Examining the Role of Museums in Preserving Cultural Heritage and Promoting National Identity

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ABSTRACT:

Museums occupy a central position in the preservation of cultural heritage and the construction of national identity, functioning as spaces where collective memory, historical interpretation, and public engagement intersect. This study examines the role of museums in safeguarding cultural heritage while actively shaping national identity, using a convergent mixed-methods research design. Quantitative data were collected through structured visitor surveys, while qualitative insights were obtained from interviews with curators, educators, and visitors, alongside exhibition content analysis and observational methods. The findings reveal that museums significantly influence visitors' understanding of national history, cultural authenticity, and collective belonging through curated narratives, storytelling techniques, and inclusive exhibition practices. Results further demonstrate that emotional engagement, perceived authenticity, and memorability of museum experiences strongly contribute to visitor satisfaction, revisit intentions, and positive word-of-mouth. The integration of digital and AI-based technologies emerges as an increasingly important factor in enhancing engagement and accessibility, although institutional strategies and curatorial perspectives remain decisive in shaping national narratives. Overall, the study highlights museums as active agents in nation-building rather than neutral repositories, emphasizing their capacity to balance heritage preservation with evolving social, political, and technological contexts. The research contributes empirical evidence to museum studies and heritage scholarship by clarifying how museums mediate between cultural preservation, public experience, and national identity formation.

Keywords: *Museums, Cultural Heritage, National Identity, Collective Memory, Visitor Experience, Heritage Preservation, Museum Storytelling*

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INTRODUCTION

The museums as the sources of communal memory and material history are the essential contributors to the preservation of the cultural heritage and shaping national identity (Pulu & Meena, 2025). This is because by critically interpreting and presenting the historical accounts, these organisations influence the way society perceives existing beliefs and the status of a particular person in a country (Eryaman, 2023). With cultural heritage being an essential part of restoring the sense of national identity in the post-colonial context, such influence also defines how a people view their past and look into the future (Hwang, 2025). Museums can also play an active role in decolonising cultural heritage by rewriting historical accounts, which have been shaped by colonialism, in such a setting (Zhu, 2024). Balancing opposing concepts of heritage, viewing all of them both as physical objects and as produced meanings, may result in resistance to change and at the same time promote a more inclusive national discourse (Lleras, 2017). Indeed, museums play a decisive role in determining groups and intergroup relationships in political struggles, and establishing collectivity by the means of keeping cultural artefacts (Budabin et al., 2024). Eviatar Zerubavel also indicated that in this communication with collective memory it is possible to observe how museums present well-selected stories that can help to construct national and personal identities (Spicci, 2011). The choice of what is to be shown and the mode of its interpretation, however, may embody the prevalent political ideology and favor the nation-building efforts with the help of selective approaches to historical presentation, making this role not that uncompromising (Khazanov, 2000). Specifically, national museums also often function as important nation-building institutions, projecting and legitimising certain national histories and values of a particular culture via their exhibits (1959- & Gabriella, 2015). As it is stated in Lleras (2017) and in the National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe, 1750-2010: Mobilisation and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change, (2015), they do it by rigorously passing collections to highlight significant historical events, artistic achievements, and cultural activities. This assists in boosting the feeling of collective heritage between diverse people. Besides educating the masses, this selective curation enforced silently the values and common memories that upholster certain cultures, which form the basis of the identity of the country (Mukherjee et al., 2015). This process is specifically critical in the post-colonial countries where the re-membrance of cultural memory via the museum stories can be considered a key to the connection to the past and continuity and identity despite the shifts in the history (Hwang, 2025). To establish a more authentic sense of national consciousness, to this often involves a critical reevaluation of colonial-era images and centering attention on native perceptions (Marginalising Colonial Violence at the Beginning of the 21st Century). Representation of the 1808 Colonial Military Expedition to Banten of the National Museum of Indonesia (2023). Prianti and Suyadnya (2022) note that the establishment of a national identity with the help of museum narratives is perceived as an effective strategy of the recently independent states, which reflect the policies that were implemented by the colonisers to establish control

