



## **TITLE Museums and communication channels: insights from social media choices**

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### **Abstract**

**Purpose of the paper:** The purpose of the work is to analyze the role of social media choices in communication channels of the cultural museums district. The paper focuses on how use their social and analytics' tools in order to meet the needs of different targets before Covid-19.

**Methodology:** We used a qualitative methodology, and we conducted an empirical investigation of multiple case studies (Yin, 1992): in particular, we chose evidence from the museum district of via Duomo in Naples, analyzing the eight cultural sites that compose it.

**Main Findings:** Main findings show that the museums analyzed did not have a planned communication strategy (e.g. uniform content on all social platforms; publication of posts at wrong times, etc.) showing the lack of a common strategy of the district. Furthermore, the potential of foreign tourists is still little exploited and their presence on these pages is too marginal.

**Practical implications:** Each cultural institution should use an integrated and planned strategy of digital communication. In particular, they should diversify their posts tailored to the main type of audience used by the single social media.

**Originality/value:** This work offers a better understanding of the impact that digitalization and social media tools may have on cultural institutions.

**Keywords:** cultural tourism, social media, digitalization, engagement, digital marketing

## **INTRODUCTION**

The cultural tourism industry has been hit in recent years by a series of digital transformations that have changed the way it communicates and manages the relationship with customers (Cook, 2014). Cultural tourists have become protagonists of the tourism offer and co-creators of value and travel experiences (Campos et al., 2018). Indeed, scholars recognize that the narration of a place cannot be entrusted only to institutional representatives, but rather the tourist's voice becomes relevant to communicate the history and authenticity of a landscape (Frias *et al.*, 2019). Cultural organizations are encouraged to use digital communication tools that favor the creation of online communities in order to allow interaction and the exchange of experience and opinions between customers (Liu *et al.*, 2019).

More in depth, the aims of the cultural organizations are not only related to the quantitative growth of the audience through the conversion of the occasional public or the non-public but includes diversification, involvement and satisfaction of the public achieved through product and process innovations.

For these reasons, the need arises to direct the cultural tourism industry towards digital communication strategy. However, literature review shows that the relationship between digital communication tools and the cultural tourism industry is widely studied but an empirical research that allows to deepen the role of new digital tools to promote customer engagement is still scarce.

Our paper addresses this gap and offers an empirical analysis attempting to answer the following research question:

*RQ: How cultural district Via Duomo use their social and analytics' tools in order to meet the needs of different targets?*

To answer our research question, we have conducted an exploratory case study with the combination of quantitative and qualitative data (Gummesson, 2017; Yin, 2018). We chose evidence from cultural heritage context and we analyzed eight cultural institutes that are part of Via Duomo district.

This study proceeds as follows. The next sections develop the literature background on audience development and digital communication in the cultural tourism industry and, after that, explain the aim and methodology of the paper. The final sections present the main findings and the early implications.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1.1 Digital communication in cultural tourism industry**

Cultural tourism is part of a highly dynamic industry characterized by constant changes, especially in recent years. The ability to use new technologies is considered extremely relevant both to ensure high levels of productivity and in terms of management and relationship with the customer (Labanauskaite *et al.*, 2020).

Today, digital technologies are an integral part of our daily life under various aspects, from communication to purchases to time (Kayumovich, 2020). For this reason, “*companies may take into account that customers no longer buy only products or services, but participate in the consumption of their products or services, becoming co-creators of experiences and value*” (Del Vacchio *et al.*, 2020, p.5).

Several studies have focused their attention on the new role of consumers (e.g. Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Buhalis & Sinarta, 2019) and on the birth of a culture of sharing and co-creation of value (e.g. Porter & Heppelmann, 2015).

Indeed, scholars show that digital technologies can affect customer experience and, in particular, social networks could influence the process of "virtual" acculturation of tourists, namely the learning and acquisition of cultural skills (Cuomo *et al.*, 2021). So, cultural managers should use social media to support the provision of the tourist service and improve the quality of external communication.

The various global organizations (ICOMOS; UNESCO; OMC) have also shown interest in the development of cultural tourism by exploiting technological evolution and new communication strategies (Garau, 2017).

