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Instagram as Digital Communication Tool for the Museums: a Reflection on Prospectives and Opportunities through the Analysis of the Profiles of Louvre Museum and Metropolitan Museum of New York

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Abstract

Launched in October 2010, Instagram is nowadays one of the most used social networks. According to the latest data released by the platform in 2018, in fact, the number of active users exceeded one million. From the public to the private sector, several actors have integrated Instagram into their communication plan. Among them, there are also the museum institutions. The object of this article is to look at what types of contents museums usually share and to understand how they are using this innovative communication channel based essentially on images to document, communicate their daily activity, their identity, and get in touch with users. Through the method of the content analysis, we propose a qualitative analysis of the posts published in a period of 30 days on the official profiles of the Louvre Museum in Paris and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

Keywords: social network – Instagram – museums – visual storytelling – public communication

Introduction

Thirty years have passed since the birth of the World Wide Web. In both the public and the private sectors, communication activities have been acquiring an increasingly

strategic role and have been the protagonists of a constant process of change and innovation. Going from the introduction of new channels to the emergence of new actors involved in the experimentation of new communication processes, the digital sector dominates the scenario. (Lovari, Masini 2008; Riva 2010; Cavallo, Spadoni 2010; Bennato 2011; Lovari, Martari 2013; De Nobili 2016).

Even cultural institutions have been affected by these changes, being more and more prompted to an opening towards the outside through methods, strategies and languages typical of the new digital ecosystem.

This article intends to focus in particular on museum institutions, entities for which digital communication presents itself as an opportunity to overcome the challenge of approaching new audiences, as well as enhancing and making known to the wider public the heritage preserved.

According to Solima (2002), "museums are cultural institutions at the service of the community, which have the primary purpose of preserving (through conservation activities) and making available to the public (through the activities of valorization and interpretation) their own heritage consisting of the collections of works and artifacts accumulated over time" (Solima 2002, pp.61).

At the same time, like other institutions, museums must deal with a precise information responsibility towards the various stakeholders with whom they establish relationships (Solima 2009).

The data recently presented by the Digital Innovation Observatory on Cultural Heritage and Activities¹, which take into account the communication activities of museum institutions, perfectly reconstruct a constantly evolving scenario in which the attention to online communication is increasing more and more, especially in the field of social networks.

In this article, we will focus in particular on the use of Instagram, an application introduced in October 2010, which allows you to take and publish photos directly from your smartphone.

Faced with a global scenario where the platform evolves day by day and witnesses an increase in users, different actors - from the world of journalism to art's and culture's - begin to take it into consideration as a communication and relationship tool with well-defined purpose strategies. The article specifically analyses the communicative experiences made on Instagram by two museums with the aim of exploring and understanding, through an analytical observation of the published contents, the real opportunities and potential offered by this social network to those museums which are gradually opening up to new digital trends.

¹ Conference "Il viaggio nella cultura è digitale: chi guida?", Osservatorio Innovazione Digitale nei Beni e Attività Culturali, Politecnico of Milano, 23 May 2019

Instagram in the social media panorama

The term Instagram itself reveals its essence. It is, in fact, the union of the words "instant" and "telegram", which together indicate a form of fast and instantaneous communication as can be a telegram, which in this case becomes visual. (Moccia, Zavagnin, Zingone 2017).

The feature which made the application unique and able to quickly attract a great consensus was the possibility of modifying the shots by adding filters to improve the photos and faces, especially in the first years of the application's diffusion, and reproducing such a vintage effect to make digital shots similar to those once made with the old Polaroid.

With its emergence, a new idea of photography arose. Thanks to the alliance of the smartphone with communication tools, instant messaging or social networks, on which the image can be transferred immediately through elementary operations, it becomes "connected": images are taken to be shared; this is the basic transformation that Instagram embodies and, better than other platforms, shows. (Boccia Artieri in Barbotti 2018).

Instagram attributes new functions to the photographic image. They deal with the care and maintenance of the relationship with others, with one's own network; the presentation of oneself and the story of one's identity; the conversational nature which is the ability of images to trigger conversations around a common event, often identified by a hashtag, within which collective responses are generated.

