

# Analysing the importance of social media on European museums

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**Abstract.** Facebook and other social media platforms enable European museums to broaden their reach, engage visitors, promote collections and events, cooperate with industry professionals, and contribute to cultural heritage protection and promotion. This study analysed data from Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube and found that Facebook played a significant role in increasing visitor numbers to European museums during and after the pandemic. This research explored how Facebook has positively impacted European museums by enhancing their visibility, accessibility, and engagement. During the pandemic period, museums utilized Facebook for virtual tours, online exhibitions, and interactive content to maintain connections with audiences. This digital shift enabled museums to reach wider and more diverse audiences while fostering community involvement and cultural enrichment. Furthermore, Facebook's targeted advertising capabilities effectively promoted museum initiatives to interested individuals. In the decades since the epidemic, Facebook has continued to be an important tool for increasing outreach. This has been accomplished through live streaming events, educational programs, and user-generated material, all of which have helped to promote meaningful relationships with the general population.

## 1 Introduction

The emergence of social media platforms has revolutionized the dynamics of interpersonal communication, connectivity, and information consumption. Among these platforms, Facebook has emerged as a potent tool for fostering engagement and enhancing cultural experiences on a global scale. European museums, renowned for their historical significance and abundant heritage, have significantly reaped the benefits of Facebook's influence, particularly during and after the pandemic crisis. This research will explore how Facebook has benefited European museums by enabling them to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic while thriving in a time of rapid technological advancement.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, European museums faced extraordinary challenges as a result of restrictions, closures, and limited physical access. Nonetheless, by providing a virtual platform for engaging with worldwide audiences, Facebook has emerged as a critical resource for these institutions. Museums used Facebook capabilities like live broadcasts, virtual tours, and interactive events to connect with art lovers, history fans, and the general public. These digital initiatives presented an unparalleled opportunity for museums to transcend geographical boundaries and reach audiences far beyond their physical locations while fostering a newfound appreciation for European culture and heritage on a global scale. European museums have effectively adapted their communication strategies and outreach

efforts through Facebook. They have utilized targeted advertising to promote exhibitions, online workshops, and events, thereby enhancing their online visibility and attracting diverse demographics. By sharing engaging content such as behind-the-scenes glimpses, historical anecdotes, and captivating visuals, museums have created immersive experiences that resonate with a broader audience, including younger generations who may not otherwise consider visiting museums.

## 2 Case description

### 2.1 Overview of social media presence among the top 270 museums included in this study

During the COVID-19 epidemic, European museums faced extraordinary challenges as a result of restrictions, closures, and limited physical access. Nonetheless, by providing a virtual platform for engaging with worldwide audiences, Facebook has emerged as a critical resource for these institutions. Museums used Facebook capabilities like live broadcasts, virtual tours, and interactive events to connect with art lovers, history fans, and the general public. Despite the fact that a majority of the 270 museums examined in this study had already established a social media presence (i.e., 250 out of 270 museums, or 92.6%, had previously maintained a Facebook account), new platforms were also identified.

