



Visual Communication

Photographic Sharing, the Self and the Museum

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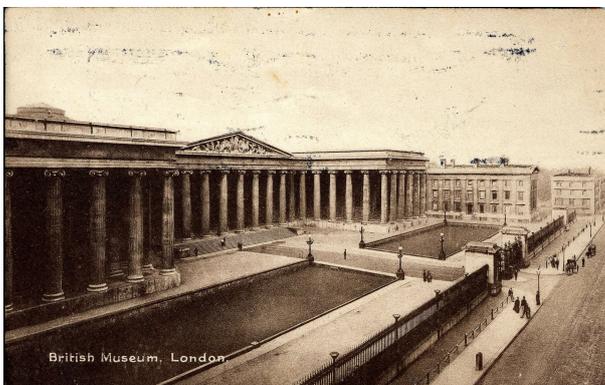
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Introduction

General observation of images posted to Instagram by museum visitors suggests that, armed with their own smartphones and with access to social media platforms, visitors collect, exhibit, and certify their own experience. This process is not a modern phenomenon; picture postcards allowed the museum visitor to share their own experience, and photographs have been available for purchase by the public since at least 1879¹.

Research Aim

The research focuses on photographic practices of the museum visitor; it seeks to understand why visitors buy, capture, and share photographs of the museum, and how the use of photographs may contribute to ideas of the self. This is to understand how the museum may respond to the changing cultural practices of its audience and better inhabit the public realm.

Methodology

A single case study is proposed, bounded by the British Museum but comparative in nature, with inner-case analysis used to compare insight from a historic and contemporary period. The research uses visual analysis and grounded theory to gain insight into the development of photographic use by the visitor, and how this may inform contemporary practices.

Images are 'translated' to text using Barthes² ideas of denotation and connotation, and subsequently coded alongside transcribed messages; postcards and Instagram posts considered semiotic materials which are coded as a whole.

Open ended questions and interview are proposed to gain further insight from contemporary museum visitors and test conclusions drawn from grounded theory.

1 – Photographs were available for sale by the librarian at the British Museum in 1879, this is evidenced on the document; British Museum (1879) "List of Photographs which may be purchased as the principal librarian's office" British Museum Printed Records: Microfilm Reel 2 – Barthes (1977) *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana

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