versatile façade; an elevation, as a sign, symbolic enough to represent museums at large, and London, whilst simultaneously encapsulating and representing the British Museum's collection. Underpinning this broadened perspective of motivations to use museum

postcards is the evidence of postcards being sold in shops beyond the British Museum during the study period, both prior to 1912 before the Museum opened its first postcard stall, and after, when the Museum supplied external 'agents' with postcards (British Museum Standing Committee, 1921b). Buying a postcard therefore didn't require a person to enter the British Museum, and thus, the use of the south elevation need not be limited in use to describing museum experiences. However, the view of the British Museum, and the values tied up in the image of the museum, and the decision making of the Board of Trustees support personal messaging, regardless of content.

THE SOUTH ENTRANCE AND INSTAGRAM

Unlike postcards, people sharing images of the British Museum on Instagram have attended the museum, and visitors have greater choice with regards the views chosen to share with others.

All of the shared images of the south elevation are inherently tied up with place, be that through the image itself markedly locating the participant at the British Museum via the symbolic elevation or signage, or the UK, through inclusion of the flag above the pediment. Many participants also shared their location via accompanying hashtags, including #BritishMuseum, #London, and #UK and this shows the elevations use in place-locating activities by visitors.

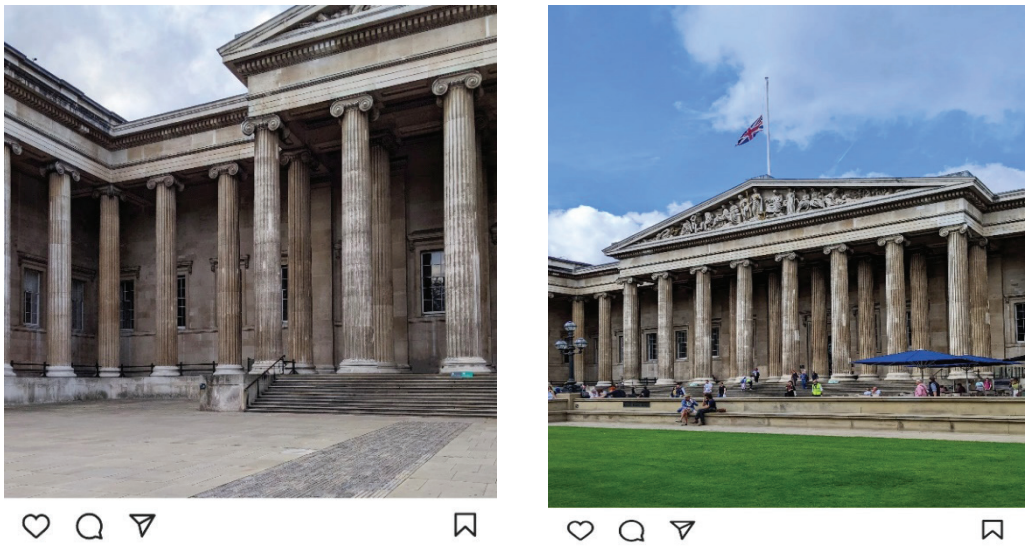

Figure 5. Examples of typical photographs shared to Instagram by visitors. On the left, AI has been used to remove signage and people, on the right, colour has been emphasised and the image aligned within the Instagram application.

Source: Author's work (Simpson).

Photographs of the south elevation can be largely categorised in two ways: either as architectural with few or no fellow visitors present, or as self-representational photography, where the participant is visible alongside the museum, with others visitors either barely noticeable or absent.

Predominantly, participants who shared 'architectural' views of the elevation opted not to include a caption to accompany their image. Those who did use captions broadly reflected on their experience, referencing the museum as a 'place'. One participant shared the caption "British Museum 🏛 GB", which identifies the museum, both visually (as a 'typical' museum), and geographically. Djenar et al. (2017) explain that emojis are language which should be read as text elements, not understood as separate visual things. The authors say that emojis are elements which "function intersubjectively in promoting solidarity through shared light-hearted attitudes" (2018). The use of the 'museum' emoji in this instance reflects the aesthetic of the British Museum, but may have also

been used to layer a sense of playfulness and informality alongside a 'serious' view.

