CHIARA GIACHINO

COMMUNICATING IN A DIGITAL WORLD

The museum evolution

COMUNICAZIONE D'IMPRESA

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To my family, to those who have always been here.
"Créer des liens? Tu seras pour moi unique au monde".

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Thanks to Prof. Re who introduced me to the museums' world stimulating my curiosity and interest.

Thanks to Prof. Johar who inspired me and made me understand the importance to learn more about people's behavior and psychology.

Thanks to Augusto and Luca who helped in identifying new trends in the field and… thanks to all the people I have had the opportunity to work with over the years.

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Foreword

I first met Chiara in New York in 2019 when she expressed an interest in spending some time at Columbia and immersing herself in the research being done in consumer behavior and marketing. She visited the department later that year and sat in on my Research Methods class and contributed to our discussions. We also spent some time talking about the art and science of research in consumer psychology and consumer behavior, and the importance of thinking deeply about customer needs. I'm thrilled to see that Chiara has written a book that puts forth an imperative for museums that is based on a sound understanding of what is desirable and meaningful to consumers in the current moment. Cultural organizations need to adapt to the needs of the time and use sound consumer insights to develop strategies that leverage technology and digital tools. Chiara's book helps illuminate the way to make this happen. It is incredibly up-to-date, touching on au-courant topics such as crypto-art and digital ownership, and is filled with practical advice based on rigorous analysis. This book is a critical companion for managers of cultural institutions who are grappling with changes in consumer habits, and also trying to attract the younger generation.

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Introduction

Culture is a complex term that is open to several definitions. It is very difficult to find a precise, unambiguous, and shared representation of its content in its daily use, in which it assumes a wide variety of meanings.

When we talk about culture, in fact, we refer to values, ideas, opinions, experiences, lifestyles, and all the elements that represent the basis of the development of a country, and that can influence people's behavior or, as Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) express, "culture can be: the way of living, the social heritage, a way of thinking, an abstraction of behaviour, an anthropological theory, the collective knowledge, a set of standardized guidelines, a mechanism of regulation for behaviour, adaptation techniques and a portion of history". Even when looking at the most recent literature, the picture that emerges has no well-defined contours, revealing how complex it is to find a common sense for the word culture.

We can say that art and culture are essential for all people who, for example, love to travel. But it's not only about that. Most people visit museums, participate in cultural initiatives, follow exhibitions, and identify with a certain type of art.

Some artworks are known all over the world and their value is inestimable. Some artworks make people learn, others overwhelm visitors and make them dream. Everyone can feel emotions and live a special experience, even with limited knowledge of art and culture.

Art works have a historical, aesthetic, and social impact: For these reasons, they can cause emotions and attract the attention of people.

All over the world, every year, millions of people decide to visit well-known museums, regardless of their marketing and communication initiatives or their presence on social networks. Other museums have a smaller audience, and, for various reasons, they were unable to reach millions of visitors. These are the rules of the market. However, everything can change and can be changed.

In fact, over decades, many museums have shown a slow evolution in the adoption of new digital tools that allow them to communicate with people and innovate their offers. This way of acting was not an issue because of the power and interest that culture and art have on people, the external conditions of the environment, and the dynamics of the sector.

However, in the last few years, something started to change: virtuous museums have invested in digital approaches, begun to engage with social media and new technologies, and are looking for new ways of communicating with the market. Other museums that struggled to update a social media page were left behind. This often happens for economic reasons (the resources of museums are far from infinite) and for a lack of technological skills (not all museums have a dedicated team to focus efforts on these activities).

Therefore, the target audience is changing: the new generations, in particular Generation Z (GenZ) and all the digital native generations, are forcing museums to reconsider the way of communicating and presenting themselves offline and online. Moreover, the pandemic and the new technologies applied to the art contest (i.e., crypto art) are even more influencing the dynamics of the sector. Museums have now the opportunity to challenge themselves in a new (unprecedent) context and with the possibility to redesign their future.

Museums are responsible for preserving heritage for future generations, central actors for promoting lifelong learning and equal access to culture, and the dissemination of values on which humanity is based.

