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Mu.SA: Museum Sector Alliance

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**MuSA**  
museum sector alliance

## **W03.4.2 INFLUENCE, PERSUASION AND MUSEUMS**

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Abstract:	This unit has two main objectives: understand how museums use institutional influence according to his specific objectives, linked with soft power theories, and try to identify the main domains in museum work where it can be used.
Keywords:	<i>Influence, persuasion, museum work, soft power, problem-solving</i>



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## Aim and objectives

This unit has two main objectives. The first is to understand how museums use institutional influence according to specific objectives, linked with soft power theories. The second is to identify the main domains in museum work where it can be used.

## Learning outcomes

Upon completion of this resource, you will be able to...

LOut4: Indicate two daily work situations where persuasion is a useful and a valuable skill

LOut5: Identify the most important outcome of influence and persuasion skills in museum work.

## Keywords

Influence, persuasion, museum work, soft power, problem-solving



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## 1. Introduction

Museums in the 21st century are not only institutions for preservation and exhibition of historical, scientific, artistic or cultural artifacts. Museums also have a social role in society, by giving meaning to the collections they hold and preserve, enhancing human connections for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment of publics. To achieve such objectives, conservation, research, communication, exhibition and interpretation are fundamental functions (or tools). The use and development of influence and persuasion skills by museum professionals can contribute to those purposes.

It is possible to identify three main application fields of influence and persuasion skills in the museum sector. Firstly, influence skills will be helpful to the recognition of the institutional and social relevance of museums for and in society.

Secondly, persuasion skills can help you in daily museum work situations, such as problem-solving and decision-making.

Thirdly, because of the previous two applications, museum professionals can use influence and persuasion skills to connect with the publics, acting as agents of social development.

Furthermore, it is possible to connect the three main principles of influence and persuasion as discussed in the previous unit (authority, honesty and likability) with each of these purposes, even if it is clear that they must always be together in the process.

By using persuasion for institutional recognition museums will be noted as an authority; when used at daily museum work situations, solving problems and making decisions, people will perceive the honesty of your work; and finally, applying persuasion in communication and actions with public and stakeholders, will create likability and, by this, will reinforce a sense of community.

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## 2. The use of influence to institutional recognition: museums and *soft power*

As we mentioned before, even if you use all the principles in the persuasion process, some of them will be noticed more than other. By the institutional approach, when museums use influence, they get social recognition as an authority.

Let's start by defining **soft power**. For this is a good help the synthesis made by Gail Dexter Lord and Ngaire Blankenberg "Cities, Museums and Soft Power" (2015). The concept of Soft Power started with Joseph Nye, an academic and political scientist, that created this term in the late 1980's to describe the relations based not on military or economic issues, but on influence. They defined soft power in contrast with "hard power", based on force and finance, appealing to the use of intangible resources, such as ideas, knowledge, values, and culture, in order to influence behavior using persuasion, attraction or agenda setting.

In 2013, the British Council identified the link between soft power and culture in its report "[Influence and Attraction: culture and the race of Soft Power](#)", focused on civil society institutions.

Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, museums were originated by the hard power agents and to serve its purposes (state, church, capitalists, etc.), depending on them to funding and governance. They influenced the museum mission, goals, objectives, acquisitions and exhibitions, directly and indirectly. Museums were places to exhibit trophies, dedicated to times, events and personalities that were judged as heroic, glorious, civilized, special, unique, just to give some examples. Museums were places of glorification of the ideals of their patrons.

Looking back, is possible to identify that a lot of the ideals that oriented the ancient museums aren't so glorious in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, after the Declaration of Human Rights, the end of the Eurocentric



imperialism, the necessary postcolonialism posture, and the end of the consideration of humankind as a master of nature, for example.

Museums have been changing, from depending from the powerful to become institutions of civil society, finding new roles, responsibilities and expectations, trying to amalgamate a plurality of voices and influences. This has resulted in a change from a collection-focused institution to people-focused one. They assumed an educational dimension, trying to provide physical and intellectual access for all the publics. This changed everything in the museum sector, from acquisition to exhibition, and imposes a new dynamic, transforming the museum experience.

Even if museums shifted their mission from relevant collections approach to a civil society oriented one, they still have a status of prestige, and seen as an authority. That depends of much more issues than collecting and preserving items. It is connected with the power, a soft and subtle one, that museums as educational institutions with social development goals have today.

So, what is the role of the museums today and why are they important? Here you have a short video (2m35s) of the International Conference of UNESCO, taken in Paris on 2016, where some experts talk about the role of museums today and its relevance:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfQxeHVID1E>

As you listen, museums are considered as:

- Places of memory that congregate different people from diverse generations and origins;
- Places that stimulate curiosity about other cultures (differences and similarities)
- A place where every individual or group belongs and can contribute with something to society;



- A close and interactive social motor that gives knowledge to everyone;
- A magnet for economic development for diversification, for connecting in with the global community;
- A place for the whole world, not just for a specific place;

So here you have: when people talks about museums nowadays, they speak about an institution people oriented, having as objective the social cohesion and development on a global scale trough education, increasing the feeling of belonging and removing obstacles to mutual understanding. Museums don't talk anymore just about heritage and glorious times: they are civic institutions, with social concerns and global opportunities.