Another participant described the museum as somewhere "where you relive history over and over again"[1]. This reflects the breadth of objects in the British Museum, but also suggests the visitor has previously visited and may return again. Additionally, the museum allows the participant to share their own interests with their audience whilst subtly suggesting their experience was enjoyable.

Those engaging with self-representational photography more often opted to include captions, which largely had some element of joviality or irony. One example of a participant jumping in front of the elevation is captioned "Responsible cultural trip to the British Museum", whilst a group photograph opts for "Having fun". Selfies aren't often considered 'typical' of visitor behaviour and may be disregarded as meaningful media due to a suggested disengagement between space and visitor, with visitors turning their back on the space they are photographed. However, in the majority of selfies taken at the south elevation, there is consistent centralisation of the participant beneath the British Museum's pediment. This visual alignment suggests a connection between participant and architectural space, with participant and photographer actively engaging with the museum environment to ensure this centralisation.

Participants who opted to share architectural images without captions also generated a connection with the museum, albeit more understated. When shared on Instagram, photographs of the south elevation are read beneath the photographer's username, marking an association between museum and person. In essence, the Instagram user 'owns' the shared image, and, the image comes to reflect some aspect of the photographer as part of their personal profile. Online, motivations for sharing views of the south elevation reflect those bound up with the tourist gaze, and arguably, in an environment where the 'skill' of the photographer is evident, the aesthetic of the final photograph becomes ever important as this comes to represent not only the museum, but the photographer.

Responding to an open-ended question, participants describe difficulties faced in photographing objects, saying that objects are "very difficult to take decent photos of", "artifacts can't be photographed clearly through the glass cases", and that "there were always a lot of people in the way to get great photos", and this perhaps explains why views of the museum are so frequent in the dataset. In sharing a view of the south elevation, a further participant simply noted "the sky was nice", and their photograph "looked good". Cumulatively, this shows an appreciation of the aesthetics of the shared image amongst participants.

Through Instagram and with the use of supporting third party applications, people are able to edit and manipulate their images, working through processes of colour saturation, alignment, and in some instances incorporating AI to remove parts of the image which are less aesthetic, likes bins and signage. The option to edit photographs is part of the 'workstream' of the Instagram platform, and whilst none of the participants described these process, perhaps because it is an inherent part of the application, it is probable that many have adjusted their image. Through processes of editing, Instagram users 'adopt' the view, it becomes their image not only because they have captured it, because they have worked on the image. Shared photographs of the south elevation act as mediators between museum and personal messaging, and we see they simultaneously represent person and place.

1 Participant caption rephrased to maintain anonymity

Participant 5056 included an image of the south entrance as part of a carousel post. In this post, the south elevation was the first image of the sequence, and, unless an Instagram users scrolled through the images, the south entrance would be the only photograph seen. The image, accompanied by the caption "Day at the British Museum[2]", connects person and place, but also demonstrates a digital development of Beard's (1992) concept of the elevation as "treasure chest". Scrolling the carousel we see the post fully encapsulates the participants day, including not only a series of objects, but their lunch, and a selfie. The south elevation, in this instance, is not only used to broadly 'collect' and make sense of the array of artefacts on display, but a selection of activities and events experienced throughout the day which are personal to the photographer. The south elevation is no longer a container, but a threshold, which when you scroll through, allows Instagram users to witness activities and experiences of the museum and beyond.

CONCLUSION

The 'commodification' of the Museum via postcards shared the curatorial eye, and showed the public how to see the museum and its collection. The British Museum asserted control over the production of their own postcard series and associated messaging, but we do eventually see the museum produce 'popular' views as part of their own series of cards. Maintaining monochromatic production of these views distinguishes museum manufactured cards from commercially produced 'keep sakes'. This enabled the British Museum to participate in popular, social, forms of communication whilst sharing their spaces and collection, and retaining a sense of authority.

