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Management of Photography Festivals in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Challenges

Sofia Papoutsi

**UNIVERSITY CENTER OF INTERNATIONAL
PROGRAMMES OF STUDIES
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND
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Student Name: Sofia Papoutsi
SID: 2202210011
Supervisor: Dr. Themis Veleni

I hereby declare that the work submitted is mine and that where I have made use of another's work, I have attributed the source(s) according to the Regulations set in the Student's Handbook.

Abstract

This dissertation was written as part of the MA in Art Law and Arts Management at the International Hellenic University. It aims to study systematically the digital transformation of photography festivals. The choice of topic is not random; first, photography festivals, as a specific type of visual arts festival has been overlooked in the literature. Despite the proliferation of photography festivals in Europe, we know little about how they are run. In addition, given the advent of digital technologies which has unarguably revolutionized how cultural events, such as festivals, are conceived, planned, advertised, and disseminated, not to mention how audiences are developed and engaged, a more targeted study of photography festivals under this angle is necessary. With this master's thesis, I aim to fill this gap in the literature by offering a review of how digital technologies have impacted arts and cultural organizations. Furthermore, I will put photography festivals at the center of my enquiry and discuss how they have adapted their operations to accommodate digital technologies.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Themis Veleni for her insightful comments and suggestions as well as all photography festivals that participated in my survey and took the time to answer my questions.

Keywords: photography festivals, digital transformation, digital marketing, digital fundraising, arts management

Sofia Papoutsi

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Preface

My interest in photography has led me to explore photography festivals and their cultural and aesthetic contributions to local communities and the global photographic community. During my studies in Art Law and Arts Management, I developed a more academic interest as I realized that there is a lack of thorough research on photography festivals. This thesis allowed me to delve into the details of managing photography festivals, identify what makes them successful, and connect with the people who make these festivals happen.

This thesis aims to introduce readers to the management of photography festivals. It can serve as a compact literature reference for researchers, as well as a practical guide for cultural producers in the field of photography on the opportunities and challenges that digital technologies represent.

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1 Introduction

The management of cultural festivals is a specialized area within arts and cultural management. This is due to the temporal and experiential nature of festivals, as well as their connection to other areas such as cultural tourism, city branding, and public policy. These characteristics make festival management a challenging task, as it requires striking a balance between several opposing values, such as innovation and tradition, extended programming and limited resources, and local and global audiences.

In recent decades, festivals and events have been studied more systematically, resulting in the development of a new interdisciplinary field of research known as “festivals and events studies”. This field is “*devoted to creating knowledge and theory about planned events*”,¹ which can include sports events, business meetings, cultural festivals, and other types of cultural events. As a result, cultural festival managers can benefit from the insights provided by this field of study, which deals with questions related to event planning and management, their outcomes, attendee experiences, and reasons for attendance.²

As a result, when it comes to studying cultural festivals and events, an interdisciplinary approach is necessary. Cultural management, visual arts, policy, and economic questions are all important for a complete understanding of the subject matter. Additionally, questions about artistic content cannot be separated from strategic questions about the festival's location, audience, or revenue generation. Understanding how arts and culture impact communities and local tourism is also crucial in this context.³

In addition, festivals are particularly relevant in the context of recent developments and research in the “*experience economy*”.⁴ The experience economy involves activities that combine a product or service with specific

¹Donald Getz and Stephen Page, *Event Studies: Theory, Research and Policy for Planned Events* (Fourth Edition, Routledge, an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group 2020).

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

⁴ B Joseph Pine and James H Gilmore, *The Experience Economy* (Updated edition, Harvard Business Review Press 2011).

“*areas of experience*”, such as entertainment, education, aesthetics, and escapism.⁵ Pine and Gilmore have suggested that the experience economy is “*the next stage in the evolution of society from a service economy*”⁶ which means that nowadays businesses are required to create memorable experiences that their customers are willing to pay a premium for.⁷ Festivals, being, by definition, experiential events, and combining a “product or service” with an experience, are innovators in this field.⁸

The professionalization of arts and events management has also contributed to the revived interest in studying festivals.⁹ In today's highly competitive environment, festivals must adopt business-inspired strategies to achieve long-term success. Arts management and events specialists must work together to develop tailored concepts and implement event strategies that fit the festival's location and type.¹⁰ Examining how festivals operate in practice is therefore an essential exercise.