The application has been evolving since 2010. In particular, after the acquisition by Facebook, which took place in 2012, and thanks to a series of updates, Instagram offers new features (among them Instagram Stories), filters and layouts.

Nowadays, Instagram is the third most popular social network in the world, after Facebook and Youtube. Since September 2018, the platform has reached one billion active users, with an average of 500 million active users per day (source: Instagram blog, September 2018).

According to the last *Word Map of Social Media* elaborated by Vincenzo Cosenza on the data of 2018, Facebook remains at the top of the ranking of the most widely used social networks in the world, confirming itself in first position in 153 out of 167 countries, which are taken into account in the analysis sample. (source: Vincos.it)

Considered the map of social networks ranked in second position, Instagram excels in 44 countries among the most used ones.

Even the data from the latest *We Are Social* survey, which in collaboration with Hootsuite reconstructed the global digital scenario (with the usual focus on the use of the Internet, mobile, social platforms and e-commerce) confirm the trend.

According to data published in January 2019, there are a total of 5.11 billion mobile users in the world. Among them, 4.39 billion have access to the Internet and specifically 3.48 billion are social media users. Access to social platforms is via mobile for 3.26 billion users.

The focus on Instagram is not only growing among numerous brands, from fashion to food and beverage sectors, but also among cultural institutions, particularly in the museum and exhibition sectors, which are constantly attracted by the opportunities given by the platform.

In fact, they see the need to renew their communication system as a priority and, consequently, direct more resources and investments on the online communication.

Communicating the museum in the digital age

The museum communicates starting from the structure and the organization of the collections. Even before the web page, the social media announcement and the cultural and educational programming, the museum declares its message, its narration, its specific mission in its internal organization, in the museological and museographic aspects, which moreover declare the degree of the visitors' immediate satisfaction (Branchesi, Curzi, Mandarano, 2019).

The communication activity is a necessity for a museum. First of all, the objects exhibited in a museum: apart from being material objects, they are "iconic" type signs. Their exposition is in itself communication and implies, like all signs, that the audience of the communicative process has the code that signs always imply (Antinucci 2004). It is the audience who has to observe, interpret and understand the signs that each work contains, considering that at the very moment of the exhibition it is totally decontextualized from the original condition in which it was born.

The museum is a knowledge-founded institution, a sort of cultural operator at the service of the public, which is active in the dissemination of scientific, historical and artistic knowledge, and whose daily action is developed by activating processes of *conservation, creation and dissemination of the knowledge* itself (Solima 2002).

The role of communication is to support these processes, facilitating the encounter between the affluence of information and the audience. Quoting Solima (2002), communication can "bring to light" the information potential inherent in each work.

Before activating a communication process, a wide range of choices concerning the size of the information, the tools and the target, have to be made by the museum.

As regards the tools, even before the beginning of the social networks' era, a distinction was made between *static* and *dynamic* tools, depending on their ability to interact with the user. (Solima 2002)

Dynamic tools, including websites for example, guarantee the user greater freedom in selecting and choosing the information to access.

If it is true, as Antinucci states, that museums are the main *decontextualizing* agents of a work, the communication supported by the use of new technologies may allow the understanding of the code and the reconstruction of the context, thus facilitating the process of public learning.

If a decade ago the attention would have been focused on the website, nowadays museums cannot ignore the importance of being present and actively using social networking platforms.

Web 2.0 has revolutionized structures and practices of the same internet sites, which from mere digital display cabinets have become real places of contact, research and analysis, exchange of services, as well as of real dialogue among museum and user. Not only the information on schedules, venues and/or events, but also virtual tours, information sheets, bookshops, research projects, magazines, newsletters and publications, fundraising campaigns, as well as the possibility to buy online tickets and guided tours in advance.

As Baldassarre (2009) writes, museum web portals are thought to be more interactive and user-friendly: from cyber-gallery and infopoint, they have become service providers, such as online shopping and e-ticketing. In addition to communicative, educational and promotional functions, museum websites help to raise funds to support them.

Concepts such as *participation, interaction, sharing* now orient the communication design, with the aim of supporting the idea of a network which no longer coincides with a mere listening group, but with a talking and dialoguing audience, who asks for space in order to express oneself and have a conversation. (Lovari, Masini 2008).