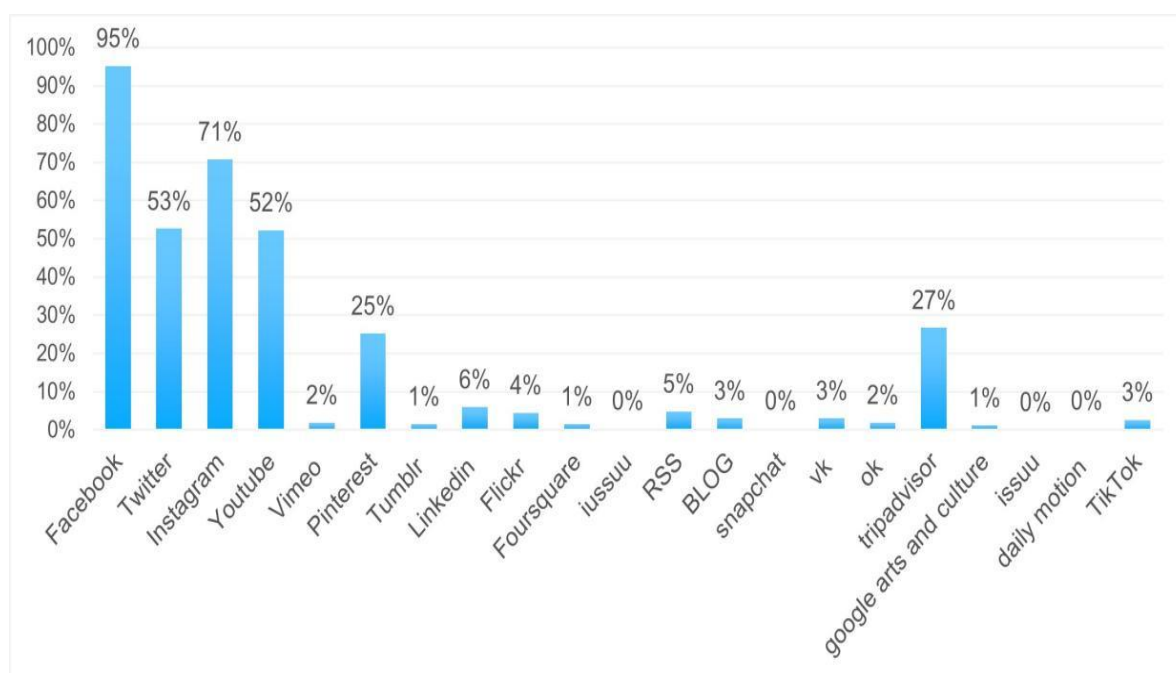
The most popular social media platforms used by museums are Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and

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Twitter. Facebook is the most prevalent platform (95.2%, 257 out of 270 museums), followed by Instagram (70.7%), Twitter (52.6%), and YouTube (51.9%). TripAdvisor has a presence in 27% of museums surveyed, while Pinterest is present in 25%. LinkedIn (6%), Flickr (4%), VK (3%) and TikTok (3%) have a less frequent and less intense presence, similar to blogs and RSS feeds, respectively [1]. It should be noted that, in contrast to 2019, museums have demonstrated an increased presence on emerging social media platforms

such as TripAdvisor and TikTok in 2020 (refer to Figure 1) [2]. Additionally, it is noteworthy that while VK remains a popular social media platform in Russia, no other European museum utilizes this platform. Conversely, TikTok has emerged as a rapidly growing and highly popular network among younger demographics. TikTok has been utilized by prominent museums such as the Rijksmuseum, Thyssen-Bornemisza, Gallerie Uffizi, and Prado [1].



**Fig.1.** Social media presence in the 270 museums of this study, expressed as a percentage [1].

During the lockdown, there was a little increase in the presence of museums on the four most popular social media platforms (see Table 1). While Facebook already had accounts for 250 of the 270 museums, Instagram and YouTube saw a considerable growth in their presence, with increases of 6.7% and 5.22%, respectively [1]. The increase can be linked to the success of Instagram photographs and YouTube videos, which are more aesthetically focused than text-based Facebook, in digitally exhibiting museum objects from collections. Furthermore, Instagram and YouTube give an excellent platform for promoting past and present events, such as webinars and exhibitions, as well as developing instructive content for youngsters.

**Table 1.** Comparison of the quantity of museums per social media platform between the survey conducted in 2019 and 2020 [1].

	2019	2020	Percentage
Facebook	250/270	257/270	2,80%
Instagram	179/270	191/270	6,70%
Twitter	141/270	142/270	0,71%
YouTube	134/270	141/270	5,22%

Large museums use social media as a crucial part of their overall marketing strategy, which is a key finding from earlier research that the new data further supports. This approach not only enhances the museums' brand image but also fosters an active online community [3]. As such, these institutions maintain and manage accounts across various popular social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, as well as less mainstream ones. By contrast, more diminutive cultural establishments have a tendency to uphold and preserve Facebook profiles while actively engaging on one or two additional social media platforms, predominantly Twitter or Instagram. Facebook often serves as a dynamic substitute for their website, which is frequently left unattended. It has been observed that many museum websites remain static with outdated content and lack integration with their social media accounts. Social media icons are often absent from many museum websites, and in some cases, they may lead to a different platform or no content at all. Additionally, while small museums may maintain social media accounts, their posting frequency is sporadic.