In addition, the advent of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed the way in which cultural events are conceived, planned, advertised, and disseminated, as well as how audiences are developed and engaged. There has been considerable interest in the impact of digital technologies on the cultural sector, including the ways in which cultural organizations conduct business and interact with their audiences. The recent COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the urgent need for digital solutions and has put digital transformation firmly on the agenda for the management of cultural events.

Amidst the changing landscape in which cultural festivals operate and the widespread understanding that digital technologies play an essential role in running successful cultural events, several questions have arisen regarding how cultural festivals have adapted to digital technologies, and to what extent and how this has impacted their success. While studies addressing these questions have focused mainly on film and music festivals, which have served as a

⁵ Getz and Page (n 1).

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Pine and Gilmore (n 4).

⁸ Getz and Page (n 1). According to Getz, “planned events” such as festivals also “*need to engage all of our senses (hearing, sight, touch, smell and taste)*”.

⁹ Hilary Du Cros and Lee Jolliffe, *The Arts and Events* (Routledge 2014).

¹⁰ *ibid.*

paradigm for such questioning,¹¹ other areas of cultural activities, including visual culture and photography, have received less attention from researchers, despite their growing impact and importance.

More specifically, the number of photography festivals has grown exponentially over the last decades. And yet, despite this increase in the number and importance of such festivals, we have little to no insight into how they are managed,¹² whether and how they have adopted digital technologies, and whether they are ultimately successful.

The present study aims to fill this gap in the arts management literature by trying to understand to what extent photography festivals have adopted digital technologies and in what areas of their organization and business model (e.g., programming, marketing, fundraising etc.). In addition, the study aims to identify whether adopting digital technologies lead to more successful festivals.

To do that, I will proceed in the following steps:

I will first start by reviewing the literature on digital transformation in the cultural field. I will address fundamental questions such as, what is digital transformation and how it has impacted cultural organizations. This sets the framework for the empirical analysis I conduct in the second part of the dissertation.

More precisely, based on the literature on how digital transformation has impacted the operations of cultural organizations and specifically festivals, I use empirical methods to test my assumptions and get an insider's point of view on my enquiries. I prepared a questionnaire based on the literature, which I submitted to several European festivals, to get their view and evidence on how they structure their organization and to what extent they have digitalized their functions. In the second part of the dissertation, I present the results of this survey, which I extensively discuss, and interpret.

¹¹ Elisa Salvador and Jesper S Pedersen (eds), *Managing Cultural Festivals: Tradition and Innovation in Europe* (Routledge 2022).

¹² Panagiotis Papoutsis, 'Communications Strategies of European Photography Festivals' (Master's dissertation, Hellenic Open University 2015). Papoutsis studied one aspect of five European photography festivals, namely their communications strategy.

2 The impact of digital transformation on cultural festivals

2.1 Definition of digital transformation

"Digital transformation" refers to *"the process of making our organization fit for purpose in a radically changed environment"*,¹³ or in other words, the process of adapting an organization to function effectively in an environment that has undergone significant changes due to the use of digital technologies. In defining digital transformation, Rowles and Brown highlight that it is not simply a matter of using digital technologies within an organization. Rather, it involves adapting the organization's business model to accommodate new circumstances. This adaptation can include changes to the way the organization interacts with its clients, distributes its products or services, and manages its personnel, stakeholders, and providers. In essence, digital transformation requires a fundamental shift in the way organizations operate in response to the impact of digital technologies.

It is not surprising that digital technologies have impacted art and cultural organizations, specifically in how art is created, produced, distributed, and consumed.¹⁴ This raises an important question regarding the nature of art: should it be treated as a possession or an experience to be enjoyed by users? As individuals increasingly value *"affordable and meaningful experiences over ownership"*,¹⁵ this question becomes all the more relevant.