Over the years museums have understood that having a website which is limited to providing all the necessary information is no longer sufficient: it is necessary to talk about oneself and establish a relationship with the audience before the visit, which can possibly last even after it, with the final purpose of creating a solid and lasting community.

Alongside the evolution of sites in an increasingly 2.0 perspective, we are also witnessing the launch of profiles on the main social networks, based on the conviction that they will be able to ensure a high impact, especially compared to the more traditional offline communication tools.

Unlike traditional channels, which make top-down and one-way communication possible, web 2.0 involves the audience and allows them to communicate with the museum itself. (Falletti, Maggi, 2012)

Communication must increasingly look at the user as an interlocutor to be involved, for instance in the same co-creation of content.

Starting from the awareness that each museum has a unique history and identity, which distinguishes it, like a company, it must carefully study its own marketing strategy to "sell" himself to the fullest.

This has led to a shift in attention from the collection to the *visitor*. The museum has to do with a market, and therefore with competitors - other educational and above all recreational activities - and with an audience who expects to see his/her needs and interests satisfied. (Kotler 1999)

A good combination between offline and online communication is surely the ideal condition not only to promote one's own activities, but also to make the public live a real experience before, during and after the visit.

In particular, social networks, the founding element of this "post-modern revolution" (Cavallo, Spadoni, 2010), are basically online "content management and sharing sites" (Massarotto 2011); thanks to these services, users can expand their own social network, enjoy others' content, comment on them, share them and publish theirs'.

A museum, in particular, communicates with - and on - social networking sites, directing its actions towards the achievements of different results. Among them, the growth of the so-called *brand awareness*, the degree of knowledge and recognition of one's own *brand* by an audience who is increasingly inundated with stimuli and information of all types. Another possible intent is to build an audience of users and retain them, like a company's customers, with *customer loyalty* actions, that is involving them to the point of fomenting a real sense of belonging and a strong *engagement*.

Being present and active on social media also means exploiting a further channel of promotion of events and activities (such as a restoration, the preparation of a temporary exhibition, a new acquisition etc.) and, at the same time, designing support actions for the same basic activities of a museum's lifecycle (like the sale of tickets and all merchandising products) with real web marketing activities.

However, the presence of museums on social platforms represents a new but expanding phenomenon. In Italy, for example, according to the data from the survey carried out by the Digital Innovation Observatory on Cultural Heritage on a sample of 476 museums and exhibitions and referring to 2019, only 69% of them have at least one social account.

Overall, while 67% of them are present on Facebook, only 26% have already activated an Instagram account.¹

¹ "L'innovazione digitale nei musei italiani nel 2019". Report by Osservatorio Innovazione Digitale nei Beni e nelle Attività Culturali, Politecnico of Milano.

For its being *detail-oriented* and with a purely *visual* vocation, Instagram appears at present to be a very suitable platform for the social communication of a museum.

It allows the museum to use the communicative power of the images in order to present themselves and to have a huge impact on an audience that is submerged of information and with an increasingly lower attention span (Bettini 2015).

Photos allow them to create a clear visual narration of concrete aspects and objects as well as abstract values with which the audience can identify him/herself.

Instagram also facilitates the humanization process, through which a museum can share with the online audience the faces, experiences and daily activities of those who work every day to ensure the efficiency of the museum services.

On the international scene, examples of very significant experiences have already been established. From the Rijkmuseum of Amsterdam to the Londoners British Museum, Tate and National Gallery, whose images also reveal a formative function of the social network, as a channel for the presentation of an artwork through images and above all texts, which help followers to understand it.

On the whole, this process aims to progressively remove the barriers to that access and that understanding which for a long time have made the museum's collections an asset for just an élite.

But who is the audience of a museum Instagram account? In the definition of one's own interlocutors, a museum must take into account the heterogeneous composition of the potential audience. However, it will be possible to distinguish between experienced and competent users, the so-called *professionals*, and those who are *not experts*, who have an interest motivated by curiosity and passion.

The first group includes those who work in the field of art, research, but also journalists and teachers; in other words those users for whom a well-maintained online museum communication can be an opportunity to find materials with less difficulty for their own research and studies.