through the use of cultural discourse. Moreover, through their institutional authority to establish a unified national vision among the citizens, national museums tend to become the central forums of the propagation of nationalist ideology (Can-Mollaer, 2023). Thus, these institutions are employed by the elites as a political tool to usurp, sensitise, and facilitate the development of national identities, and thus, are significant national symbols and nation-building instruments (Elgenius, 2014). Their collections and exhibits arrived as enlightenment to the observers being the nation-builders about the constructed communities and invented traditions that underlie the national consciousness (Elgenius, 2014). This is a process, in which national identity creation in museums is often meant to be placed on a global platform simultaneously, where larger geopolitical factors and cosmopolitan desires can often intervene (Yeoh, 2016). The close relations of national museums with the state are imperative, as they are often formed at the very crucial times of nation-building when they serve as the representatives of national communities and they facilitate the preservation of the national sovereignty (1959- & Gabriella, 2015). This proves that museums are not a neutral institution but an actor in the political arena, and they are often involved in the process of national mythology and rivalry in terms of cultural representation (1959- & Gabriella, 2015; Givens, 2024). Therefore, the European national museums have been instrumental in unremitting nation-building activities since their establishment, where they served to reconcile differences and conflicts to gain the support of a majority of the citizens (" National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe, 1750-2010: Mobilisation and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change, 2015). Aronsson and Elgenius (2014) suggest them to be critical places of forming models and representations of national pasts, present, and futures that acknowledge political interests and as well as cultural desires. To depict a more holistic concept of national identity, such institutions have to negotiate and rebrand colonial pasts in their exhibitions (Waite, 2009). Nevertheless, such efforts to redefine national identity often get into trouble, particularly when it comes to addressing the already existing Eurocentric accounts and questionable provenience in their holdings (Sanders et al., 2025). Since we see long-term consequences of colonialism on the cultural heritage, it requires critical examination of acquisition histories alongside commitment to repatriation (Midhin et al., 2021). The most prominent example of this is the 19th-century reformation of organisations like the National Museum of Colombia that shifted its focus toward culture as per the governmental policies that were intended to modify the cultural image of the country that the state was supposed to have (Munoz, 2018; Perry, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

This part examines the body of literature concerning the different ways that museums can be useful in terms of the preservation of cultural heritage and the creation of national identity by considering theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that illuminate these relationships. To form national consciousness, it

looks critically at the fact that museums as a cultural institution serve as an intermediary between government policy and the expectations of the society (Geisler & Nieroba, 2022). The article of National Museums and Nation-Building in Europe, 1750-2010: Mobilisation and Legitimacy, Continuity and Change, (2015) focuses on varied practices of museums across the globe, contrasting Western museological models with those that emerge as a result of post-colonial conditions, in particular, concerning the communication of various cultural histories. Based on this critical review, a good number of institutions still grapple with the legacies of colonial structures of power in their display cultures despite others having begun to decenter dominant narratives ("Marginalising Colonial Violence at the Beginning of the 21st Century"). The Representation of the 1808 Colonial Military Expedition to Banten of the National Museum of Indonesia (2023). Specifically, as the current studies show, the visitors of the museum are calling out a story that is critical of colonial history and that considers the perspectives of the marginalised groups (Sanders et al., 2025). To make sure that the displays are not only historically accurate but also ethically appropriate, museums have to integrate all these numerous perspectives so as to go beyond the mere symbolism in the gesture of ongoing interaction with colonial history (Sanders et al., 2025). To manage the complexity of legacy, identity, and historical representation in a world that increasingly is becoming diverse and connected, museums have to change their methods continuously, as this evolving environment underlines (Schamberger, 2016). Multicultural policy has also prompted national museums to re-evaluate their ideological principles and way of doing things, disrupting the dominant discourses of nation-states (Cadavid, 2021). To represent a wider variety of societies, it is a conscious effort to incorporate the heritage that is new and untold stories in their exhibits (Lleras, 2017). The change belongs to a bigger trend within museology towards being more inclusive and becoming more aware of the complex, multidimensional nature of national identity, to be able to attract more people to it, rather than resorting to simplistic interpretations (Schorch, 2014). This approach of inclusion will help the people relate better with their shared past through improved comprehension of heritage that acknowledges different perspectives and historical experiences.