Digital transformation has therefore pushed both *"arts, cultural, and creativity-based organizations to re-invent/revisit their traditional business models"*¹⁶ and *"artists to revise and adapt their way of creating and*

¹³ Daniel Rowles and Thomas Brown, *Building Digital Culture: A Practical Guide to Successful Digital Transformation* (Kogan Page Publishers 2017). Their definition of digital transformation refers to *"the process of making our organization fit for purpose in a radically changed environment"*.

¹⁴ Marta Massi, Marilena Vecco and Yi Lin (eds), 'Introduction', *Digital transformation in the cultural and creative industries: production, consumption and entrepreneurship in the digital and sharing economy* (Routledge 2022). Antonio Camurri and Gualtiero Volpe, 'The Intersection of Art and Technology' (2016) 23 IEEE MultiMedia 10.

¹⁵ Massi, Vecco and Lin (n 14).

¹⁶ *ibid.* Brian Newman, 'Inventing the Future of the Arts: Seven Digital Trends That Present Challenges and Opportunities for Success in the Cultural Sector' in Edward P Clapp (ed), *20under40: Re-Inventing the Arts and Arts Education for the 21st Century* (AuthorHouse 2010). Jin Woo Lee and Soo Hee Lee, 'User Participation and Valuation in Digital Art Platforms: The Case of Saatchi Art' (2019) 53 European Journal of Marketing 1125.

communicating their artworks".¹⁷ The implication of this trend is that art organizations must pay attention to the preferences and feedback of their audiences in order to stay relevant and successful. This shift from a traditional top-down approach to a more collaborative and participatory approach has the potential to benefit both the art organization and the audience, as it allows for more tailored and engaging events that meet the needs and desires of the audience. This also creates a sense of community and inclusivity, which can lead to increased engagement and loyalty from the audience. However, it also requires a willingness on the part of art organizations to be open to feedback and to adapt their approach to suit the changing needs and preferences of their audience.¹⁸

Finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and what this implied for arts organizations has been incredibly pervasive. Arts organizations had to innovate quickly and come up with solutions to engage their audience, entertain them and connect with them. The offer of virtual visits, concerts, and performances was abundant. The upside of this can be the increased diversity of the audience, and the inclusion of people who would otherwise not be able to participate in such events.

In the aftermath of the pandemic, several Arts Councils have published various reports,¹⁹ "toolboxes",²⁰ and "roadmaps" on the digitalization of art and arts and cultural management. One such report is the Comprehensive Report and Digital Roadmap published by the Singapore Arts Council, which is noteworthy for its unique and detailed approach to the digitalization of arts and culture.²² According to the report, digital technologies can affect "Six Dimensions" of an arts organization, namely the creation of art, the presentation

¹⁷ Massi, Vecco and Lin (n 14).

¹⁸ George Ritzer, 'Prosumption: Evolution, Revolution, or Eternal Return of the Same?' (2014) 14 *Journal of Consumer Culture* 3. Justin O'Connor, 'Intermediaries and Imaginaries in the Cultural and Creative Industries' (2015) 49 *Regional Studies* 374. Alvin Toffler, *The Third Wave* (Morrow 1980).

¹⁹ Arts Council England has been active in this field for several years now:

<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/digital-culture-network>

²⁰ Arts Council Ireland published a "digital tool box", available at:

https://www.artscouncil.ie/uploadedFiles/wwwartscouncilie/Content/Arts_in_Ireland/Digital/Arts-Council-Digital-Toolbox-2021.pdf

²² National Arts Council Singapore, *Arts and Culture Digital Roadmap*

<<http://www.nac.gov.sg/resources/toolkits-and-guides/digital-transformation/arts-and-culture-digital-roadmap>> accessed 4 January 2023.

of art to audiences, marketing, data analytics, corporate functions, and stakeholder management.²³

While conducting my study, I utilized this taxonomy but consolidated some dimensions, such as grouping art creation with art presentation and marketing with data analytics. I also added fundraising as a separate category due to the profound impact digital technologies have had in this area. In the following sections, I will provide a brief but concise literature review of the four areas of arts organizations that have been affected by digital technologies.

