

Analysis of Factors and Issues Affecting the Brand Development of Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts

Liu Ming¹, Chaiyot Vanitwatthanuwat^{2*}

¹ Doctor of Philosophy in Fine and Applied Arts (Fine and Applied Arts Management)

² Faculty of Fine and Applied Arts, Bangkok Thonburi University; Email: chaiyot.tak@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author: chaiyot.tak@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research are (1) to study and analyze the current brand management of Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum, and (2) to analyze the factors affecting the brand effectiveness of Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum. This study employs qualitative methods to review effective brand management models for art museums through a literature review and to optimize these models based on the characteristics of the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum. In addition, SWOT analysis is used to examine the internal and external factors and conditions of the target case and to infer the factors that influence brand performance. The research found that: (1) Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum adheres to the principle of supporting service, education as a venue for higher education research. Due to its relatively closed environment and small number of visitors, the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum lacks the attention of society and the public. In addition, competition between art exhibition venues and museums is intense. The Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum recognizes the challenge of maintaining a strong market position. It therefore conducts research on brand development and identity enhancement through targeted approaches to development and marketing management. (2) The factors and problems of Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum that can improve brand efficiency are based on the museum's brand management system in four dimensions: quality and academic dimension, personal dimension, symbolic dimension, and organizational dimension, to develop and improve the brand efficiency of the university's art museum, aiming at effectively building its competitiveness and satisfying visitors.

Keywords: Art Museum, Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts, Branding, Development Management

INTRODUCTION

University art museums, as spiritual and cultural symbols of their universities, not only bear historical traces that reflect responses to the development of academic disciplines and scientific research, but also provide material exemplars for faculty and students in teaching and research. As university art museums seek to enhance public awareness and increase visitor numbers, museum marketing has become increasingly strategic and complex. A growing number of institutions are therefore exploring practical marketing models that can ensure creativity, effective communication, and long-term sustainability.

The case study of this research is the Art Museum of the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts, located in Liaoning Province, People's Republic of China. This museum is a specialized art institution whose core functions include academic research, exhibitions, collection and conservation, and public education. It is also a member of the National University Art Museum Alliance. The findings on improving brand management strategies at this museum can serve as a reference for enhancing brand performance in similar university art museums. More broadly,

students and educators in the arts, artists and professionals, museum managers and staff, local governments and cultural institutions, as well as the general public, may benefit directly or indirectly from the outcomes of this research.

Fundamental Context of Brand Development at the Lu Xun Academy of Art Museum

The Commercialization Wave in Nonprofit Organizations

In contemporary society, competition among cultural institutions has transcended traditional industry boundaries and evolved into a struggle for public attention and diversified forms of entertainment. Many nonprofit organizations have increasingly adopted commercially oriented operational strategies, a trend that is particularly evident in the museum sector. Similar to commercial entities, nonprofit institutions must generate revenue to sustain their operations. Social marketing has demonstrated remarkable potential within the museum industry, driving the transformation of museums from conventional exhibition spaces into recognizable cultural brands (Gonzales, 2021). Research indicates that brand-oriented management not only enhances visitor numbers and public awareness (Ajana, 2015) but also strengthens institutional credibility in fundraising and improves internal management efficiency for sustainable development (Ferreiro, 2022). In some cities, museums have been integrated into urban regeneration strategies, using cultural landmarks to enhance regional competitiveness (Vivant, 2011).

Policy Drivers and Urban Cultural Strategies

China's 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development explicitly emphasizes the "intellectual property development of museums," while Dalian's "City of Art" initiative positions art museums as key vehicles for cultural competitiveness. For example, collaborations between the Palace Museum and enterprises such as AutoNavi and China Unicom to establish digital laboratories exemplify cross-sector cooperation and provide models for the digital transformation of the Lu Xun Academy Art Museum. University art museums are thus required to participate in the construction of urban cultural capital through branding, stimulating regional culture and demonstrating how brand innovation can enhance local cultural competitiveness.

Mission Evolution of University Art Museums

Operational experience from the Princeton University Art Museum highlights the necessity for university art museums to balance academic missions with public responsibilities. In 2015, 46% of its revenue (approximately 130 million RMB) originated from social funds, underscoring the importance of market-oriented operations for sustainability. As the first university art museum in northeastern China to adopt a dual "academic-public" operational framework, the Lu Xun Academy Art Museum urgently needs to transition from a purely academic space to a regional cultural landmark. Brand management is therefore critical for addressing challenges related to resource mobilization and audience expansion.