The relationship between cultural tourism, cultural heritage and digital technologies has been investigated widely (Kalay *et al.*, 2008; Stanco *et al.*, 2011; Logan *et al.*, 2015; Russo Spina & Bifulco, 2021). Indeed, scholars Roque & Forte, (2017) show that cultural heritage has a decisive role in the development of cultural tourism and, for this reason, it is necessary to adopt innovative and digital communication models that leverage the sharing and dissemination of tourist data (e.g. information on events, places of interest etc ..). Therefore, “*the cultural tourism industry should maximize investments for the digitization of cultural heritage*” (cfr. European Commission, Directorate-General for Information Society 2002, p. 72).

Recently, scholars Hammolu *et al.* (2020) show that social media are used as the most widespread communication channel to allow the transmission, safeguarding and promotion of intangible cultural heritage. Scholars recognize that the narration of a place cannot be entrusted only to institutional representatives, but rather the tourist's voice becomes relevant to communicate the history and authenticity of a landscape (Frias *et al.*, 2019). The communication of cultural heritage through digital communication tools has now become fundamental for the enhancement of culture and knowledge (Tovmasyan, 2020).

For this reason, cultural organizations are encouraged to use digital communication tools that favor the creation of communities of people who come into contact, exchanging opinions, advice, experiences and creating a great source of value (Liu *et al.*, 2019). Not only, several scholars (Kaur, 2017; Mariani *et al.*, 2018) agree that the use of a digital communication strategy allows companies in the cultural tourism industry to improve the involvement of consumers and, above all, of younger customer segments. Indeed, Pencarelli *et al.* (2019) show that new technologies are used at all stages of the digital customer journey and that millennials are attracted primarily through digital content posted on social media.

## **1.2 Audience Development**

To better understand how the digital transformation of museums' habits works, this phenomenon could be included in a wider and holistic approach related to the topic of audience development. The museums' need to attract an audience is an emerging issue and it is becoming more and more urgent as the COVID19 crisis has dramatically affected the viewing habits of European audiences, denying them the opportunity to enjoy art physically.

Given this growing importance of Audience Development and participation of the public, the theme has become so central today as it has been included among the priorities of Creative Europe Horizon 2020 already, in line with the strategic objectives of EU 2020, to contribute to social innovation for a smart, sustainable, and inclusive growth (Cerquetti, 2016).

In this direction, the programme's budget increased as well: for the period 2021-2027 it is an estimated €2.44 billion, compared to €1.47 billion for the previous period 2014-2020.

A good amount of this budget is devoted to digital transformation as "*the challenge for the sector will be to maximize the opportunities in terms of audience outreach of the digital transition*" (European Commission, 2021, p.23).

To carry out this challenge, which means to stimulate audience growth, to engage new and larger audiences, especially young one, and to promote and ensure wider access, European cultural programme has introduced the audience cluster. Further Europe is focusing on the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills such as, among others, digital technologies development, promotion, data collection and analysis especially on prediction for content creation.

Italy, despite being one of the countries adhering to Creative Europe, shows one lack of awareness on Audience Development issues and in particular on the importance of the analysis of habitual or potential audiences aimed at grasping their needs and expectations: the public's cognitive picture appears fragmented and not very specific and there is no monitoring and evaluation system centralized.

During the last ten years, audience development evolved from a financial point of view which means the achievement of financial outcomes and therefore almost purely marketing, especially arts marketing, oriented (Diggle, 1984), to then arrive at a more holistic and procedural one; a multidisciplinary approach that includes themes sociological, psychological and consumer behavior (Mailand, 1997; Walker-Kuhne, 2001; Black Graham, 2005; Arts Council of England, 2011; European Commission, 2012; Lipps, 2015; The Audience Agency, 2017). The shift from a financial purpose to a more social one means that cultural organizations started thinking about themes such as participation (European Commission, 2012; Lipps, 2015), engagement (European Commission, 2012; Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2019), accessibility (European Commission, 2012), cooperation (Arts Council of England, 2015), creation of long relationships term with potential and current audience (Lipps, 2015; The Audience Agency, 2017; Morris Hargreaves McIntyre, 2019). To improve AD, digital communication strategies are needed: digital tools are needed as well to engage younger audiences as indicated in the guidelines of Creative Europe.