Building on this consideration, this book presents an overview of the most important changes in the last decades that have contributed to change the dynamics of the sector. More in detail, it presents three main topics: the role of digital tools and social media, the visitor experience with a specific focus on younger generations (i.e., Millennials and Generation Z) and the role of the pandemic on the evolution of the museum offer.

This book aims at guiding the reader along a complex path that highlights how museums are connected and communicate with their public and, underline the need to include digital technologies and an open-minded approach to survive to complex periods. The Covid-19 pandemic triggered an acceleration of the evolution of the museum sector: will the sector be fast enough to embrace the change and surf the wave?

1 Communicate and interact with (new) generations

This chapter introduces the role of museums in the cultural sector and examines their public in depth, highlighting the necessity to adapt the communication according to the target (i.e., young generations). The role of museums is essential to spread culture among people, and museums can teach, educate, share experiences, and so on. The evolution and innovation of museums has been slower than that of other sectors, however. Museums must evolve at the same speed as the continuously evolving and differentiating people's needs: there are several generational cohorts with very different behaviours and interests who must be studied and considered. It was easier to serve people some decades ago, but everything has changed with the advent of the digital generations (Generation Z and Millennials). These generations are used to finding information online, sharing experiences, leaving reviews, and making decisions about what to do according to the reviews left by others and museums need to adapt their communication.

1.1. Marketing and people in culture

The market of a cultural organisation is broad and changes according to the relationships that are established with its main players: the state (public financiers), the private sector (sponsors and partners), agents (distribution market) and, most important of all, the end consumers. In the cultural market – which like any other type of market is a place of exchange – there is a demand (made up of the users of culture), an offer (products/services offered by cultural enterprises), competition between structures that carry out similar activities, or which may be seen as substitutes, and a marketing strategy that connects supply and demand, with the aim of increasing the number of users of a cultural asset, creating value and spreading knowledge.

Competition in the cultural market, especially in recent years, has increased significantly: there is an external competition, resulting from external cultural systems such as theme parks; there is internal competition, between, for example, two museums; and finally, there is alternative competition, in which cultural organisations compete with institutions (e.g. banks) that have chosen culture to differentiate their presence in the market (Codignola, 2006).

The cultural market therefore involves the existence of a real supply chain, which is determined by the offer, as well as all the related industries. The marketing concept is more extensive and differentiated for cultural organisations, because it includes the set of relationships that can be established with its main subjects. Marketing thus assumes an important role and can make a difference in promoting culture among people.

In the past (but often also today) the main objectives of marketing were to attract and retain new customers so as to make a profit (Drucker, 2012), and the process used in order to reach this objective includes specific phases, such as designing, promoting and producing goods and services for potential buyers and customers (Webster & Wind, 1972).

More recently, Kotler et al. (2014), has put the role of people and their needs at the centre of the marketing definition, and so marketing become an activity that must be able to meet people's needs and expectations.

Marketing management is the art, the science, and the ability to identify a target market, and to reach, conquer and increase the customer base through the creation of an offer and the communication of its value to the customer; the goal is to exceed customers' expectations.

From this point of view, marketing activities are essential for culture and, the most important word to focus on is "people". Managers and entrepreneurs, private and public companies, in whatever sector they operate, have the task of analysing the market and understand people to leverage the marketing mix variables that, more than others, can ensure a greater return (profit or no profit) to the organisation.

In the cultural sphere, the role of marketing was addressed in 1967, when Kotler considered the importance that marketing plays not only in companies but also in cultural organisations, whose task is to compete on the market to capture the attention of customers, but, at the same time, to attract state funds for the maintenance of artistic and cultural heritage. Those who manage cultural organisations must therefore have some other abilities, such as being able to understand how to attract customers, but at the same time to find and attract economic resources that allow the sustenance of the cultural system.

As pointed out by some authors (Diggles, 1986; Melillo & Lavender, 1983; Mokwa et al., 1980), the objective of cultural marketing is spreading knowledge about an artwork, and generating positive economic results, always taking the type of artistic organisation into consideration, since, in this case, it is the product which attracts the audience.