Strategic Significance of Brand Management

Overcoming Resource Conversion Barriers

The collection of the Lu Xun Academy Art Museum reflects the artistic and cultural development of northeastern China while preserving the institution's century-long educational heritage. However, the development of cultural and creative products remains largely confined to traditional formats, such as commemorative publications. Brand management can transform the intellectual property of collections into cultural capital. Drawing on cross-industry collaboration models, such as the partnership between the Shanghai Museum and Cartier, the museum's "Red Classics" artworks could adopt international exhibition models, such as *Man Ting Fang Fei*, and leverage cross-industry licensing for digital collectibles or co-branded products to convert academic value into economic returns.

Reconstructing Public Access to Aesthetic Education

As an inheritor of the contemporary interpretation of the "Lu Yi Spirit" (the revolutionary artistic ethics of Yan'an), the museum must balance academic excellence with mass appeal through branding. Inspired by the Princeton University Art Museum's mission to "connect audiences with global art," the Lu Xun Academy Art Museum could establish a dual system integrating "academic branding" with "community art education." Initiatives such as youth workshops and digital art experiences linked to exhibitions such as *Trace* and *Radiance* could strengthen the museum's integration within the regional cultural ecosystem.

Addressing Digital Survival Challenges

Currently, approximately 80% of the museum's social media content focuses on exhibition announcements, while engagement among younger audience accounts for less than 20%. By adopting a "digital + AI" approach,

similar to that of the Palace Museum, the museum could develop 3D virtual galleries and real-time interactive systems. Projects such as the 2023 “Deep Time Tunnel” demonstrate how digital technology can expand cultural accessibility. Future innovations, including metaverse exhibitions and artist live-streaming, could establish a digital brand matrix that resonates with Generation Z.

Enhancing Global Influence

Although the Lu Xun Academy ranks eighth in China’s 2025 Fine Arts Academy Brand Index, it still lags behind leading international university museums. Following strategic collaborations such as that between the Shanghai Contemporary Art Museum and Chanel, brand management could attract international curators and art funds. For instance, integrating collections into international programs, such as France’s May Art Festival, could enhance the museum’s influence within global art networks.

Exemplary Value of the Branding Approach

The branding initiatives of the Lu Xun Academy of Art Museum provide three key academic insights for cultural institutions:

- **Interdisciplinary Innovation:** Leveraging national strengths in visual communication and animation to transform academic expertise into brand competitiveness, such as developing animated IP derivatives.
- **Regional Cultural Empowerment:** Deepening brand-city integration through collaborations, exemplified by cultural tourism products such as “Lu Yi × Jinshitan.”
- **Governance Model Upgrading:** Adopting Princeton’s diversified funding structure to create a hybrid revenue model that combines government support, social funds, and commercial operations, thereby reducing reliance on a single funding source.

Under the dual pressures of rising cultural consumption and digital transformation, brand development and management have become core strategies for university art museums to transcend resource constraints and redefine public value. The practices of the Lu Xun Academy of Art Museum not only ensure institutional sustainability but also advance its mission to reinterpret the “Lu Yi Spirit” as contemporary cultural production. By systematically analyzing brand development factors and challenges, this research provides a foundation for transforming the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum into a contemporary, modern, and widely recognized cultural institution.

Research Objectives

1. To examine and analyze the current brand management practices of the Art Museum of the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts.
2. To analyze the factors influencing brand effectiveness at the Art Museum of the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research approach and employs qualitative analytical methods, including literature and SWOT analyses.

1. **Literature Review.** This method involves reviewing and analyzing relevant academic literature to examine how brand management has been applied as a strategic tool within the Art Museum of the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts.
2. **SWOT Analysis** SWOT analysis is employed to evaluate the museum’s internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats. This method enables a comprehensive understanding of both internal and external factors influencing brand development at the Art Museum of the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts. It helps identify key elements affecting brand performance.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. Brand Is More Than a Logo

When discussing “brand,” it refers to how people perceive an organization. A brand functions as a means of communication through which institutions express who they are and what they do. Branding may include logos, slogans, social media accounts, and even innovative marketing strategies. Effective branding enables organizations to differentiate themselves and capture public attention.