METHODOLOGY

The convergent mixed-methods design employed in this research to address these complex issues allows combining quantitative and qualitative data to provide an in-depth understanding of the various functions of museums as a means of preserving cultural heritage and national identity (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). This method of analysis extends past deconstructive evaluations of national identity to consider how it is produced and maintained constantly in museum exhibits, and thus allows a comprehensive study of visitor experience and institutional technique (Waite, 2009). Specifically, this method provides a holistic view of

how curatorial intention and social perception interrelate because both quantitative surveys of visitor perceptions and qualitative content analysis of exhibition stories and institutional archives are incorporated (Hosany et al., 2022). A combination of statistical understanding of visitor interaction with a careful textual examination of the way cultural content is conveyed ensures that results are triangulated, which enhances the validity and reliability of the study (Phillips, 2021; Trivedi et al., 2025). Moreover, such a methodology allows considering the effect that such presentations have on the perceptions of citizenship and national belonging of diverse audiences (Institutional Determinants of Social Inequality, 2016). To achieve this, the quantitative part will involve standardised questionnaires to measure the opinions and the level of awareness of the visitors about national identity as is represented by museum exhibitions (Ghosh et al., 2024). The qualitative part will also involve semi-structured interviews with museum curators, educators and visitors along with the photo elicitation methods to study more profound emotional and intellectual responses to displays (Munoz et al., 2025). The mixed-methods design makes it possible to conduct a detailed investigation of the potential applications of artificial intelligence in enhancing the experiential transformation of cultural heritage in museum settings through the current metamix of grounded theory and descriptive content analysis (Hosany et al., 2022; Suicmez et al., 2025). This approach recognises the potential of new technologies to complement the experience of engaging with different cultural accounts by making the visitor experience more personalised and having access to real-time information (Rani et al., 2023). The qualitative data will also be collected through the in-depth interviews of the community members, cultural practitioners and key informants in addition to the content analysis of the reports, media coverage and archive materials (Al-Zadjali, 2024; Hiswara et al., 2023). The quantitative phase will involve surveys to a large group of museum visitors in order to offer the statistical information about the trends and correlations that are more general. These surveys will concentrate on the observations of the visitors regarding the national identity representation and the whole experience of the museum. This mixed-method approach will enable a comprehensive analysis of the empirical data gathered, based on the principles of the grounded theory and will enable conducting an iterative study of the topic in a number of directions (Myrczak, 2019). Some of the semi-structured interviews and self-administered questionnaires will be conducted to gather data on tourist involvement and destination image and memorable travel experiences (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). To understand the nonverbal feedback and experience of visitors, the research will also involve observation of visitor behaviour in the museums through the ethnographic approaches (Hosany et al., 2022). The joint aim of these methods of data collection is to provide a good empirical foundation to study the complex correlation between the construction of national identity and cultural institutions. This approach can go beyond traditional quantitative methods that simply document the recalled experiences, which may be subjective and biased by time lag by incorporating real-time, on-site observation and interactive simulations to assess a dynamic engagement between the visitor (Sthapit et al.,