In Table 2, the percentages of social media presence in museums across all countries included in this research are presented based on the four most frequently used platforms [1]. Notably, the majority of museums in six countries (the United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Italy,

Spain, and Russia) have created a presence on all four major social media networks (shown by strong type). This suggests that these institutions have made significant investments in leveraging social media to

achieve their strategic objectives and day-to-day operations.

**Table 2.** Presents a comparison of social media presence percentages among museums in different countries for 2019-2020 [1].

Country	Facebook 2020	Facebook 2019	Twitter 2020	Twitter 2019	Instagram 2020	Instagram 2019	YouTube 2020	YouTube 2019
AUSTRIA	100	100	30	30	80	80	70	70
BELGIUM	100	100	50	50	60	60	30	40
CROATIA	90	90	50	50	50	50	20	30
CJEZH	100	100	50	50	60	60	50	40
DENMARK	100	100	50	50	90	90	40	40
ESTHONIA	100	100	30	30	50	50	50	40
FINLAND	100	100	50	50	80	80	50	50
FRANCE	100	80	60	60	70	70	50	50
<b>GERMANY</b>	90	90	80	80	80	70	80	70
GREECE	100	90	30	40	30	40	40	30
HUNGARY	100	100	30	30	80	80	60	60
ICELAND	100	90	20	20	40	40	30	30
<b>IRELAND</b>	100	100	100	100	70	70	80	70
<b>ITALY</b>	90	70	70	60	100	90	100	90
LATVIA	100	100	80	80	70	60	50	50
LITHUANIA	80	70	10	10	50	30	20	20
MALTA	90	90	20	20	10	10	30	30
NETHERLANDS	100	100	70	70	90	90	50	50
NORWAY	100	100	80	80	90	90	20	20
POLAND	100	100	50	40	90	80	60	60
PORTUGAL	100	100	20	20	60	30	40	30
<b>RUSSIA</b>	90	90	70	70	90	90	80	80
<b>SPAIN</b>	100	90	90	90	100	90	90	70
SWEDEN	90	100	20	20	80	80	40	40
SWITZERLAND	90	90	60	60	90	90	60	60
TURKEY	70	70	60	60	70	60	30	30
<b>UK</b>	90	90	90	90	70	60	90	90

**2.2 The Covid-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on museums throughout Europe**

The use of sections to divide the text of the paper is optional and left as a decision for the author. Where the author wishes to divide the paper into sections the formatting shown in Table 2 should be used.

In the year 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic will have had a profound impact on the global economy. Museums have been significantly affected by this unprecedented crisis, with nearly 90% of them worldwide being forced to close their doors [4]. The closure of museums during this period has had far-reaching economic and social consequences. Museums serve as a fundamental pillar for fostering sustainable economic development at the international, national, and local levels. Moreover, they possess the potential to play a pivotal role in surmounting crises. During the first lockdown period from March 2020 to June 2020, a vast majority of European museums (92%) were closed, with only a few exceptions in Sweden, Albania, and Austria [5]. The

same trend was observed during the second lockdown period, from October to December 2020. Globally, approximately 94.7% of museums remained closed between April 7th and May 7th in response to COVID-19 [6]. It should be emphasized that the vast majority of institutions closed their physical doors to the public in mid-March 2020, with a large proportion remaining closed forever [6]. The shutdown of the vast majority of the world's museums has had serious economic consequences.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, museums worldwide have been compelled to curtail their operations. According to the International Council of Museums [6], nearly one-third of museums will likely undergo downsizing, and more than one in ten may close permanently. The majority of museums have reported a decline in revenue due to the loss of income from ticket sales, gift shops, cafes, and other services. According to NEMO's survey in 2019, large-scale museums such as the Rijksmuseum and Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna suffered losses ranging from €100,000 to €600,000 per week [5]. Private museums have also experienced

significant losses, as they heavily rely on sales for the majority of their revenue.