More in depth, the goals of the cultural organizations are not only related to the quantitative growth of the audience through the conversion of the occasional public or the non-public but includes diversification, involvement and satisfaction of the public achieved through product and process innovations.

It therefore appears evident that it is necessary combine objectives of a financial nature and linked to performance results economic with social objectives related to the quality of the performance it owes contribute to public involvement and social innovation by improving the experience of the public involved, providing them with sufficient information and adequate and modalities of use congruent to their heterogeneous needs and expectations.

Although, the relationship between digital communication tools and the cultural tourism industry is a widely studied topic in the literature, an empirical research that allows to deepen the role of new digital tools to promote the engagement of large and various customer segments. it is still scarce.

## METHODOLOGY

### *2.1 Research proposition*

From the above discussion, it will be apparent that the research proposition for the present study was to better understand the use of social and analytics' tools of the district via Duomo in order to meet the needs of different targets before Covid-19.

To answer our research questions, we have conducted an exploratory case study with the combination of quantitative and qualitative data (Gummesson, 2017; Yin, 2018).

### *2.2 Data collection and analysis*

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews and data derived from direct observation and secondary sources (e.g. website, museum social pages, sector reports) (Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, 2017). We have conducted 8 interviews with the representatives of the cultural structures of the Via Duomo district. The details of the interviews are presented below (Table 1). The data were analyzed following the 'logic of replication': in particular, the cases were considered as single experiments and were examined individually and, subsequently, a cross-analysis was carried out to identify similarities, differences and best practices (Yin, 1994).

Table 1. Interviews details

MUSEUM	DESCRIPTION	INTERVIEWED	TIME
Filangieri Museum	Private museum located in Naples, set up in the fifteenth-century Palazzo Como, dedicated to applied arts, sculpture, painting and the conservation of ancient books.	Director and Communication Manager	30 minutes
San Gennaro	The Museum of the Treasure of San Gennaro is a museum in Naples, The museum area is over seven hundred square meters and exhibits his works, jewels, statues, busts, precious fabrics and paintings of great value that are part of the Treasure of San Gennaro	Director and Communication Manager	30 minutes
Cartastorie	The Historical Archive of the Banco di Napoli contains the centuries-old documentation concerning the activity of the ancient public banks of the city.	Communication Manager	30 minutes

Pio Monte della Misericordia	The Pio Monte della Misericordia, founded in 1602, is still home to the House of the Institution in its historic building.	Communication Manager	30 minutes
Donna Regina	The Monumental Complex of Donnaregina - Diocesan Museum of Naples offers an interesting and unique itinerary between Gothic and Baroque. Tourists can admire the fourteenth-century church of Donnaregina Vecchia and the seventeenth-century church of Donnaregina Nuova.	Communication Manager	30 minutes
San Severo al Pendino	San Severo was built in 1575 on the ancient church with the hospital of Santa Maria in Selice. The interior has the typical architectural features of the sixteenth century, in which the eighteenth-century altars in polychrome marble are inserted.	Cultural Heritage Department's staff of the City of Naples	30 minutes
Madre	The Madre - Donnaregina contemporary art museum is located in the historic heart of Naples. The building develops on eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century structures around two courtyards	Communication staff	30 minutes
Girolamini Monument	The monumental complex of the Girolamini was built between the end of the sixteenth century and the middle of the seventeenth century. The complex, enlarged and enriched with works of	Director	30 minutes

	art during the eighteenth century, became a National Monument in 1866 with the subversive laws of the ecclesiastical heritage		
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Source: authors' elaboration

## FINDINGS

The analysis highlights some peculiarities of the Cultural District, made up of extremely different subjects, such as public, private, ecclesiastical or formed by particular legal realities. The study showed that there is a multiplicity of approaches to the management of social media in the cultural heritage sector. A first classification of the eight museum bodies divides the subjects between the active ones and the less active ones. A group made up of the majority of museums, six out of eight, shows a massive use of social media. On the other hand, two institutions, San Severo al Pendino and the Girolamini National Monument, stand apart from the other group due to a scarce use of social media. In the first case, the subject is a church managed by the City of Naples, used as a congress and exhibition hall, it does not have any particular tourist attractions inside; it does not have its own website, but an information page on the City of Naples website, the Facebook page has a hundred likes and does not seem to be officially followed since the contents are posts by other subject. No use of the other social networks is recorded.