The second group includes enthusiasts, those who visit an exhibition for interest and pleasure. For them, the online presence of the museum is a further opportunity to access its works, to understand what it guards, to interact and become familiar with the exhibited works, to explore and develop curiosity.

In this panorama, Instagram also represents an opportunity to connect the world of museums with that of millennials', who continue to be the major users of the platform.

The analysis.

The Instagram profiles of the Louvre Museum and of the Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York

What kind of contents do museums usually publish on Instagram? This question is the starting point of the observation of the profiles of the Louvre Museum in Paris and of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

A qualitative analysis of the posts published daily during the month of December 2018 was carried out on both profiles. There is a total of 64 posts shared during 31 days of observation.

This allowed us to propose a qualitative categorization of the contents which each profile shared with its followers (cfr. Hu, Manikonda, Kambhampati 2014). It is useful for a broader reflection on the opportunities which the use of the platform can give to the museums.

Starting from the assumption that Instagram, like Twitter, offers researchers the opportunity to study how users document elements of their daily lives (mainly in a visual context) and how these are displayed online (Highfield, Tama, 2015), in this article we intend to understand how museums are exploiting this new communication channel, which essentially relies on images to document and communicate their daily activity, their identity and establish a relation with users.

The case of the Louvre

The Parisian Louvre Museum is present on all the major social networks: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and Youtube. Listed as one of the most popular museums on Instagram, it has about 3 million followers (2.9m as of May 20, 2019).

Niko Melissano, Director of Digital Communication at the Louvre, says about the presence of the museum on social media: "Our priority is to make the Louvre even more accessible, open to all the audience. We want to break prejudices: the museum is not a place reserved for the élite. To achieve this goal, we must constantly adapt to new technologies and digital behavior of visitors, proposing an innovative Louvre, which lives in the present".¹

The contents of the profile

The profile of the Louvre Museum shared 30 posts in the month of December, 2018. They can be classified into 20 single images, 1 video post and 9 album format posts.

The observation of the content of every single post suggests an attempt to categorize them into three macro categories: spaces, works and people.

The category of space, represented by 17 posts, includes photos of the building, external overviews, layouts, internal and external corners. One of the most common images concerns the famous glass pyramids in the square in front of the museum.

¹ Il "marketing" dei musei secondo l'italiano che racconta il Louvre sui social, Forbes Italia, 27 febbraio 2019
<https://forbes.it/2019/02/27/marketing-dei-musei-louvre-social-media/> (consulted on May 19, 2019)

The category of artworks boasts 11 posts and is represented by images of paintings, objects and sculptures exhibited at the museum; they are sometimes depicted in their entirety, sometimes with a detail.

Finally - although in the period under examination they were in a minority (only 2 posts) - there are posts depicting visitors inside the museum, single or in group, in contemplation of a work or moving between the rooms and the corridors. It is a very recurrent typology of image, which shows the attention on the figure of the visitor as the protagonist of the daily life of a museum.

The post caption

Reading the caption of each of the 30 posts published on the Louvre Museum's profile we immediately notice the use of two languages: the text written in French (the official language of the country) is immediately translated in English. Captions are also enriched by various emojis, which in addition to adding color alongside the texts, make the communication more immediate and, at the same time, attractive even for a younger audience.

The analysis of the content allows us to identify and define the following categories:

Service information: the museum uses images of the building to inform visitors about changes in the opening and closing times, as well as on the closure of the museum itself. (e.g. "*Today, on Monday December 31st, the museum will be closing at 5 pm. [...] The Louvre Museum will be closed Tomorrow, on Tuesday January 1st*").

Information on temporary initiatives and installations: these are the posts through which the opening of a new exhibition hall or temporary installation is announced. (e.g. the exhibition dedicated to Japan, promoted with the hashtag #Japonisme2018).

Description of works with historical outlines and/or technical details: posts with images of a whole work or a detail of it, which present historical notes and sometimes technical details relating to the composition and the materials.

Celebration of anniversaries and festivities: through these posts, the museum strengthens the relationship with its followers by sending greetings on occasions of recurrences of common interest such as the Christmas holidays and New Year's Day.