Many of these severely impacted museums are concerned about the possibility of permanent closure. Museums located in tourist regions have estimated a staggering 75–80% decrease in income. The museum sector responded with remarkable agility to the COVID-19 crisis, expanding its online presence in order to maintain and/or establish connections with the public [7]. UNESCO's report has identified over 800 initiatives worldwide in response to the pandemic, with a significant portion of these efforts focused on promoting virtual museums that build upon pre-existing investments [4]. Museums were compelled to digitally execute all their planned activities, encompassing exhibitions, conferences, and other engagements, in order to effectively engage with their existing audience while also expanding their reach to a broader demographic [4, 8]. The temporary closure of museums during recent lockdowns has highlighted the significance of digital communication with the public. Throughout the lockdown, numerous museums have enhanced their digital activities in order to offer alternative or supplementary services through digital platforms, despite limited resources. To effectively communicate with their online audience, many museums have used existing social media channels or created new ones. In this era, Facebook is at the forefront of social media's digital cultural legacy, enhancing individual fun and creativity. In today's world, digital museums are no longer a pipe dream, as cultural organizations and major European museums use Facebook's digital social media to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, provide alternative forms of digital learning and entertainment, and foster global solidarity.

### 3 Analysing

#### 3.1 Increased reach & visibility

The enhanced reach and visibility provided by Facebook have transformed the way European museums engage with their audiences.

With a user base of over two billion worldwide, Facebook presents an unparalleled opportunity for these institutions to expand their influence beyond their physical locations and connect with a vast and diverse audience [9]. Museums utilize Facebook to create fascinating content that highlights their exhibits, such as high-resolution photographs and videos of notable artworks like the Mona Lisa or Venus de Milo at the Louvre in Paris. This method not only gives millions of potential visitors a glimpse into extraordinary collections, but it also piques the interest of art fans and historians from around the world, resulting in increased foot traffic as previously unaware individuals are motivated to arrange visits.

Moreover, museums can utilize Facebook Events to effectively promote their diverse programs and activities. For instance, the British Museum in London leverages this feature to announce upcoming lectures, workshops,

and cultural events. By creating Facebook Events and extending invitations to interested individuals, the museum can effortlessly generate interest and enthusiasm among a wide-ranging audience. As these events are shareable, users also have the ability to invite their friends and family members, thereby expanding the reach of these occasions. This organic reach not only leads to increased attendance but also fosters a sense of community surrounding the museum's activities.

#### 3.2 Targeted advertising & personalization

Facebook's advanced advertising technologies provide European museums with a strong tool for accurately targeting their target audiences. By leveraging these tools, museums can utilize an extensive range of demographic filters to focus on the most receptive segments of the population. For instance, let's consider a museum in Amsterdam planning to host an exhibition on the Dutch Golden Age, with a particular emphasis on art enthusiasts interested in Rembrandt and Vermeer. With Facebook's advertising capabilities, they can accurately target individuals who have expressed interest in art history, specifically the Dutch Golden Age, as well as those who have previously attended similar museums or events.

Moreover, geographical targeting is another crucial aspect that proves invaluable for these museums. Let's take into account a museum located in Barcelona that aims to promote an exhibition about the Catalan modernist movement. Utilizing Facebook's geotargeting feature allows the museum to concentrate its efforts on people residing within a specific radius around the museum or even tourists visiting the city. This enables them to tailor ads and messages in various languages to cater both to locals and tourists while maximizing their potential reach [9].

Additionally, Facebook's advertising tools enable museums to effectively engage potential visitors based on their specific interests and behaviors exhibited on the platform. For example, a museum in Florence, Italy, is strategically planning an exhibition dedicated to Renaissance architecture with the aim of attracting individuals who have demonstrated a keen interest in architecture or travel. By utilizing the platform's interest-based targeting capabilities, the museum can establish connections with individuals who actively follow architecture-related pages, engage with travel blogs, or have expressed a desire to visit Italy. The effectiveness of this targeted approach is evidenced by the significant increase in visitor traffic experienced by numerous museums [10].