The Girolamini case is more complex: in the last years the intricate legal events heavily influenced the management of the site and the continuity of their communication strategies. The website seems to have more pages at the moment but not an official one: there is one on the site of the Polo Museale with information, another page on the site of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and a page of the sites.google domain dedicated to Girolamini. The presence on other social networks, excluding Facebook, is unfortunately very discontinuous and, as regards TripAdvisor, there are three different profiles: the picture gallery, the church and the library of the Complex. Probably for these reasons, the Girolamini Complex proved unwilling to provide the requested data and the analyzed data were mostly obtained from direct checks with social media, where available. Except for San Severo al Pendino and the case of the Girolamini, all the institutions analyzed have their own website. The Filangieri museum, which changed its director in 2018, changed the site a few months later. At the moment of the analysis the site was still very static and the body's communication representatives have assured me that there will still be many changes, such as the possibility of being able to make donations online shortly. Unfortunately, no past data was available before the site change.

Table 2. Tools and strategies used by the analyzed museums

	Filangieri	San Severo	Pio Monte	Girolamini	San Gennaro	Donnaregina	Madre	Cartastorie
SEO	YES	NO	YES	N/A	YES	YES	YES	YES
Google Adwords	NO	NO	NO	N/A	NO	NO	NO	NO
Google Analytics	YES	YES	NO	N/A	YES	YES	YES	YES
External communication office	NO	City of Naples	YES	Polo Museale della Campania	NO	NO	Scabec	NO
Press office	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES
Booking online	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO
Ads on social	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
A specific hour for posting	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES

Source: authors' elaboration

All institutions use SEO, except for San Severo al Penino, in order to be found more easily on web search engines. The Madre in particular stated that in 2019 intended to implement the use of this tool. None of the subjects uses Google Adwords as a tool and almost all the subjects rely on Google Analytics as a tool for analyzing the statistical data of their sites. The Filangieri museum started renovating the site in November 2018 for which it has only recently activated this tool. The Pio Monte della Misericordia, in order to monitor the data of its website, started to use a tool similar to Google Analytics, Awstats.

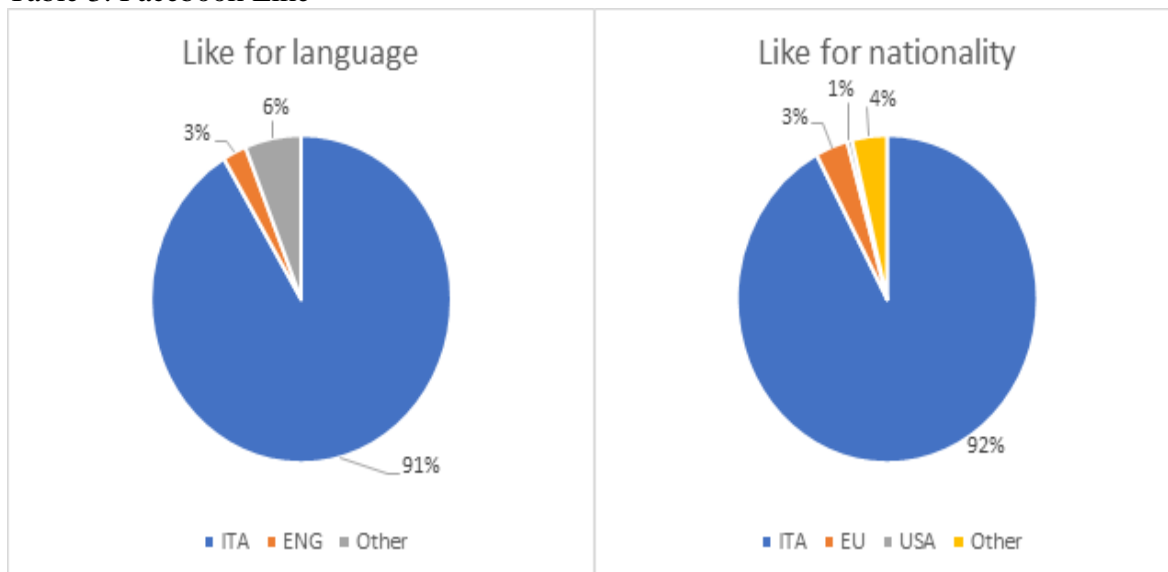
Of all the institutions analyzed, half take care of their own communication strategies directly: the Filangieri museum, the museum of the Treasure of San Gennaro, the Cartastorie museum and the Diocesan Museum of Donnaregina, while the others rely on external communication companies. Among these, the Madre entrusts its communication to Scabec, the church of San Severo al Pendino to the City of Naples, the National Monument of the Girolamini at the Campania Museum Complex. Pio Monte della Misericordia uses an external private company. With the exception of San Severo al Pendino, the Girolamini and the Diocesan Museum of Donnaregina, the other entities all use a press office. For almost all the museums it is possible to book the ticket for the visit online: for both the San Gennaro Museum and the Filangieri it is possible to buy the ticket online. For the Pio Monte della Misericordia there is this possibility (through the ticketonline website) but very low numbers have been recorded. For the Girolamini Complex, San Severo al Pendino and Cartastorie, it is not possible to book online. The Donnaregina museum had about 2,000 online bookings in 2018, including visits, shows and concerts, while the Madre has activated the online booking service since 2018. This subject is the only one that sponsors content on social media. All the other museums do not allocate