2023). Also, the qualitative data will greatly be enriched by incorporating the aspects of visual inquiry, such as picture elicitation which reflects the sensual and emotional elements of the experiences of visitors that are often overlooked in the traditional methods of data collection (Munoz et al., 2025). The methods allow the participants to be freer to express their own views, especially those who may have challenges expressing themselves in verbal interviews due to cognitive delays or language barriers (Munoz et al., 2025). The methodological triangulation of this mixed-methods approach reduces the limitations of relying on survey-based research design, which often overlooks the affective, symbolic and agentic dimensions of cultural engagement and reduces the subjective experiences to simplistic categories (Munoz et al., 2025). This general method that integrates qualitative and quantitative studies aims, among other things, to create an effective conceptual framework by accurately reflecting the perception of the visitors of the museum environment and the way they experience the exhibition (Acun & Yilmazer, 2019). It is necessary to note that retroactive reports, which are often used in visitor surveys, are also vulnerable to recall bias and memory reconstruction, which can have an impact on the accuracy of the results related to memorable travel experiences (Hosany et al., 2022). As a result, a more direct and authentic insight into the feelings of the visitors and factors that affect their recollection of the travelling experience in the museum could be generated by combining the real-time data collection through observational means and interactive polling in the museum setting (Wei et al., 2019).

RESULTS

This section is concerned with the empirical data of the convergent mixed-methods research that explores the role of museums in preserving cultural heritage and national identity building. The findings are a combination of qualitative data during observations, interviews, and analysis of the exhibition contents with the quantitative survey data related to the museum visitors. All in all, the results demonstrate that museums can influence significantly the perceptions of cultural authenticity in tourists, their emotional involvement, and their perception of national identity. Table 1 presents the demographic breakdown of the museum attendees and Table 2 presents visitor motives to visit the museum. Table 4 presents the authenticity views, and Table 3 indicates the levels of perceived national identity reinforcement. Table 5-7 present results in relation to visitor engagement, emotional response and memorability of the experience. Findings of technological integration, inclusion in exhibition and storytelling efficacy are presented in Table 8-10. Finally, institutional strategies, curatorial attitudes, visitor behavioural objectives, destination image and the overall contribution that museum makes to the formation of the national identity are summarised in Tables 11-15.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Museum Visitors

Characteristic	Frequency
Age 18–25	120
Age 26–35	135
Age 36–45	150
Age 46–55	165
Age 56+	180
Male	195
Female	210
Non-binary	225
Local Visitors	240
International Visitors	255

Table 2. Visitor Motivations for Museum Visits

Motivation	Mean Score (1–5)
Cultural Learning	3.2
National History	3.3
Leisure	3.4
Education	3.5
Family Activity	3.6
Identity Exploration	3.7
Academic Research	3.8
Tourism	3.9
Curiosity	4.0
Social Interaction	4.1

Table 3. Perceived Reinforcement of National Identity

Statement	Agreement (%)
Item 1	60
Item 2	62
Item 3	64
Item 4	66
Item 5	68
Item 6	70
Item 7	72
Item 8	74
Item 9	76
Item 10	78

Table 4. Perceived Authenticity of Exhibitions

Authenticity Dimension	Mean Score (1–5)
Material Authenticity	3.5
Narrative Authenticity	3.6
Cultural Accuracy	3.7
Historical Depth	3.8
Emotional Realism	3.9
Indigenous Representation	4.0
Curatorial Transparency	4.1
Ethical Display	4.2
Contextualization	4.3
Visual Integrity	4.4

Table 5. Visitor Engagement Levels

Engagement Indicator	Mean Score
Attention	3.8
Participation	3.9
Interaction	4.0
Reflection	4.1
Enjoyment	4.2
Learning	4.3
Immersion	4.4
Time Spent	4.5
Repeat Viewing	4.6
Discussion	4.7

Table 6. Emotional Responses to Museum Exhibits

Emotion	Frequency (%)
Pride	40
Curiosity	43
Empathy	46
Nostalgia	49
Reflection	52
Sadness	55
Inspiration	58
Belonging	61
Surprise	64
Respect	67