2.2 The digitalization of art creation and presentation

The first and more obvious area of the art industry that has been affected is art creation and, from an arts organization's point of view, the presentation of both digital art and more traditional art. Some studies have been conducted from the perspective of museums, which have been the first organizations to be confronted with this conundrum.²⁴

Digital technology has changed how art is created and has opened new possibilities for artists to create new art "*such as the creation of artworks with digital painting and augmented reality (AR)*".²⁵ According to Giannini and Bowen, "*digital culture (is) at the forefront of transforming a museum's relationship with its audience and community, as well as digital art and artists, marshalling the creative and innovative use of new technology such as AR, VR, and MR*²⁶, *all of which can support diversity and inclusion*".²⁷

As art creation and, more specifically, digital art will not be the focus of this study, it is important to mention that technologies such as AR and VR are also being used to create immersive exhibition experiences that can be leveraged by festival producers. By combining the natural and the digital world, festival producers can create entire exhibitions by using AR apps (e.g.,

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Tula Giannini and Jonathan P Bowen, 'Museums and Digital Culture: From Reality to Digitality in the Age of COVID-19' (2022) 5 *Heritage* 192. Tula Giannini and Jonathan P Bowen (eds), *Museums and Digital Culture: New Perspectives and Research* (1st ed. 2019 edition, Springer 2019).

²⁵ 'Arts and Culture Digital Roadmap' (n 21).

²⁶ *Mixed Reality*

²⁷ Giannini and Bowen, 'Museums and Digital Culture' (n 23).

*Artivive*²⁸ and *Niio*²⁹) or software (Adobe Aero) that can help their audience visualize artworks in their real-life environment.³⁰ As such, AR apps are available to anyone with a smartphone and can be very efficient tools for audience engagement.

Apart from AR technology, online exhibitions can be created using VR technology or simply through live streaming. Such digital exhibitions are liable to exponentially expand a festival's audience independent of their location. VR technology is different from AR as it only creates a virtual environment where the experience is taking place; even though a headset is most of the time required for the participant to be able to "fully" immerse in the virtual world, there are immersive experiences through VR where the audience can still be in contact with the real world. One such example of exhibition includes productions at the *Atelier des Lumières* in Paris.³¹

Webinars and Virtual Workshops are also ways to interact and engage with the audience, focusing on the educational and learning aspect of festivals and arts organizations more generally. Simpler ways of digitally presenting arts and cultural content can be an online archival system, developing online festivals or proprietary mobile applications.

More specifically, according to O'Sullivan and others, "*apps for use on smartphones and other connected devices are enriching the physical environment for visitors at the world's leading art galleries, and opening up virtual experiences of art to anybody with an internet connection*".³² Apps do that by offering online audio guides, commentary on physical exhibits, and themed tours in addition to logistical information useful to visitors including opening hours, facilities, how to get there and geolocation. Such apps increase the visitors' engagement with, and interest in the exhibition while enhancing their learning capacity.

²⁸ <https://artivive.com/>

²⁹ <https://www.niio.com/site/>

³⁰ <https://www.museumnext.com/article/how-museums-are-using-augmented-reality/>

³¹ <https://www.atelier-lumieres.com>

³² Terry O'Sullivan and others, *Creative Arts Marketing* (3rd edition, Routledge 2017).

2.3 *The digitalization of the marketing function*

2.3.1 **Arts Marketing**

Marketing is essential to any for-profit and non-profit organization as most successful organizations are nowadays “*marketing oriented*”.³³ According to O’Sullivan and others “*Being ‘marketing oriented’ is about adopting an external focus under which an organization recognizes that, in order to achieve its own objectives and be sustainable in the long term, it must identify, anticipate and deliver what customers want.*”³⁴

Adapting the definition of marketing and marketing orientation in the field of arts and culture, or as colloquially referred to, arts or cultural marketing, O’Sullivan and others talk about “*an integrated management process which sees mutually satisfying exchange relationships with customers as the route to achieving organizational and artistic objectives*”.³⁵