However, the British Museum were not the sole producer of museum-postcards, and reflecting on the variation of postcards available to the public during the study period, the range of views, and the use of monochromatic and coloured prints, we see that postcard senders had access to a range of museum-photographs to support their messages. Whilst there were limited options with regards viewing angles of the British Museum's south elevation, a person was able to choose a postcard which may reflect an aesthetic preference in the purchaser, or the tastes of their recipient, allowing for greater personalisation, and perhaps meaning incorporated into the shared messages.

Regardless of postcard selection, these postcards incorporate museum values alongside personal messaging, aesthetic preference, and, in many examples, are used to maintain social connections. Much like Perkins and Thorns (2001) description of tourist photography these postcards are far from passive; the south elevation is an active photographic object. As Beard (1992) notes the south elevation comes to represent the "baffling" array of the British Museum's collection, through use, we see the facade also supports a broad array of messaging, with the view used to support messages of museum experiences, to support phatic communication, and also the sharing of trivial information. Whether commercially or institutionally produced, these postcards are mediatised representations of the British Museum, and through use, they shape broader audience perceptions of the museum, as part of the tourist gaze.

Today, armed with smart phones, museum visitors are able to take and share their own photographs with friends and families, and we see the museum, as an institution, has little to no control over how their visitors share photographs. Even with significant development to the building, and free reign over the museum,

2 Participant caption rephrased to maintain anonymity

many visitors still opt to share views of the south elevation. Whilst there is natural variation in the images taken, all are taken from within the museum grounds and share some view of the pediment, firmly locating the photographer as a visitor to the British Museum, regardless of whether they are behind the camera, or in front of it.

The supporting captions of the sampled Instagram posts are much less detailed than the majority of messages on the reverse side of postcards, and significantly, when a caption has been shared, they largely reflect a museum experience. This arguably is due to the photographer needing to have attended the British Museum to take their own photograph. Whilst there is notable similarity in some of the images shared on Instagram with those on postcards, particularly when taken inside the museum's forecourt, the contemporary museum visitor's use of social-photographs more closely relates to museum experiences than the use of printed postcards at the turn of the century.

Postcard use embellished the British Museum's image with person, blending formal views with personal messages, fostering a connection between sender and museum, enhancing a sense of accessibility amongst a wider audience. This literal dissemination of museum imagery also extended socially, knowing that a friend of family member had visited encouraged recipients to attend themselves. This is particularly important during a period where museum were seen to be becoming more public.

Online, museum visitors curate their own images for their audience, and make the decisions postcard manufacturers once did with regard views and colouring. The image users are now image producers, and images of the south elevation produced and used by visitors today reflect the British Museum, its values, and the visitor; the curatorial eye, evident in institutional postcards, is enmeshed in visitor-produced photographs today. Further, the consistent use of the south elevation both in historic postcards and on Instagram today suggests the façade is an established and recognisable symbol of the British Museum.

Ultimately, shared social-images of the south elevation, regardless of whether sent to others as a picture postcard or shared online via Instagram, are purposeful modes of communication. These visual media blend personal narrative with institutional values, and reflect learnt ways of looking. It is evidenced that picture postcards encapsulate the curatorial eye, and the visually-communicated values become entwined with personal messaging, informing broader audience opinions and perception of the British Museum. Online, the values inherent in the British Museum's façade are incorporated into personal photography, and the continuity in representation of the south façade demonstrates the elevation as a symbolic pictorial-object. As postcards extended the British Museum's reach, so to do visitor-produced photographs; these images may act as informal 'guides' to fellow audiences, influencing photography.

Whilst this study does demonstrate that postcards and Instagram posts are valuable media to visitors, additional engagement with Instagram users, to better understand their photographic decision making, would further provide insight into how these visitor-shared images influence broader audience perceptions, and photographic behaviours.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest was declared by the authors.

Authors' Contributions

The authors contributed equally to the study.

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Ethics Committee Approval

As part of the PhD study of Charlotte Simpson at the University of Nottingham, the study received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Nottingham on [14.01.2022].

Legal Public/Private Permissions

In this research, the necessary permissions were obtained from the relevant participants (individuals, institutions and organizations) during the survey, in-depth interview, focus group interview, observation or experiment.

Additional Comments

The submitted paper includes two figures (Figure 3 & 4) which are reproducible under the CC BY-NC-SA 4.0 license through the British Museum.

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