For museums, attracting visitors and reaching new audiences is often challenging. By establishing a strong brand identity, art museums can enhance their capacity to promote exhibitions and implement activities aligned with their core values and long-term objectives (Pusa & Uusitalo, 2014). Although art marketing has received considerable scholarly attention, research on brand management in university art museums remains limited. Most empirical studies on art museum branding focus primarily on brand associations, lacking clear definitions of brand identity and a comprehensive understanding of visitor touchpoints.

While some scholars emphasize visual aspects of brand identity such as logos, slogans, and color schemes, brand identity encompasses far broader meanings than visual elements alone. David Aaker's Brand Identity System, introduced in 1996, established a foundational framework for understanding brand identity perspectives and components, which remains widely applied. In 2014, Pusa and Uusitalo adapted Aaker's model to the art museum context, confirming its flexibility and applicability within this sector. They categorized art museum brand identity into four dimensions:

- **Brand as Product**, including collections, exhibitions, service quality, and physical facilities;
- **Brand as Person**, encompassing personality, user imagery, artists, museum managers, and experts;
- **Brand as Symbol**, including visual imagery, metaphors, brand name, brand heritage, and architecture;
- **Brand as Organization**, incorporating organizational characteristics and relational attributes.

This multidimensional framework provides a comprehensive lens for systematically examining the brand identity and effectiveness of university art museums.