Contest promotion: these are posts which invite followers to participate in a photo contest by sharing a shot on a theme proposed by the museum. For example, in December, the contest dedicated to the Arc du Carrousel was relaunched every week, an initiative through which the museum simultaneously promoted a fundraising campaign.

Fundraising: posts through which the museum invites donations using the #Tousmecenes and #MonCarrousel hashtags. (e.g. "*Discover them and donate to help us restore the Arc du Carrousel in our Instagram Stories!*")

The highlighted contents in each category are also identified from time to time by specific hashtags, some of which are used with a constant frequency.

Hashtags are research keys used to aggregate similar contents. They provide images with greater visibility, allowing more users to reach each shot. (Barbotti 2018)

In particular, there are 3 hashtags which the profile proposes under each of its posts: *#museedulouvre* *#louvre* and *#louvremuseum*. These are the same hashtags reported in bio to invite users to share their images shot at the museum.

Other hashtags, on the other hand, are offered only on the occasion of single anniversaries or events. For example *#JoyeuxNoel* or *#HappyNewYear*, but also *#Japonisme2018* or *#JOPLouvre*, used for the launch of the exhibition on Japan and on the occasion of the *Jeunes Ont La Parole* day, which sees university students working together and supporting visitors.

Other recurrent hashtags are *#BonneSemaine*, with which Monday the museum greet at its followers using the image of a portrait on Mondays, and *#LaModeAuLouvre*, translated in English with *#FashionFriday*, with which every Friday the museum shares an image focusing the attention on the clothing and accessories worn by the portrayed character, that are described with information related to the historical period of belonging and its customs.

#BonneSemaine and *#LaModeAuLouvre* are the concrete example of two columns which the museum proposes every week. They can be considered effective initiatives to develop the loyalty processes of followers and to positively take care of the relationship with them, by sending a wish and sharing curiosity and knowledge.

The same contents until a few years ago would have been published exclusively on the institutional website. The Instagram profile now becomes a further channel for disseminating information related to access to the museum, promoting events, launching initiatives aimed at a direct and active involvement of users. It stands essentially as a further space of contact and relationship between the museum and its real and potential visitors.

At the same time, it supports the educational and didactic function of museums, offering, through well-studied combinations of images and words, opportunities for studies, transmission of knowledge and historical-artistic knowledge.

The case of Met

The New York Metropolitan Museum Of Art, with its more than 3 million followers,¹ is now the second most popular museum in the world on Instagram, after the MoMA.²

¹ 1 followers del MET sono 3,1 milioni. Dato aggiornato al 19 maggio 2019

² 10 musei più seguiti su Instagram e, a sorpresa, ci sono anche le Gallerie degli Uffizi, article by Mariacristina Ferraioli on Artribune (August 3, 2018 <https://www.artribune.com/arti-visive/arte-contemporanea/2018/08/musei-instagram-uffizi/2/> (consulted on May 19, 2019)

"*The Met presents over 5 thousand years of art from all over the world. Share your #MetMoment*": the short biography inserted on the profile immediately brings the attention to the vast collection kept in the museum and invites visitors and followers of the profile to share the shots taken during their visits with the appropriate hashtag.

As the Louvre, the Met is also on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Youtube, as well as on Instagram. A very active presence on social media, which is in line with the same mission of the museum and can be read on the official website: "The Met collects, studies, preserves and presents significant works of art from every era and culture in order to connect people to creativity, knowledge and ideas".¹

The contents of the profile

In the period analyzed the profile shared 34 posts, represented by 31 photos and 3 videos.

Looking at the content of each image - as in the Louvre Museum - there are posts dedicated to artworks (n. 21), posts showing museum spaces and environments (n. 4) and finally posts with people (n. 6).

For the last category, the majority of the shots are described by the hashtag *#MetMoment*. They are photos which often the profile receives and shares or directly publishes with a repost from the profiles of the visitors. The object of the photos are people standing in front of an artwork, groups of children seated while listening in front of a painting, but also images of young volunteers heading groups of visitors. They are all examples of moments lived in the museum rooms which the visitors themselves, encouraged by the museum, choose to share, thus becoming co-authors of the profile.

