

Gen Z

Short-Form Video Strategies for GLAM

London College of Communication (LCC) students in the final year of their BA (Hons) Media Communications course and creative consultancy Bright White Ltd – A Keywords Studio, teamed up for a second year on a quest to explore how the GLAM (Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums) sector can engage Gen Z audiences. This year, Gen Z students drew on their social media experiences to propose short-form video cultural storytelling for the sector.

Short-form Videos and Gen Z

For more than a decade, short-video platforms have seen a surge in popularity (e.g. Vine, Snapchat, Flipagram and Musical.ly) establishing specific norms and practices in the short video industry. Typically, under a minute, short-form videos represent an evolution in user-generated content, defined by four key characteristics: duration, endless scroll, integrated creation features and replicability. Platforms like TikTok, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels made the format popular, functioning both as an app for creating and sharing videos and a tool for entertainment, marketing and education. Widely regarded as a Gen Z native platform, it has become a vital space for youth expression, connection and protest.

Despite TikTok's massive reach and the potential of such short-form video tools for cultural organisations, the applications and strategic adoption from the GLAM sector is limited. Current approaches focus on the sporadic documentation of visits and cultural spaces, or short-lived attempts to engage younger demographics through trends and audio memes. An example includes a curator at the Royal Armouries Museum in Leeds who went viral on TikTok last year with a series of videos using popular Gen Z slang terms to promote the museum exhibits to a younger audience. Despite views in the millions, the videos sparked criticism among Gen Z. Many of our students said the videos were 'outdated' and a bit 'cringe'. Major museums like London's National Gallery and the V&A have tried to leverage short-form video's full potential without success.

The current use of short-form video by the GLAM sector highlights three issues:

- The complexity of short-form video creative practices.
- The need for dedicated staff creativity to reach young and diverse audiences.
- The need to strategically embed short-form video creativity into digital initiatives without compromising educational and artistic mission.

These issues will need to be addressed to achieve audience growth and engagement that reflects contemporary youth.

The Design Challenge

With this in mind, Bright White Ltd, a leading interpretative design studio working in the GLAM sector, invited Gen Z students to develop short-form video strategies to engage Gen Z audiences via a 'How would you do it?' approach, 'hoping to gain transferrable insights' that offer interpreters and heritage organisations fresh insights into youth creative expression.

We present three examples that show distinct strategic and creative approaches, followed by core threads we identified across projects and key takeaways for the sector.



ASMR toolkit for GLAM institutions (printed double-sided flyer).

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Stills from the short-form videos Cultural Breaths: A Moment with Art and Echoes of the gallery ASMR Tour.

Creative Responses

Pause, Watch, Listen

While Gen Z are digitally native and fluent in short-form video, which makes them interested in any digital content, students critiqued this oversimplification. Using Camden Art Centre as a case study, they argued that engaging Gen Z with cultural institutions isn't a content problem but a delivery challenge. This led to the development of their project 'Pause, Watch, Listen', a strategy that uses slow media and Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (ASMR)-inspired design to create sensory calm and reflective connection. Likened to meditation, ASMR is a perceptual sensory approach whereby a video viewer may experience a calming 'tingling' sensation from the sound of a microphone tap or a breathy vocal. The project responds to Gen Z's desire to escape algorithm-driven content loops by using sensory triggers (whispers, textures, ambient sound), immersive pacing (replacing high-stimulus editing) and multisensory layers (visual, auditory, tactile).

Watch the short-form YouTube video:
Cultural Breaths: A Moment with Art.
<https://bit.ly/LCC2500>



Portraits Reframed

Capitalising on the sophisticated visual literacy of Gen Z, this project gives portraits of historical figures from the National Portrait Gallery a Gen Z 'transformation' by creating a series of digital prototypes of their fictional social media accounts (e.g. Instagram, LinkedIn, Tinder). These reimagined profiles are presented through a blend of wit, popular culture and stylised visuals. Framing the historical figures in this way humanises them and makes them more accessible to Gen Z by using a visual language that they intuitively understand. The approach demystifies the fields of cultural knowledge and heritage interpretation, while the platform-native format helps to keep the content fresh and in tune with current social media trends.

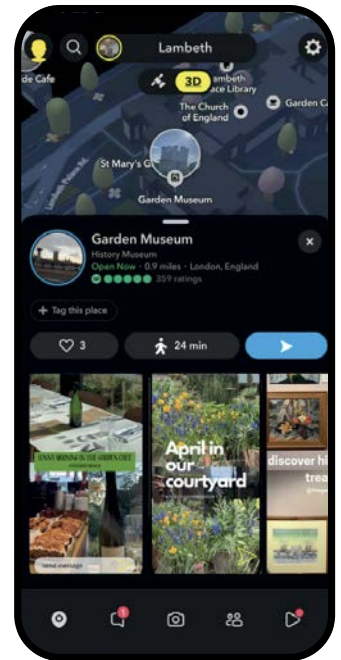


Stills from the short-form videos If Portraits Had Boleyn's Tinder, If Portraits Had Rosenberg's Instagram.