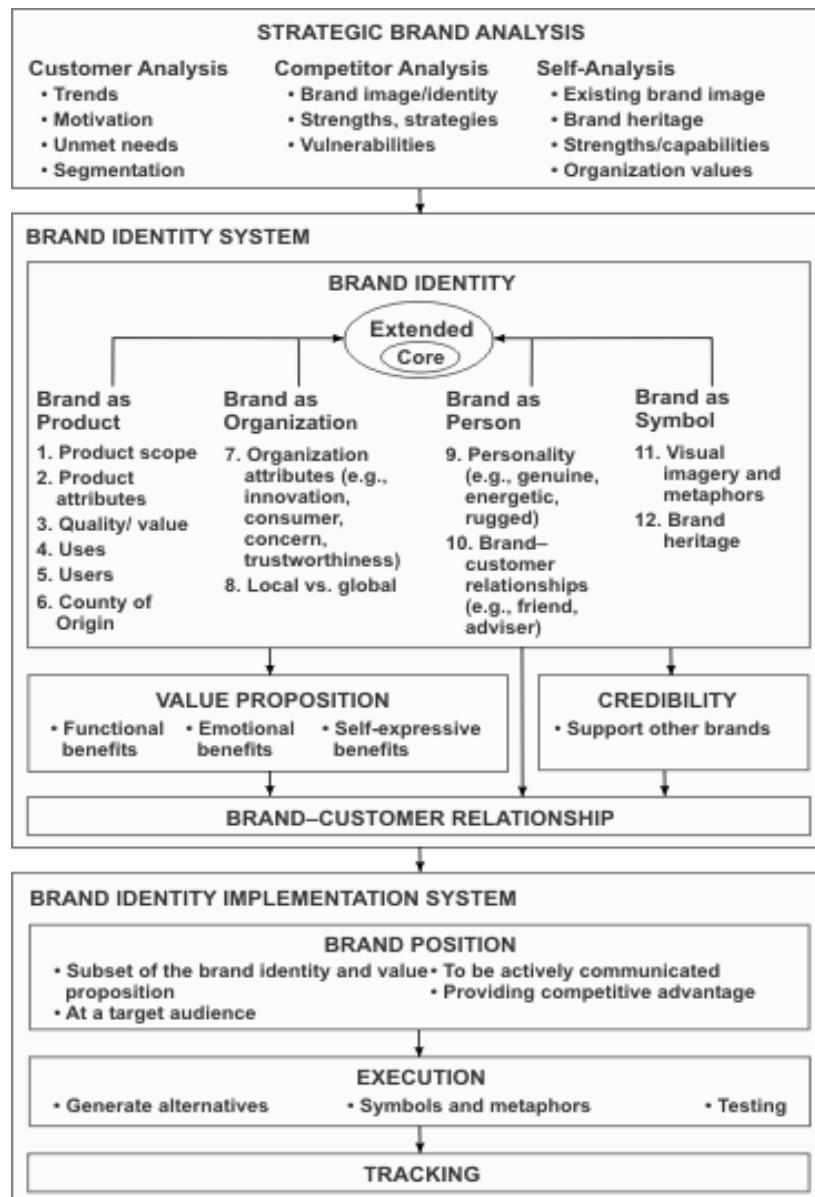


Figure 1: Aaker's Brand Identity / Brand Vision Model

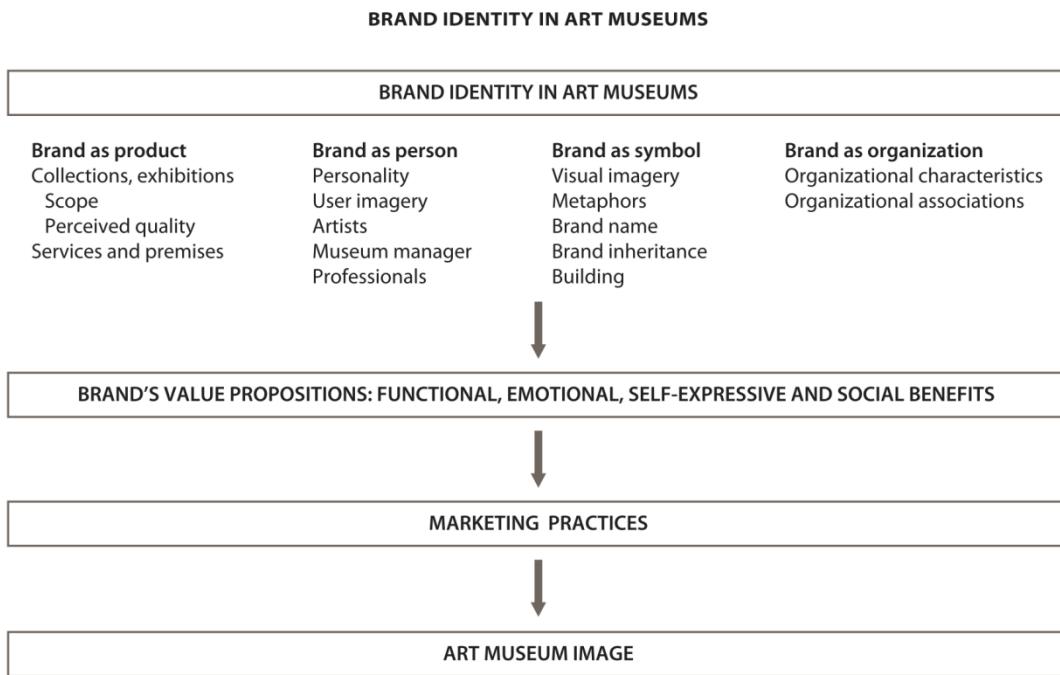


Figure 2: Art Museum Brand Identity Model

Source: Pusa, S., & Unsitalo, L. (2014)

Based on the models and research findings discussed above, the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Museum can refine its branding strategy in the following ways to achieve improved outcomes:

1. **Academic and Quality Dimension:** The most significant advantage of a university art museum over a public museum lies in its strong emphasis on academic research. University art museums should therefore prioritize the quality of their collections and exhibitions, as these constitute their core functions. The museum can curate exhibitions with high academic value and educational significance, showcase the institution's achievements in art education, and highlight specialized collections that support scholarly research. In addition, providing high-quality services such as museum shops, educational programs, and guided tours can further enhance the visitor experience. Museum shops may offer merchandise related to exhibitions, while educational programs can be integrated with academic curricula to provide hands-on learning opportunities.
2. **Brand-as-Person Dimension:** Establishing a distinctive brand personality for a university art museum can be achieved through its brand image, promotional media, and activities. For example, emphasizing academic research or fostering interaction with students and faculty can reflect the museum's educational role and its mission of community service. Market research to understand the needs and interests of target audiences can inform the design of exhibitions and activities that align with audience expectations.
3. **Brand-as-Symbol Dimension:** Developing a distinctive logo and a coherent visual identity system for the university art museum can significantly enhance brand recognition. Visual elements should align with the institution's educational philosophy and artistic character. Furthermore, incorporating the university's history and cultural heritage into the museum's brand narrative can add depth and strengthen audience engagement.
4. **Brand-as-Organization Dimension:** Clearly defining the museum's mission, vision, and core values and ensuring that these are consistently reflected in all operational activities is essential. Demonstrating social responsibility and educational commitment through community engagement initiatives, public lectures, and seminars can be particularly effective. In addition, establishing partnerships with other art institutions, academic departments, and community organizations through collaborative projects and programs can enhance social impact and strengthen the museum's brand value.