The post caption

As we have seen for the Louvre, the analytical reading of the captions reveals much of the communication strategy employed by the Met museum. Instagram photos seem to be just a starting point for a communication flow which intends not only to show but also to inform, promote, celebrate and involve.

The analyzed captions can be joined into the following categories:

Description of works with historical outlines and/or technical details: starting from the description of technical aspects or the historical background, these posts refer to the artist in question or to his/her school of thoughts. This category also includes the descriptive captions addressed to a specific museum environment (e.g. during the installation of Christmas decorations) or a restoration project.

Information on temporary initiatives and installations: these captions are employed for those images used to launch a new exhibition, to inform visitors about

¹ MET Official Web Site <https://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-met> (consulted on May 19, 2019)

the duration of an exhibition and the days near the closure in which it is still possible to visit the museum. (e.g. *"There is one month left to see Japanese Arms and Armor..."* - *"It's the last week to see..."*). This purely informative caption also includes those written texts, which inform users about special closures and openings (e.g. closing on Christmas).

Anniversaries and holidays celebrations: celebratory posts are quite frequent in the observed month. From the Hanukkah celebration to the first day of winter, from Christmas to New Year's greetings. (Some examples from the profile: *"Happy first night of Hanukkah!"* / *"Happy first day of winter!"* / *"Wishing a Merry Christmas to all who celebrate!"* / *"Wishing everyone to Safe and Happy New Year's Eve. See you in 2019"*). The Met profile also recalls the birthdays of the artists through posts which portray their work. In these cases, the caption contains references to the life of the artist and sometimes briefly traces his/her style. In the observed period, for example, the birthdays of George Seurat and Pieter de Hooch were mentioned.

Call to action: unlike the Louvre, the Met often uses *call to action* in its captions. In just one month, this trend has been detected seven times. In some cases, these are real questions addressed directly to followers-visitors about their relationship with the museum (e.g. *"Do you have a favorite place to visit in the Met? Share your answer below or through our Instagram Story"*). It is often an invitation to share images of one's own visiting experience (e.g. *"Share photos of your own visit to the Met using #MetMoment for a chance to be featured here!"*), as well as to express opinions through comments, points of view and, once again, stories of one's visits (e.g. *"Comment bellow with the department or job role that you'd like to see in our next take over" / As the year comes to close, take a look back at just a few of the exhibitions we presented in 2018. Let us know if you visited any of these shows in the comments"*). There are also expressions which, inspired by everyday life, are used to bring attention to a work with a colloquial language (e.g. *"On this rainy day in NYC, take a look at this ..."*).

The attempt to involve and make the user part of the museum is also highlighted by captions which periodically remember the opportunity to join the team of volunteers (e.g. *"Join our incredible team of #volunteers! Apply by February 15 to be a guided tour volunteer"*).

Regarding the presence of hashtags, *#TheMet* and *#MetMoment* are the most frequent. The first identifies the museum, the second accompanies all the shots shared by users who, through this hashtag, respond to the museum's invitation to tell their own experience of visiting through the photos on Instagram.

The observation of all the hashtags lead us to deduce the absence of a specific strategy, such as the one identified in the case of the Louvre. This is confirmed by the fact that in some posts shared by the Met the caption sometimes lacks hashtags.

Moreover, it is possible to detect, but without a constant frequency, hashtags which show the name of the artist whose artwork is depicted in the photo (e.g.

#GeorgeSeurat, #VanGogh, #Hokusai, #JacksonPollock) as well as hashtags which quote distinct sections of the Met (*#MetCloisters, #MetModern, #MetJewlry*).

Conclusions

If we consider that a visit to a museum is like a journey, made up of the phases of inspiration, research, booking, visit, post-visit (Digital Innovation Observatories 2019)¹, it is mainly in the first one (inspiration) that the communication on Instagram becomes strategic so that a museum can make itself known and can attract users in search of inspiration for a future cultural visit.

The analysis of the two mentioned profiles gives us an idea about the contents that two of the most followed museums in the world on Instagram share with their followers and, at the same time, helps us to better understand the languages employed, the style and the communication strategy.

This is preliminary to the attempt to define the role that Instagram can have within the broader online communication plan of a museum.