#### 3.3 Connecting with art enthusiasts & professionals

Facebook serves as a robust platform for connecting art enthusiasts and professionals, drawing visitors to European museums. Its multifaceted features cultivate a dynamic and interactive art community through virtual hubs such as art-focused groups and pages where

individuals can engage in discussions, share insights, and appreciate diverse forms of artistic expression. Artists can showcase their creations on Facebook Pages, reaching a global audience. Art institutions and museums utilize Facebook's advertising and event features to promote their exhibits and events, informing followers about upcoming exhibitions, workshops, and lectures through Facebook Events. This allows art enthusiasts to plan visits while museums assess interest and engagement. For example, the Louvre Museum announced a limited-time exhibition of rare Egyptian artifacts using Facebook Events, resulting in a surge of visitors from around the world [10].

Furthermore, the British Museum charmed a varied audience with a live-streamed guided tour of their Viking exhibition using Facebook's live streaming capability. Furthermore, museums may effectively engage certain demographics and interest groups with art content thanks to Facebook's algorithmic targeting, allowing European museums to attract specialized audiences and build personalized experiences. For example, the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam partnered with Facebook to target history buffs interested in the Dutch Golden Age, resulting in increased interest from both domestic and foreign history buffs [10].

### 3.4 Engagement & interactivity

Facebook has revolutionized the way in which European museums engage with their audiences by providing dynamic features that facilitate real-time interaction and active participation. Through a diverse range of interactive tools, such as posts, comments, and direct messaging, museums have successfully cultivated a profound sense of community and connection with their visitors, thereby enhancing the positive perception of these cultural institutions [11]. An exemplary instance of such engagement can be observed at the Louvre Museum in Paris, France. By leveraging its Facebook page effectively, the Louvre shares captivating narratives about its most esteemed artworks while providing historical context, trivia questions and engaging quizzes to assess visitors' knowledge.

In addition to regular postings, European museums have achieved remarkable success by incorporating innovative interactive elements. For instance, the British Museum in London has embraced live streaming on Facebook, enabling users to virtually accompany curators as they explore specific exhibits. These live events offer an unprecedented opportunity for direct engagement with experts and provide insights into the collection that may not be readily accessible during an in-person visit [12].

Moreover, virtual tours have emerged as a potent tool for engaging audiences, exemplified by the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam, Netherlands. By offering captivating virtual walkthroughs of its galleries on Facebook, the museum entices users with stunning high-definition imagery and compelling narration, providing them with an immersive glimpse into the museum's ambiance from the comfort of their homes. This

immersive virtual experience can ignite visitors' curiosity and inspire them to plan a physical visit to witness the art firsthand.

Moreover, Facebook's interactive features have empowered European museums to unveil exclusive behind-the-scenes content, offering a unique perspective into the inner workings of these institutions. The Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain frequently shares videos showcasing conservation efforts, art installations and interviews with staff members [13]. Such content humanizes the museum experience by making it more relatable and enticing visitors to become part of the museum's ongoing narrative.

### 3.5 Social sharing word-of-mouth (WOM) marketing

Social sharing and word-of-mouth marketing have emerged as influential tools in the digital era, with Facebook playing a pivotal role as a leading social media platform. The inherent sociability of this platform encourages users to share their experiences and interests with their social circles, thereby generating user-generated content that can significantly impact businesses and institutions such as European museums [13]. Recommendations from individuals within users' social circles are more credible than conventional advertising, increasing the likelihood of converting them into actual visits.

In addition to individual users, travel bloggers and influencers play a pivotal role in amplifying word-of-mouth marketing for European museums. These influential individuals visit various museums, curate engaging blog posts, and produce captivating videos for their dedicated followers. When they share their experiences on Facebook and other social platforms, their followers perceive them as authoritative figures and may be influenced to plan their trips accordingly. Overall, the significance of Facebook's role in facilitating social sharing and word-of-mouth marketing for European museums and other businesses cannot be underestimated. The platform empowers users to disseminate authentic experiences, creating a ripple effect of user-generated content that reaches a wide audience with substantial credibility.