SWOT Analysis Table

Based on an assessment of the internal and external competitive environment, the SWOT analysis identifies internal strengths and weaknesses, as well as external opportunities and threats relevant to the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Museum.

Table 2 SWOT Analysis of the University Art Museum Brand

Internal, External and other factors	Opportunity (O)	Threat (T)
	(SO)	(ST)
Strength (S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specialized collection resources University academic history Educational and research activities Publications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leveraging unique academic resources Enhancing the effectiveness of curriculum development Organizing high-quality exhibitions
Weakness (W)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incomplete management team Limited marketing budget Outdated facilities Insufficient community linkage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhancing the effectiveness of digital transformation Strengthening communication and collaboration
Weakness (W)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving resource allocation efficiency Enhancing the visitor experience

Source: Liu Ming, 2025

The SWOT analysis of the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum provides in-depth insights into both the internal and external environment, enabling the development of targeted strategies to enhance overall brand effectiveness and operational performance.

First, in terms of strengths, the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum possesses a unique collection and a strong academic background, which provide valuable resources for exhibitions and educational activities. The museum's professional expertise and educational mission also constitute significant advantages, enabling it to deliver high-quality art education and to support research. However, these strengths are accompanied by specific weaknesses. Insufficient funding often limits the scale of exhibitions and the development of facilities, while relatively low public visibility may affect public perception. In addition, inadequate facilities and limited community interaction further constrain the museum's social impact.

To address these weaknesses, the museum can adopt WO (Weakness–Opportunity) strategies to improve its situation. First, it can leverage digital transformation to compensate for funding constraints, for example, by expanding audience reach through virtual exhibitions and online courses, thereby reducing operating costs. Establishing partnerships with art institutions, businesses, or other universities can facilitate resource sharing and enhance the effectiveness of exhibitions and promotional activities. Moreover, developing educational programs and activities tailored to community needs can effectively increase public awareness of the museum and strengthen community engagement, thus enhancing overall brand influence.

To respond to external threats, the museum can employ WT (Weakness–Threat) strategies. To mitigate risks arising from economic fluctuations and funding shortages, the museum should allocate resources more efficiently, prioritize budget expenditures, focus funding on critical areas, and actively seek external funding and donations. In addition to addressing inadequate facilities and intensifying competition, the museum should enhance the visitor experience by renovating and upgrading its facilities and introducing innovative exhibition formats and interactive technologies to strengthen its competitive position. To counter shifts in public interest and economic uncertainty, the museum should strengthen its marketing and public relations efforts, develop targeted promotional strategies, and maintain public interest and visitor stability.

Based on this strategic analysis, the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum can more effectively leverage its strengths and opportunities, overcome weaknesses and threats, and identify key factors influencing brand effectiveness. This, in turn, will enhance brand value and improve overall operational performance.

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of a University Art Museum Brand		
Dimension of Brand Origin Identification	Influential factor	Effects for more efficiency
Brand as a product	Collection	Strengthen the museum's academic reputation and enhance brand awareness through its own strengths
	Electronic exhibition	
	Academic research	
	Printed matters	

Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of a University Art Museum Brand		
Dimension of Brand Origin Identification	Influential factor	Effects for more efficiency
Brand as a person	Scope	
	Perceived quality	
	Services and facilities	
	Digital creation	
Brand as a symbol	Personality	Define distinctive personal attributes to enhance the brand's competitiveness
	User-generated images	
	Teachers and students	
	Artists	
	Museum managers	
	Experts	
Brand as a Organization	Visual imagery	Strengthen the museum's brand image and brand perception
	Metaphors	
	Brand name	
	Brand heritage	
	Architecture	
	University	
Brand as a Organization	Imagination	Increase audience satisfaction and the brand's attractiveness
	Attractiveness	
Brand as a Organization	Organizational characteristics	
	Organizational associations	