Watch the short-form video If Portraits had Tinder (hosted on Google Drive).
<https://bit.ly/LCC2502>



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Mock-ups of Snapchat content for Garden Museum.

Garden Museum

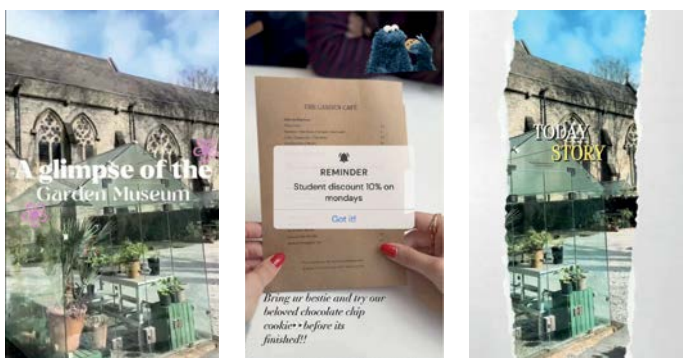
A group of students developed a transmedia campaign targeting Gen Z's fragmented platform habits by strategically dispersing narrative elements across digital and physical platforms to maximise museum visibility. The work created videos for multiple platforms; TikTok to deliver playful behind-the-scenes teasers; Instagram for aesthetically pleasing interactive content; and Snapchat for its location-based options. The team also proposed collaborations with relevant and popular content creators, while the digital outputs linked to physical advertisements (tube/bus/billboards) and pop-up events, to further enrich the multi-dimensional storytelling strategy.

Common Threads

Students chose GLAM institutions of varying sizes whose missions and narratives reflect the sociocultural and political issues they gravitate towards. These resonated with Gen Z's evolving attitudes towards education, social justice and health and wellness, and can be seen in the common threads observed. Gen Z's keen awareness of the world's problems is evident here, as they prioritise mental health, diversity and inclusivity in their values system.

A project using the Museum of Broken Relationships as a case study highlights that Gen Z share their feelings online and boldly speak up about their mental health. The students proposed an extension of the museum (originally based in the Czech Republic) to London through a pop-up confessional booth that would serve as a real-world storytelling set where everyone is invited to shoot short-form videos sharing their feelings.

Humour is a key approach to short-form video and platforms such as TikTok. This is fundamental for Gen Z to engage with complex or sensitive stories, making them accessible and democratic. For instance, one project used parodies and cultural references to London's urban youth subcultures to promote the William Morris Gallery. In one of the videos, ironic meme dialogue was employed while portraying the roadman character. Across this and other examples, humour combines relevant and familiar cultural references that translate historical stories into relatable and replicable short-form videos.



Stills from selected short-form videos made for TikTok and Instagram.

Watch the short-form video made for TikTok (hosted on Google Drive).
<https://bit.ly/LCC2503>



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Key Takeaways

Based on the creative responses from our Gen Z students, we summarise the following actionable key takeaways for heritage interpreters:

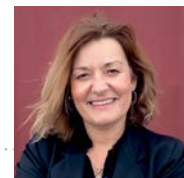
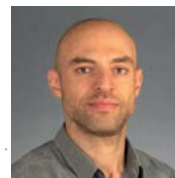
- *Gen Z values originality and institutional authenticity.* Replicating viral memes and trends feels over-performative. Instead the content must align with the institution's core ethics, mission and identity to come across as genuine.
- *Frame past and present stories to connect with Gen Z's core values:* social causes, mental well-being, diversity and inclusion. Approach these topics with empathy and honesty, with content that is value-driven, not opportunistic.
- *Consider cross-media and transmedia approaches,* using short-form videos that are part of integrated and immersive narratives (linking to physical exhibits, AR, physical events and other content), not one-off solutions to attract attention.
- *Experiment with other formats for storytelling* such as slow media and ASMR, to cater to Gen Z's desire for mindful, reflective and emotionally resonant experiences.
- *Emphasise high-quality aesthetics in videos,* e.g. using carefully framed shots and sound and lighting, to unlock the narrative possibilities within a gallery's space.

- Use strategic *humour and balanced wit, and culturally relevant references* to make complex histories and heritage accessible, connecting past to present meaningfully.
- Prioritise content that sparks genuine curiosity and offers emotional engagement over trend-driven virality.

Read on...

Kaye, De B. V., Zeng, J. & Wikström, P. 2022. *TikTok: Creativity and Culture in Short Video*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Carignani, F., Iodice, G. & Bifulco, F. 2023. TikTok in museum management: an effective museum enhancement tool? *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 39(3), 377–391. <https://bit.ly/LCC25MMC>



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