any budget to it. Almost all the institutions analyzed do not publish their posts at a specific time: the Pio Monte della Misericordia usually does it in the morning between nine and ten, while the Cartastorie museum claims to post at a "variable according to the Insight statistics", as well as the Diocesan Museum (table 2).

Generally speaking, the study highlighted some characteristics of these museums. In fact, the lack of a communication strategy emerges, as a common district, but even for individual subjects. The gap manifests itself mostly in the choice of times with which content and posts are shared: few subjects always post in the same hours and some subjects even choose to post in a moment of the day with little visitor traffic and therefore collecting an extremely reduced visibility. From the data analyzed on the nationalities of the followers and the languages used by them, it also emerges that the potential of foreign tourists is still little exploited: their presence in these pages is extremely marginal. As a matter of fact, these institutions have the potential to attract many international tourists and this can also be seen in the physical visitors. So it is important to underline how on social media, in particular on Facebook, just the 8% of the followers of the page are not Italian as just the 9% do not speak Italian (table 3). The reason behind these low numbers is probably the lack of attractiveness for foreign users that the pages have.

Table 3. Facebook Like



Source: authors' elaboration

A multi-language communication or more based on images and video, could help to have a better attractiveness. Among the strengths of the subjects there is certainly that of being present on social platforms, with some exceptions. In particular, the Madre places itself in a position of privilege by seeking even greater interactivity with the user: the museum has also been equipped with Spotify and a Telegram channel.

Table 4. Facebook likes divided for gender and age

San Gennaro

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total	From 2018
Women	11	151	677	551	549	392	225	2556	83%
Men	41	322	882	782	632	365	262	3286	132%
Not specified	0	0	2	10	6	4	3	25	47%
Total	52	473	1561	1343	1187	761	490		
From 2018	136%	235%	92%	100%	101%	120%	103%		

Pio Monte  
della  
Misericordia

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total	From 2018
Women	1	136	828	679	513	269	187	2613	17%
Men	2	69	450	461	404	261	182	1829	18%
Not specified	0	1	4	14	2	1	3	25	47%
Total	3	206	1282	1154	919	531	372		
From 2018	-67%	-7%	11%	21%	23%	29%	22%		

Filangieri

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total	From 2018
Women	3	186	1084	895	768	503	393	3832	32%
Men	6	137	651	668	604	467	384	2917	30%
Not specified	0	1	7	21	10	4	7	50	25%

Total	9	324	1742	1584	1382	974	784		
From 2018	-36%	24%	23%	31%	36%	36%	41%		

#### Donnaregina

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total	From 2018
Women	11	570	2738	2573	2936	2174	1449	12451	9%
Men	9	273	1290	1460	1530	1300	1160	7022	6%
Not specified	0	8	35	56	39	20	24	182	3%
Total	20	851	4063	4089	4505	3494	2633		
From 2018	-51%	-13%	6%	6%	9%	13%	14%		