Figure 6 Factors Influencing The Effectiveness Of A University Art Museum Brand

Source: Liu Ming, 2025

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

1. At present, research on brand management for the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum is still at an early stage. A review of the literature indicates that university art museums often face challenges, including uneven development, insufficient resources, and low levels of visitor engagement (Wang Lin, 2018). Scholars have suggested the need to deepen understanding of communication and marketing strategies for university museums and to explore the relationship between university museums and their affiliated university brands (Chiara Bartolini, 2011). Considering the distinctive characteristics of university art museums, brand development should place particular emphasis on knowledge production. These museums not only broaden students' understanding of the world but also strengthen cultural knowledge, enhance expressive abilities, and promote interaction with the social environment (Araújo, G. C. D., 2018). Therefore, branding practices should be adapted to align with the models proposed by Pusa et al., which are widely recognized for their efficiency and effectiveness. In addition, many university art museums lack sufficient professional staff. Museum managers are often drawn from other departments, resulting in a mismatch between expertise and job responsibilities, while limited funding constrains staff development and training (Xia & Ning, 2018). This situation may directly affect the planning and implementation of brand marketing activities, preventing museums from effectively promoting their brands. Furthermore, these museums serve diverse target groups, including students, scholars, art enthusiasts, and local community residents, thereby complicating brand positioning and marketing content. As a result, museums need to develop marketing strategies tailored to the needs and interests of different audiences in order to enhance brand attractiveness and influence. In a highly competitive art and cultural sector, university art museums must compete with other art institutions and cultural centers for limited audiences and resources. Therefore, it is essential to establish differentiated brand positioning and distinctive marketing strategies that highlight unique strengths and characteristics.
2. This study employs a SWOT analysis of the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum to identify factors influencing brand performance. It integrates these findings with the descriptive model of museum brand identity developed by Pusa et al. to construct a model of factors affecting the brand

effectiveness of university art museums. The model is further refined to address current conditions and challenges and to align with the specific characteristics of university art museums. It emphasizes the product dimension, such as academic research, publications, and digital development, highlights the creative output of faculty and students in the personal dimension, and considers the influence of university image and campus culture on branding in the symbolic dimension. By strengthening brand image, the model aims to effectively enhance the museum's academic reputation, brand awareness, brand competitiveness, and visitor satisfaction.

Discussion

1. An analysis of the current state of brand management in university art museums suggests that future efforts should focus on building academic branding. Compared with art museums within the broader cultural heritage system, university art museums should be more closely integrated with academic resources and disciplinary development, offering targeted educational content grounded in scholarly research (Xu Dandan, 2019). Increased research efforts in cutting-edge academic fields can unleash the creative potential of faculty and students, identify emerging academic strengths, and cultivate specialized talents. In addition, greater emphasis on exhibition planning and marketing is essential for creating branded exhibitions with strong appeal and academic influence. Organizational challenges within management teams—such as shortages of specialists and marketing expertise—may hinder brand development and large-scale promotional initiatives. Therefore, it is necessary to develop specialized museum professionals and establish appropriate career pathways to foster a positive employment environment and retain talented personnel.
2. By consolidating the factors influencing the effectiveness of university art museum brands and integrating them with the descriptive model of museum brand identity, the benefits of brand optimization can be reflected across multiple dimensions. Students and art educators; art practitioners and experts; museum industry managers and staff; local governments and cultural institutions; and the general public can all benefit directly or indirectly from the research findings. Students and educators may view university art museums as extensions of educational resources, offering a broader range of learning and research opportunities. Art practitioners and experts can enhance their visibility and recognition within the art world through branded activities and exhibitions. Museum managers and staff can better formulate brand management strategies, evaluate and improve museum performance, enhance professional skills, stimulate cultural consumption, and promote local economic and industrial development, while also gaining greater policy and financial support. The general public can gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of art and culture through diverse exhibitions and activities, thereby fostering social interaction and strengthening community cohesion.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Practice

1. Strengthen strategic brand planning: University art museums should develop long-term brand strategies that clearly define brand positioning, target audiences, and core values to guide branding efforts.
2. Enhance digital transformation: Utilize digital technologies such as virtual exhibitions and online courses to expand audience reach and increase the museum's visibility and engagement.
3. Increase brand promotion and marketing: Develop targeted promotional strategies to enhance brand awareness and attractiveness through social media, public relations activities, and other channels.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Future studies should examine the development of university art museum branding from the perspective of the creative city, with findings applicable to similar types of museums.
2. Further in-depth research is needed on evaluation mechanisms influencing university art museum branding and on the optimization of branding strategies.

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