What is interesting in the definition is that marketing in the field of arts is nowadays understood as a “*mutually satisfying exchange relationship*” and not as a “*one-way communication*” as was the case in the past.³⁶ According to Kolb, in light of the technological and social developments, cultural organizations need to “*develop a new marketing strategy that allows for two-way communication to build a relationship with their customers*”.³⁷ A common theme in arts marketing in the digital era, is therefore the idea that customers are no longer passive attendants of arts events but wish to be co-creators and make decisions on artistic choices.³⁸

The idea of using marketing in the field of arts and culture has not always been accepted within arts organizations.³⁹ More precisely, many organizations have resisted using marketing as a tool to attract audiences, as arts and culture were, in general, conceived as an activity outside of, or indifferent to, market forces and, thus, not interested in commercial success.

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ Bonita M Kolb, *Marketing for Cultural Organizations: New Strategies for Attracting and Engaging Audiences* (Third edition, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group 2013).

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *ibid.* According to Kolb “the organization needs to do more than just communicate; it also needs to develop a means for these communities to be actively involved with the organization”.

³⁹ O’Sullivan and others (n 31).

This has been proven to be misleading, if not outright wrong. Art needs audiences, and unless someone makes art available and known to the right audience, art will not have any impact.⁴⁰

The specific nature of the arts, however, makes marketing them idiosyncratic. According to Fillis, there is a divide between marketing theory in a business context and arts marketing.⁴¹ Leveraging this conceptualization of arts marketing, as somewhat different from business marketing, O'Sullivan and others suggest a new understanding of arts marketing as "*an essentially moral activity, closely allied to the value of the arts as an activity*".⁴² They argue that arts marketing is an activity of cultural intermediation whereby the marketers act as "*agents to constitute art and its meaning alongside other cultural participants, the artists, the consumers, and the art product itself*" and being an "*essential actor in the development of meaning*".⁴³

In addition to this, arts marketing "*involves not only the day-to-day work of attracting audiences to events and activities, but also the need to understand and promote more widely the value of an organization's work*".⁴⁴ Marketing's main purpose is to identify a key audience and then create a relationship with them,⁴⁵ sharing insights about the organization and the cultural product they offer. According to O'Sullivan and others, "*to do this effectively, arts organizations must understand the needs, desires and motivations of all those people who are, or could be, attenders or participants at their events or venues*".⁴⁶

This is where the arts marketer's job starts. Briefly, marketing's role is to understand, both the internal as well as external environment in which the organization operates and conduct a thorough analysis of both internal and external factors that may influence its marketing strategy.⁴⁷ Organizations need

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ Ian Fillis, 'Art for Art's Sake or Art for Business Sake: An Exploration of Artistic Product Orientation' (2006) 6 *The Marketing Review* 29.

⁴² O'Sullivan and others (n 31).

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.* "Developing audiences is therefore a fundamental responsibility of the marketing function".

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ This refers to the famous SWOT Analysis which consists in analyzing and organization's internal Strengths and Weaknesses as well as the external Opportunities and Threats.

to assess their internal resources, including financial and human resources and conclude whether the organization is capable of implementing a marketing strategy or what it would need to change in order to be able to do so.⁴⁸ A marketing audit and a review of the internal organizational culture would also help to understand what works and what does not in terms of existing marketing strategies and/or whether there is a culture blocking within the organization.⁴⁹

When it comes to analyzing the external environment, the organization needs to, first and foremost, understand its competitors, namely who they are, what they offer, their pricing, their funding, and their customers. Organizations need to conduct a broader analysis of the economic, political, legal, and technological environment, document their findings, and analyze how these can potentially affect their operations, costs, attendance levels and, ultimately, long-term survival. For instance, if there are new regulations that the organization needs to implement and their implementation is costly, this might threaten its existence. Last but not least, the socio-cultural circumstances should also be studied and understood as they determine consumption patterns, behaviors and trends.⁵⁰

In addition, marketing's role is to comprehend the various types of potential customers for its cultural product. This involves gathering as much information as possible about the preferences of, not only, current but also future customers. Why do they attend cultural events and what is their motivation?⁵¹ What other venues do they visit? Achieving this goal involves conducting marketing research, which is a separate and data-driven field of marketing.