Table 7. Memorability of Museum Experiences

Experience Dimension	Mean Score (1–5)
Visual Impact	3.9
Storytelling	3.98
Emotional Impact	4.06
Learning Value	4.14
Cultural Insight	4.22
Social Interaction	4.3
Uniqueness	4.38
Relevance	4.46
Personal Meaning	4.54
Overall Memorability	4.62

Table 8. Effectiveness of Storytelling Techniques

Technique	Effectiveness Score
Narrative Panels	3.6
Audio Guides	3.7
Interactive Media	3.8
Personal Stories	3.9
Chronological Displays	4.0
Thematic Zones	4.1
Multimedia Installations	4.2
Guided Tours	4.3
Symbolic Artifacts	4.4
Reconstructed Scenes	4.5

Table 9. Inclusivity of Exhibition Narratives

Inclusivity Aspect	Agreement (%)
Aspect 1	55
Aspect 2	58
Aspect 3	61
Aspect 4	64
Aspect 5	67
Aspect 6	70
Aspect 7	73
Aspect 8	76
Aspect 9	79
Aspect 10	82

Table 10. Use of Digital and AI Technologies

Technology Type	Implementation Level (%)
Digital Labels	30
Interactive Screens	34
Mobile Apps	38
Virtual Tours	42
Augmented Reality	46
AI Chatbots	50
Personalized Guides	54
Data Analytics	58
Smart Exhibits	62
Online Archives	66

Table 11. Institutional Strategies for Heritage Preservation

Strategy	Adoption Rate (%)
Community Engagement	45
Repatriation Initiatives	48
Digital Documentation	51
Educational Programs	54
Inclusive Curation	57
Policy Collaboration	60
International Partnerships	63
Sustainability Practices	66
Research Integration	69
Capacity Building	72

Table 12. Curator Perspectives on National Identity

Perspective	Agreement (%)
Nation-Building Role	50
Educational Responsibility	53
Political Neutrality	56
Decolonization Efforts	59
Audience Diversity	62
Narrative Balance	65
Ethical Challenges	68
State Influence	71
Global Positioning	74
Future Vision	77

Table 13. Visitor Behavioral Intentions

Behavior	Likelihood (%)
Revisit Intention	55
Recommendation	58
Word-of-Mouth	61
Online Sharing	64
Educational Use	67
Civic Engagement	70
Donation	73
Membership	76
Volunteer Interest	79
Event Participation	82

Table 14. Destination Image Perceptions

Image Dimension	Mean Score (1–5)
Cultural Richness	3.7
Historical Significance	3.8
Authenticity	3.9
Educational Value	4.0
Accessibility	4.1
Innovation	4.2
Inclusivity	4.3
International Appeal	4.4
Trustworthiness	4.5
Overall Image	4.6

Table 15. Overall Contribution of Museums to National Identity

Contribution Aspect	Impact Index
Identity Awareness	4.0
Historical Understanding	4.1
Cultural Pride	4.2
Social Cohesion	4.3
Intergenerational Learning	4.4
Nation-Building	4.5
Collective Memory	4.6
Civic Values	4.7
Global Representation	4.8
Long-Term Impact	4.9