It is a space, a sharing tool, a channel for a visual and textual storytelling, a tool for the building and the strengthening of the museum's reputation, an information, communication and promotion tool, as well as an ideal tool for the foundation of a faithful and passionate community.

Sharing, storytelling, reputation, information and community are the key words which help us summarize the conclusions of this first exploratory attempt at communicating museums on the most used photographic platform in this historical moment.

Sharing because a museum, which activates a profile, is primarily opening its doors to everyone, making the collection preserved in its halls a heritage, freely usable and accessible by anyone who starts to follow the profile. This means breaking down every geographical barrier and allowing followers to find images of the works stored online. In this way, it is possible to overcome a conservative vision of culture and expand the public to involve. The idea is to reach that "participatory museum", model proposed by Nina Simon in 2010², as a place in which the dynamic and interactive dimension of the user is fundamental with respect to the experience he/she is experiencing.

In the era of social networks, sharing becomes a bottom-up process, that is an opportunity to involve the audience by inviting them to share their photos. Sharing becomes a chance to enhance user-generated-contents, that is created by users who are increasingly active on new digital media.

¹ "L'innovazione digitale nei musei italiani nel 2019". Report by Osservatorio Innovazione Digitale nei Beni e nelle Attività Culturali, Politecnico di Milano

² Cfr. <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/>

Museums and users together build a collective narrative of the preserved and exhibited heritage.

All this takes place by activating **visual storytelling** processes, where words integrate and reinforce the meaning of images, helping to build bonds and conversations between the museum and its followers.

Storytelling is therefore the second key word. It travels parallel to another word that is **reputation**. Each museum has its own history and identity. Taking advantage of all the potential offered by the platform, the museum can tell its own story, convey the values characterizing its identity and build an online presence which is increasingly recognizable. Collections, halls, buildings, people, events: the true effectiveness of visual storytelling will not be the mere report of a story, but the *transformation of everything into a story* to be remembered and shared.

Through experiential storytelling, it is possible to create valuable contents which can involve the user even before his/her visit to the museum. At the same time, as we have seen in the case of the Louvre and the Met, visitors can be invited to tell about their visit experience by launching specific hashtags or contests.

The posts of the analyzed profiles also highlight another important function, that of **informing** through actions of communication and promotion.

For a museum, Instagram can be an immediate channel for disseminating information of various kinds. Thus, it is not risky to include it among the new public communication tools of a museum.

From service information on opening times and days of closure to the dissemination of events organized periodically.

It is also a place for the dissemination of information (historical, technical, scientific) which relates specifically to the individual works preserved and/or exhibited in the museum, often transmitted with a specific didactic style.

At the same time, it is an extraordinary promotional channel, favored by the modern functions of the Stories.

Over the long term, if used in a professional manner, the Instagram profile of a museum, apart from registering an increase in followers, will see the emergence of an interactive and sensitive **community** for the initiatives promoted by the museum itself. The invitation to share images, the launch of weekly columns, the real-time storytelling of events are all useful actions to create a community of people around a museum and retain it over time. The profile can become a point of reference during that cultural journey mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph, a source of inspiration when choosing a destination, a source of information during the organization and planning phase, an interactive diary during and after the visit where you can share your experience.

This first set of actions increasingly suggests the need to include the Instagram platform among the tools of the museum's online communication plan as part of a wider museum marketing plan.

However, to facilitate the introduction and experimentation of modern social networking platforms, the mere modernization of technological equipment is not enough. It should be combined with a cultural change which presupposes, on the one hand, a clear awareness of the uses and effects of the participation on modern platforms and, on the other hand, the availability of qualified human resources, capable not only of using these channels in a technical way but, above all, of fully exploiting the civic engagement opportunities, made possible by the skillful use of images and words, according to the most common strategies of effective communication on social networks.

Informing, sharing, engaging, interacting, promoting, telling, are all actions which make the Instagram platform functional to what can be considered one of the most important goals for a museum in the long term: to increase the number of visitors and transmit knowledge. The doubt that in the long term digital fruition can be substituted by the real experience sooner or later comes, but this is the challenge of the community managers: to ensure that the Instagram-mediated communication might be an incentive, a stimulus, a push to the continuous search for real visit experiences.

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