## 4 Suggestions

Based on the analysis of the usage of Facebook's visibility, this paper suggests that the museum should keep using Facebook for its global reach so that museum educational programs are no longer just accessible to local audiences. Institutions such as the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam offer virtual tours and interactive educational content on their Facebook pages [10]. This approach enables them to engage with students, educators, and history enthusiasts from various regions while facilitating cross-cultural learning experiences. Such initiatives cultivate inclusivity and accessibility within museums' offerings, rendering them more relevant and appealing to a broader spectrum of

individuals. In short, the widespread use of Facebook as a promotional tool has certainly increased European museums' exposure and global reach. Museums can efficiently present exhibits, promote events, and spread educational efforts to a varied international audience by leveraging their large user base. This not only increases attendance but also encourages cultural interaction, establishing museums as crucial connectors in the modern world.

Based on the characteristic of personalization, this paper believes that museums should keep using Facebook's advanced advertising technologies in order to transform their approach to engaging with potential visitors. Museums may design their campaigns in new ways that engage with people who are really interested in what they have to offer by targeting certain demographics, interests, and geographical regions. This revised strategy has proven to be quite beneficial in increasing visitor traffic and enhancing the impact of their marketing efforts. As technology advances, museums and other institutions can use such platforms to broaden their reach and engage with a global audience in a more personal and meaningful way.

As for the ability to engage and interact, this paper finds out that the museum actively encourages followers to share their thoughts and experiences through comment section interactions that often ignite vibrant discussions among art enthusiasts worldwide. For instance, by promptly responding to these comments, the social media team at the Louvre fosters an amiable and approachable atmosphere that makes visitors feel valued and acknowledged. Moreover, Facebook's engagement tools have opened up new avenues for European museums to establish strong connections with their audiences. Through posts, comments, and direct messaging, museums have fostered a sense of community, while live streams, virtual tours, and behind-the-scenes content have captivated users and encouraged them to seek a more immersive experience by visiting these cultural institutions in person. This synergy between digital and physical experiences has revolutionized the museum industry by redefining how art and culture are appreciated and shared in today's world.

Finally, the European museums should also think about the positive effect of WOM by using Facebook to attract more visitors while fostering a devoted community of art and history enthusiasts from around the globe.

## 5 Conclusion

During the pandemic, European museums faced unprecedented challenges as they were forced to close their physical doors due to lockdowns. However, they quickly realized the potential of social media platforms for engaging with the public and fulfilling their mission of promoting art and culture. To adapt to the new circumstances, European museums fully embraced online promotional ticketing for cultural relic exhibitions. This allowed people from all over the world to access

these exhibitions virtually, breaking down geographical barriers and reaching a wider audience than ever before. The convenience of purchasing tickets online also made it easier for individuals who may not have had the opportunity or time to visit in person. Virtual tours became another popular feature offered by these museums during this time. Through high-quality videos and interactive experiences, visitors could explore various galleries and exhibits from the comfort of their own homes. This not only provided an alternative way for art enthusiasts to appreciate masterpieces but also served as an educational tool for students studying art history or related subjects. Quizzes with audiences became a fun and engaging activity that further enhanced interaction between museums and their followers on social media platforms. These quizzes tested participants' knowledge about different artworks or historical periods while providing interesting facts along the way. It created a sense of community among museumgoers who shared a common interest in art.

In this context of social media intervention and publicity, museums start or increase social media activities to interact and communicate with the public, thereby attracting visitors. The pandemic is a good opportunity for people who are usually busy with work to have their own free time. The publicity of social media for European museums can still attract visitors during the epidemic. Providing more ways for people to learn about the artifacts they love or potentially love and paving the way for offline physical visits and voluntary donations of funds to support the museum after the pandemic's end resulted in greater positive traffic than before the pandemic.

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