#### Cartastorie

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total	From 2018
Women	16	490	1605	1112	1154	949	633	5959	6%
Men	7	214	783	679	581	478	451	3193	6%
Not specified	0	4	16	17	11	5	3	56	8%
Total	23	708	2404	1808	1746	1432	1087		
From 2018	-69%	-9%	9%	10%	4%	8%	10%		

#### Madre

	13-17	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total	From 2018
Women	20	2500	13000	8500	4000	2000	1500	31520	N/A

Men	15	1000	6000	5000	3000	1500	1000	17515	N/A
Not specified	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	N/A
Total	35	3500	19000	13500	7000	3500	2500		
From 2018	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		

Source: authors' elaboration

From the data presented it is possible to notice other interesting information. The likes of the female users are in most of the cases the majority, while the youngest users are a minority compared to the others. It is interesting to note how, from 2018 to 2019, many museums have lost a significant number of young users (Table 4). It is important to consider that the user aging passes from one age range to another, but still many likes of young users are lost. These losses should stimulate a reflection on why these users chose to remove their likes.

## IMPLICATIONS

From a theoretical point of view, the study underlines nowadays how much the management of social media is relevant for museums, for their communication and for their storytelling (Nielsen, 2017) and how much the museums of this district do not yet exploit the potential of social media. Poor or wrong communication does not even manage to communicate well the value of the museum structure (Dragoni, 2017).

From a managerial point of view, in the cases analyzed, the main problem seems to be the absence of a solid strategy linked to the use of social media, considered fundamental in numerous studies and also adapted into models, as in Cornelia (2017). This problem is probably linked to the museum structures themselves: although museums with an important artistic and cultural value, the interviews revealed the use of unskilled personnel, who often occupy several roles at the same time, within the sparse organizational chart of the structures. Limits related to human resources, as well as economic resources, would affect communication policies, suggesting greater attention to staff training and hiring, as highlighted by Vigli (2018). If on one hand it is justifiable, on the other hand, with small investments in communication, such structures could improve considerably, as highlighted by Suh, 2020.

From a policy point of view, the results obtained show how social media are often underused in maintaining and expanding their audience on the media, where even negative reviews become important to improve the quality of the service offered, as highlighted by Su (2018). The data becomes even more important in relation to how the social media audience can generate interest and attention in attracting new users, activating word of mouth mechanisms based on no expense or in any case a limited expense compared to the use of more canonical media (newspapers, television), making sure to increase its audience as shown by Andriani (2019). A targeted social media communication can also be addressed to public segments less interested in museums, in order to reach new audiences (Gonzalez, 2017), but also to make them feel more involved in the dynamics of the museum, increasing their participation (Black, 2018) and therefore involving them to increase user loyalty (Mihelj, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

Our paper shows the state of the art of the use of social media in the via duomo district in the pre-Covid era. The results of our analysis show that the eight cultural institutes that are part of the district are very different in type and content.

To answer the research question that drives the paper, we focused on the strategy that museums have used to communicate their cultural offerings and seek to broaden their current and potential customer segments. The results show that the use of digital and social tools for museum communication is still immature. Indeed, although all the institutions interviewed are present on the three main social networks (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn), there is still no well-planned and structured communication strategy (e.g. excessive repetition of content on all social pages; publication of digital content in wrong time slots etc ..). Further, the involvement of foreign tourists is still neglected and their online presence is too marginal. The data analyzed showed a significant loss of users for several subject among the youngest users on Facebook. This could be linked to the quality of the posts of the analyzed museums on social media: so unattractive for this kind of audience to choose to not follow these institutions anymore and to remove their “like”. This possibility should be supported by another kind of study on the quality of material posted by the subjects. Future research could compare our pre-Codiv19 results with those after the pandemic emergency and evaluate how the institutions of the Via Duomo district have dealt with this emergency situation. A second interesting research work could be the in-depth analysis of communication content and, to do this, the analysis could be divided into weeks and the audience rations to the various published content could be monitored, also taking into account the type of content (text, video, photo).

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