The example in the video, calling the countries that own great museums to take care and use its influence to help to the preservation of the heritage of countries and museums that are in a crisis situation, can help you to understand the social (and even political) power of museums as a social institution, and how they can use their soft power on a global scale.

Persuasion and influence can help museums to get this power as institutions. In fact, this is a natural consequence of the new visitor-focused paradigm; if you work with people and for people, sometimes you have to use persuasion.

For that, museums need to have a few characteristics:

- Be free
- Be open
- Be diverse
- Value programs
- Listen

After that, museums can achieve multiple results, but one of the most important is the recognition of its authority and relevance.

Here you have a very inspiring TedX Talk by Ngaire Blankenberg on “how you can activate the soft power of your museum”:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4FTBXaAJSY>

Museums are places of power, and that is based on its influence skills and capacity of promote the social change. Museums explain how humankind, things, consciousness, science and nature change, and they promote and manage that change, being considered cultural accelerators.

Providing comparative knowledge, museums help people to understand how values and ways of living changed over time, enabling visitors to understand the past behavior and values of society, influencing the adaptation of their behavior. They also promote social inclusion.

### 3. Influence skills in museum work

As mentioned before, museum professionals use influence skills in a daily basis. Working in a museum, you can use persuasion as a problem-solving technique, but some professional profiles are more connected with this tool.

The influence skills were considered important for museum professionals, specially for two of the four emerging job profiles by Mu.SA – Museum Sector Skills Alliance. This doesn't mean that influence and persuasion skills are not used by other professionals, as is it by everyone. The Mu.sa project report “Museum Professionals in the digital era – Agents of change and innovation” (2017) just

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wants to make clear that there are two profiles that will be using persuasion and influence more than the others.

These two job profiles are the Digital Collections Curator and the Online Community Manager. Let's explore why.

The Digital Collections curator is responsible for implementing the digital strategy and is specialized in preserving and managing digital collections, developing online and offline exhibitions and contents for other departments. People with this responsibility collaborate with other staff members, as management, education, communication and curatorial department. The challenge is what to show, how, and understand the message visitors will receive. Digital Collections Curators must be aware of the museum's mission, prepare a display according with its values and goals, and there will be some moments of disagreement with other departments. Often, persuasion is needed.

The other profile job that must have persuasion skills is the Online Community Manager. This is vital for all museums aiming to invest in developing and engaging diverse audiences online. S/he is responsible for development and implementation of an audience development plan in line with a museum's overall strategic plan and mission, creating a sense of community between the museum and its online stakeholders/communities.

## 4. The museum influencers

As you know, they are four kinds of influencers: celebrities, experts and leaders, bloggers and content creators and micro influencers. These four types of influencers can be used by museums, attracting visitors, changing the feelings about an old institution, making the museum look open, updated, diverse and relevant. Some of them can be museum professionals, but there is not a big deal if museums open

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its doors to external influencers that can give an innovative and particular relevance to this kind of cultural institution. Museums just must be aware of their mission and respect it but must be open as a participatory reality. Some of the effects that the museum will achieve accepting influencers (of any kind) can be attract different kinds of publics and build a diverse community; gain authority, visibility and social relevance; and also attract fundraising;

#### 4.1. Celebrities in museums

As for general marketing strategies, the presence of celebrities in museums spaces can be used to attract their fans. The simple communication of their presence in a museum event can make their followers feel curious about that institution, but the effect can be much more improved if it is the celebrity that talks, or show, the museum.

Some of the most important museums of the world are benefitting from the phenomena of celebrity influencers, that endorsing a museum help them to attract new types of visitors. Sometimes just for attending a gala, or participating in the curatorship of an exhibition, or even as an exhibition theme, celebrities can move their fans to the museum. But sometimes the process is inverse, the celebrity takes the initiative to go to the museum, and in that situation the museum can find an opportunity to influence public. One of the most recent examples is the video made by Beyoncé and Jay-Z at the Louvre. You can see it here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbMqWXnpXcA>

At the video, Beyoncé and her husband were filmed in front of world-famous masterpieces. The video is well-known for influence the vision about the museum: here you have, a classic and traditional, European, exhibition of art appealing to the contrast with an American artist and Icon, creating connections where it was no

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obvious. An old institution as the Louvre can, after this, affirm that it is an open institution, inclusive, and welcoming of a larger audience.

On that year, 2018, the museum increased the visitor's number in 26%. The museum response was quite intelligent, and the Louvre decided to create a tour inspired on the video: <https://lifehacker.com/now-you-can-take-a-jay-z-and-beyonce-tour-at-the-louvre-1830715463>

To influence using celebrities demands flexibility. Just don't give up of the museum mission and goals. After that, you can be innovative and creative as you want.