Diggles (1986) stressed that the contribution of marketing to the cultural field is to bring the artist into contact with an adequate number of people: the attention and ability of marketing in this case is to bring customers towards the product, the artwork. Mokwa et al. (1980) reinforced this concept, describing in detail the peculiar characteristics of cultural marketing: marketing in the cultural sphere does not have the task of telling an artist how to make a work of art, but rather that of being able to bring together the artist's creations and the public who will potentially be attracted to them.

However, one of the contributions most often remembered and, perhaps most complete, describes cultural marketing as "the art of reaching those market segments that can potentially be interested in the product, adapting the variables of the marketing mix, to put the product in contact with a sufficient number of consumers and to achieve the objectives consistently with the mission of the cultural enterprise" (Colbert, 2015).

In this context, the role of the management is key. The corporate mission must be known and recognised by management, as it is management who must ask themselves how to act and what tools to use to make the artistic and cultural product accessible to people, and to do this effectively they must clearly bear in mind the type of organisation and the values it recognises (Franch, 2011). Organisations to achieve and develop a cultural marketing model can use the following process: start with the knowledge of the product (essential so as to identify the reference market), analyse the data for the market information system and, consequently, plan the objectives and strategies that can best contribute to achieving the final objective (Colbert, 2014). The marketing of culture is something more than a methodology or the management of market demand and supply.

1.2. The evolution of museums and communication

Museums are often seen as an ideal place to work, and simple to manage, where it is possible to enjoy peace and quiet, and which have few things in common with "real" jobs (Janes & Sandell, 2007). This is not true. In recent decades museums have faced the same critical issues and the same changes that affect corporate organisations.

Museum offerings, which usually consist of objects and collections, have changed because competition has opened up to other institutions i.e, theatres and circuses (Vom Lehn, 2006): it is no longer enough to offer the opportunity to see something, the visitor experience must be taken to a higher level, offering immersion and interaction with the environment (Kotler et al., 2008). The goal of museums has therefore changed to attract visitors through focused marketing initiatives and communication plans (Dirsehan, 2012).

In fact, some museums today do not even have collections but, like others, manage to involve people and encourage learning through the use of new media (Kotler et al., 2008). Museum managers have also been prompted to use new technologies to communicate and engage people, such as virtual shows (Ardissono et al., 2012).

According to Hudson (1998): "[the] most important change that involved museums during the last half of the century is the awareness about their mission to serve different publics. The old style of the museum had no obligations. It existed, had a headquarters, had collections and a staff. It was sufficiently financed, and its visitors, usually not numerous, watched and admired what had been done. The museum's primary responsibility was the collections, not the visitors".

Hudson (1998) describes the concept of this old museum style in the five key points which Joseph Veach Noble (1970) used to explain the peculiarities of museums: collecting, conserving, studying, interpreting, and exhibiting. These five elements, strongly correlated one with another, characterised the essence of the museum. Even today the five cardinal points are somehow present and inherent in the nature of museums, however, they have evolved according to the new context, and have reduced to three: preserving, studying and communicating (Weil, 2004).

Preserving is important because a place's works, structures and culture must be preserved and kept intact over time: to do this it is necessary to be able to take advantage of adequate economic resources. Studying is important because an in-depth knowledge of works and assets allows passion and curiosity to be transmitted to the public. Communicating is the ability to help people see and understand the potential hidden behind works and culture.

Finally, a museum can be compared to a company from a number of perspectives: it is an organisation that needs economic resources and human capital with technical and managerial skills, which manages tangible and intangible assets, and who aims to create value for its customers and satisfy their needs (Bagdadli, 1997; Rullani & Vicari, 1999).

Today, the view about museums is evolving: museums are not only institutions curating public education and research, but they are moving toward a broader public looking for leisure experiences, touristic attractions, and special atmosphere (Piancatelli et al., 2021; Rainoldi et al., 2020; Stephen, 2001). Therefore, the concept of museums includes the function of acquiring, conserving, and communicating art, but also the pursuit of educational purposes, entertaining people, and giving the possibility to visitors to learn by examining the collections.

Museums have to organise all the activities, from education to engagement, by making the best use of economic and human resources – which are often inadequate – and finding public funding to maintain their activities (Montella, 2014). The lack of economic resources affects several functions inside museums, from the staff, to the organisation