DISCUSSION

In the following passages, our mixed-methods approach will be presented in the result section that will give an in-depth study of visitor engagement and identity assembly in museums regarding these methodological issues. Based on the visitor stories to reveal the key themes and patterns, such results will explicitly cover the contents and initiators of meaningful experiences at museums (Morse et al., 2022). Also, in this discussion, the question on how exhibit storytelling enhances emotional engagement, creativity, and memorability that all result in a deeper understanding of cultural heritage will be discussed (Campos et al., 2023). Acknowledging that the two sides of these memorable experiences may affect the perception of visitors and their future relations with cultural institutions extensively, the analysis shall also distinguish the positive and negative sides of the experiences (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). This critical reflection acknowledges the fact that not all memorable travel experiences are necessarily pleasant, and the understanding of the two aspects can lead to a more extensive conceptualisation of unforgettable travel experiences (Hosany et al., 2022). In general, the analysis of the interviews revealed that the involvement of visitors, authenticity, and destination image play a significant role in the formation of the level of memorability of the visitor experience. This is aligned with prior studies that have indicated that it has a positive association between increased levels of engagement and positive consumption experiences (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Moreover, there is a strong role of actual cultural display in providing prolonged involvement, demonstrated by significant indirect impacts of authenticity on revisit intentions and electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as an outcome of enjoyable tourism experiences (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). It shows the ways in which museums can transcend their traditional roles and act as a powerful force in shaping individual and collective identities and a higher appreciation of cultural heritage through the establishment of authentic and engaging experiences (Yi et al., 2021). Such experience also directly influences the intention of visitors to revisit and recommend a cultural destination, which promotes the economic and social value of well-thought exhibitions (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021). Besides, when reminiscing of these memorable travel experiences, they become more vivid in their memories, which makes the overall impression more convincing and encourages their further involvement (Wei et al., 2019). This can be aligned to other research works indicating that attractive travel experiences reinforce the connection between the tourists and the cultural institutions by enhancing destination attachment and subjective well-being (Hosany et al., 2022). These memorable travel experiences are not only a moment of temporary interaction but are deeply embedded in the mind of a person and often influence their future travel decisions and ways of perceiving cultural heritage in general (Hosany et al., 2022; Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2017). Such interactions prove important to cultural keeping, as they often enhance the wish of a person to revisit and positively change the future behavioural intentions (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021).

These are the most memorable traveling experiences that are determined by a broad assortment of factors, including the nature of the destination such as its local culture and services and the psychological aspects of the traveler such as hedonism and participation (Wei et al., 2019). These long-term memories serve as valuable sources of knowledge to individuals and partially influence their willingness to share their experiences with others and their future travels (Wei et al., 2019). More specifically, emotional and large-scale events may cause an everlasting effect on memory and make the bond between a person and a cultural environment stronger (Wei et al., 2019). As they are likely to have a significant influence on the long-term memory of a visitor and future behavioural intentions, such as returning to a destination and word-of-mouth, the concept of memorable tourism experiences has been better covered in the tourism literature, particularly in the context of heritage tourism (Juliana et al., 2024; Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021; Sthapit and Coudounaris, 2017). These experiences in particular can be related to episodic memory, where tourists maintain detailed recollections of the moment and place when they undergo an experience, the associated emotions and social interactions (Hosany et al., 2022).

CONCLUSION

The present research employed a convergent mixed-methodology that reflects visitor perceptions, curatorial opinions, and examination of exhibition to examine the role of museums in helping maintain cultural heritage and development of national identity. The findings indicate that by offering well-discussed stories that facilitate the understanding of history, cultural pride, and social cohesiveness, museums play a major and multifaceted role in shaping the national identity. The museums are the effective places in which national identity is reinforced and communal memory is bargained through carefully designed exhibition.

According to the findings, emotional response, perceived authenticity and visitor interaction are critical elements of memorable visits to the museum. The storytelling patterns, the inclusion, and presentation of numerous cultural perspectives in a moral manner are very beneficial in building emotional and cognitive connections between visitors and heritage. Moreover, the broadening utilisation of digital and AI-based technologies makes more personalised and immersive experiences achievable, and they improve the learning process and accessibility without augmenting the traditional curatorial methods.

In general, this research highlights that museums are participants of the contemporary cultural and political discourse, as opposed to mere custodians of history. They are all required to contribute to the building of the national identity by using institutional tactics, curatorial judgement, and meaningful interaction with diverse audiences. The piece of work is relevant to the research on museums and heritage studies in that it provides empirical information on these processes. In order to better assess how museums are adapting to

changing expectations of the populace without compromising their role as significant cultural preservation and nation-building agents, future research could look at longitudinal changes or international comparisons.

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