#### 4.2. Experts and leaders as museum influencers

By approaching experts and leaders as museum influencers, some examples can be point out. One example is the American museologist Nina Simon. This museologist worked as executive director of the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, California, and is the author of the books "The Participatory Museum" (2010) and "The Art of Relevance" (2016).

She has a personal website (<https://www.ninaksimon.com/>), but is famous and considered an authority because of her her previous blog Museum 2.0 (<http://museumtwo.blogspot.com/>) (since 2006 to 2019) that now is authored by Seema Rao.

Nina Simon centred her career exploring how museums can be participatory, recognized as a friendly and important institution, and how to embrace technologies in museums. She also is a well-known consultant, exhibition designer, and public speaker; she participate in TedX Talks, and another conferences that you can easily find on YouTube, and by her website you can write directly to her.

She is a recognized example of a museum expert that uses the social media to interact and communicate, and one of the most influential voices about and for museums in the 21st century.

Furthermore, you can find several museum experts blogs here:

<https://www.onlineuniversities.com/blog/2009/07/100-best-curator-and-museum-blogs/>

### 4.3. Museum bloggers

Blogs have been a good medium to communicate, and then be persuasive, about museums. Some of the authors can be experts and leaders, as Nina Simon, but there are another possible kind of bloggers.

For one part, there are some participatory blogs about museums. There, the museum invites people to write articles, that can be more or less scientific, or just impressions, opinions or ideas about any issue related with museums; the blogger can be or not a museologist, can be just a museum lover, and write their personal impressions; sometimes s/he persuades others to participate on that project: personalities, experts, and sometimes just common people, write about their ideas and feelings about an exhibition, a museum theme, about architecture, good and bad things that they experienced in museums.

Here are some examples:

- National Museums Liverpool (UK) have one of the most interesting blogs about their museums related topics: <https://blog.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/>
- Linda Norris, also a well-known museologists, focus on creativity processes in museums, and has a blog where she shares her thinking about museum issues:

<http://uncatalogedmuseum.blogspot.com/>

- “Girl Museum” is a blog dedicated exclusively for girlhood, and they try to be a virtual museum with exhibitions, education, and raising awareness about girlhood globally, acting as a information platform for social and cultural dialogue.

<https://www.girlmuseum.org/blog/>

- Brown Gilrs Museum Blog is an feminist and activist blog, that belongs to Brown Art Ink, a community incubator to support the arts ecosystem for artists, cultural practitioners, and communities of color:

<http://brownartink.com/browngirlsmuseumblog/>

These are just some examples, but you can find a more online. There are professional, individual and collective blogs that use influence and persuasion, by expressing knowledge, feelings and concerns about the museum world.

#### 4.4. Museums and micro-influencers

One of the most recent phenomena on digital persuasion are the micro influencers. They use social media to influence a specific group, interacting with their followers.

To understand how museums can work with micro-influencers, please see this video of the Arts Development Community:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jAHGbCNjGoU>

Additionally, there are some advices:

- Find the right influencers for your museum or campaign – it takes a little research either in your geographic area or field; after having a list, invite them to press reviews and encourage them to post about your events;
- Allow photography and think about that when you organize an exhibition (light, reflect, etc);

- Create a hashtag for the museum – that will be shared by everyone on social media, so be sure to make it visible;
- Organize different workshops, that will attract different kinds of micro influencers;
- Give to the influencer some advantages in the local area (discounts on restaurants, hotels, etc). Some museums started to give free entrance to influencers.

## 5. Synopsis

We started by discussing museums as places to develop influence and persuasion skills. Museums may use these skills to make society aware of its relevance today, not just as cultural heritage guardians but also as civil society institutions focused on promoting the social cohesion and development; Museums use soft power theories to make clear, with influence and attraction, that they still be needed nowadays, because they are a knowledge depository, but also have an active role on the construction of the society. For that, museums must be open to community (that is the only way of building one), giving contents of people's interests and call to participation, whenever is possible.

Internally, museums can have professionals such as a digital collections curator and the online community manager, that will gain a lot using persuasion skills. But also museums should taking advantage of the social media influencers (museum professionals or not) that can help the museum gain visibility and, with that, influence.

## 6. List of references





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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PfQxeHVID1E>

Unsigned, “How museums can use social media”, Museum Next, 27 March 2019, from:

<https://www.museumnext.com/article/museums-can-use-social-media/>

## 7. Further reading

Liverpool Museums blog: a good example of a massive and participatory blog with lots of subjects related with museum work:

<https://blog.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/>

Nina Simon’s webpage, linked with her previous blog and books,

<https://www.ninaksimons.com/>

## 8. Glossary

- **soft power.** concept o started with Joseph Nye, an academic and political scientist, in the late 1980’s to describe the relations in contrast with “hard power”, based not on military or economic issues, but on influence, appealing to the use of intangible resources, such as ideas, knowledge, values, and culture, in order to influence behavior using persuasion, attraction or agenda setting.



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