Talking Points: Making Heritage Accessible...
to future-oriented audiences of the Arabian Peninsula

My speaking notes
Hi everyone! I’m Sahar Sharif, an Emirati museum specialist and community engagement analyst for The Boeing company.

Before I begin, I want to thank the AAM committee and Pamela for getting me to contribute to this wonderful book...

I recently finished a master’s degree in Museum Studies and while doing my thesis---realized the importance of having a museum-going culture
Especially in the Middle East and Asia-
Which have developed faster than the blink of an
eye..

And faster than we can say the word
“development” change slide (cs3)

Here I want to address a crucial issue happening in
Asia.

Along with the development, our heritage and true
cultural identity risks being buried in the sands of
time.
CS Slide 4:
And places that host these collections seem to have lesser and lesser interest to younger audiences.

An example is this cartoon, where a child questions her mom after roaming a museum, “Now can we have an eating experience?”
Stories and Ideas we can create, the drive to progress we can achieve

But how can we give these speedy achievements the due credit they deserve? Not only for today, but for tomorrow and generations to come?

Giving milestones their credit lies in visual memory.

How do we retain this visual memory one may ask? (Specifically with Heritage collections)
However, today’s talk does not just go on about a dusty old collection that has been sitting for posterity!

HOW do we retain visual memory better?

The Answer is making heritage collections ACE!
Cs-slide 7 ACE! Is a museum space organization strategy, that stands for A- accessible, C- connected and E- engaging.

This was developed by Museum Professional Graham Black in his book The Engaging Museum.
Our Museums, collections and archives need to be ACE!

An example of something that could be archived would be the growth of Dubai Airport, From the 1970s to now.

From a mere few thousand passengers a year to a global transit hub of 50 million passengers a year.
I used the airport because it is something that can appeal to a multitude of audiences -

They can ENGAGE directly, and reflect:

1) How did we get from there to here so quickly?

2) Where did we really come from?

3) These will not only help connect UAE heritage locally, but connect to larger segments of future-oriented audiences.
And how do we get them all to do that?

We need to create ACE collections and then a museum-going habit or culture.

(Which is much less than other parts of the world, according to ICOM statistics.)
These heritage collections should not be overshadowed.

It is crucial that museum authorities work in conjunction with the older collections.

Because what actually makes up part of the newer museum collections are—FOREIGN OBJECTS AND ARTIFACTS.
Our museums need to be ACE!
To intertwine our histories with the present and to house more indigenous cultural identity in an APPEALING MANNER.
Today’s museums need not just be the storehouses of yesteryear,

But multifunctional and appealing.

Simply because younger generations need to be lured into learning—interactively

Especially subjects they’re not exposed to—like heritage.
Social media plays a role unofficially in connecting heritage.

Then, when people in the same groups were interviewed about Emirati cultural groups they’re part of on social media -

They brought up amazing references that were part of their own family histories.
This ACE! Connect does exist, eventhough it quietly flows through unofficial social media or oral history, Usually limited to generations within the families of private collectors, and behind closed doors.

Change Slide 17-
-This can turn into an issue: No interaction with emirati culture.
-The Emirati culture is a conservative one, and collections serve as visual memory for only the near and dear.
Change to VS 18:

Social media applications could be used to a cultural advantage as well.

-As Heritage representation or even current event documentation (which would then become heritage) so essentially “heritage creation”
These contributions could then be developed into a virtual collection—like a storage cloud.

Some freely available to the public, some stored securely with access codes, and some only available to museums as collection content for R & D.

This would be an intangible collection able to give context, background and reflectn to the tangible.
Change to VS 21

Using the ACE! Method,

Collections would take the virtual dimension into account for easy accessibility - at anywhere and anytime.

-Made further accessible and engaging through touch.

Connected to vast circles as heritage elements will be all placed together

Its collaboration would involve every site visitor - making it engaging
Virtual “easy-access” collections would pave the way for virtual archives.

It would also allow for the preservation of cultural ideals that are hard to communicate physically.

e.g. vernacular dialects, customs and folklore.
Change to VS 23

Where can these virtual collections be used best?
An e.g. preserving the Khaleeji Arabic dialect
People can upload sound clips of various slang words- and
people can “buy” words everyday from a
“dukkan” (traditional store)

-This element would appeal to both younger and older
emiratis, who worry about the loss of ID.

-These could pique interest in the language among the vast
multinational community in UAE.

-These virtual collections could also be perfect formats to
document oral history- no conversions needed.
Change to VS 24

Virtually accessible appeal would:

This would lead to the recognition of some core components of the Peninsula’s history.

Then this could encourage Emiratis to lend their heritage to become part of national collections.
Using this virtual access, we can then interweave history, recognition and meaning.

We can appeal these collections to the future-oriented cultures, by involving them in the making of it.