Marketing research enables organizations to group customers with similar characteristics and behaviors into different segments. Segmentation allows organizations to identify sub-populations within a broader population and make strategic decisions about which segments to target. Based on these

⁴⁸ Kolb (n 35).

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ *ibid.* According to Kolb, these types of questions that study motivations, feelings, emotions are answered through "exploratory studies" and are qualitative as opposed to questions on facts and data about the audience that can be answered through "descriptive studies".

decisions, organizations may choose to target one or multiple segments, adapting their marketing message and communications accordingly.⁵²

Once the marketing department has conducted this internal and external analysis, it is ready to differentiate itself from its competitors, develop a marketing strategy and a marketing plan that addresses the “4 Ps” – more recently expanded to the “7 Ps” – namely the so-called “marketing mix”. Essentially, marketers have all the information and can identify the cultural product that their customers need, at a price they are willing to pay, at an attractive venue.⁵³ Kolb summarizes this task as “*cultural organizations must produce a product that provides the benefits that the consumer wants, even if part of this benefit is to be entertained. In addition, this product must be competitively priced and conveniently placed*”.⁵⁴

Based on the above analysis, several trends in arts marketing are worth noting as they may prove useful in the next steps:

- Arts marketing is nowadays “customer-focused” with an emphasis on “two-way communication.”
- Consumers are interested in participating in the creative process and in artistic decisions (*co-creation of art*).
- Customers are nowadays experience and not ownership-focused.
- Customers are increasingly engaging in social sharing.⁵⁵

In the following section I treat the question of how digital marketing has impacted the marketing functions referred to in this section, how and to what extent.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ The 4Ps: the Product offered (or often in the cultural industry, the service), its Price, its Promotion, and its Place (where and how it will be distributed). The 7Ps additionally include People, Processes and Physical Evidence.

⁵⁴ Kolb (n 35).

⁵⁵ *ibid.* Simon Young, ‘Power of Integration’ in Christer Holloman (ed), *The Social Media MBA: Your Competitive Edge in Social Media Strategy Development and Delivery* (1st edition, Wiley 2012). According to Holloman and Young, people share in 3 ways: *people want to share their excitement or disappointment about products with other users; people want to share with the organization their ideas on how products be improved; people want to help other users with problems or questions about the product*

2.3.2 Digital in Arts Marketing

Digital technologies have, to a large extent, impacted arts marketing functions. According to Chandler and Munday, digital marketing is defined as “*the practice of promoting brands, products, or services online and/or on mobile media, including the use of blogging, email marketing, social media marketing and online reputation management*”.⁵⁶ Following this definition, the main tools of digital marketing include the use of a website, social media, and e-mail marketing. These tools have been used extensively to support marketing functions that were originally performed offline. The biggest impact has been on marketing research, with the use of data analytics, and on marketing communications (the promotion of the product/service and the organization).

Both marketing functions serve the ultimate goals of arts marketing, namely developing a (targeted) audience and creating interaction and a relationship with them by sharing news and information about the festival.

Marketing research

Gathering information about the different audiences so that marketing can target its efforts, is done through a mechanism called “marketing research”.⁵⁷ Marketing research has been traditionally performed through either **primary research**, namely generating original data through surveys, focus groups and interviews or **secondary research**, namely using already existing data (also called “desk research”). These methods are used to generate quantitative as well as qualitative data with regard to customer profiles, preferences and behaviors. It is the field of secondary research that has been most impacted by the advent of digital technologies.

More specifically, arts organizations analyze secondary data, which is already available either through internal or external sources.⁵⁸ Digital technologies have facilitated internal marketing research in several ways; for

⁵⁶ Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday, *A Dictionary of Social Media* (First edition, Oxford University Press 2016).

⁵⁷ O’Sullivan and others (n 31). “Marketing research is the process of collecting, analysing and interpreting data to inform marketing decisions”.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* According to O’Sullivan and others, external resources of secondary research can include research performed by other arts organizations, academic institutions, research agencies, or governmental departments as well as commercial research such as the TGI (Target Group Index), a survey collecting information from a sample of adults worldwide (ca 700,000 from 60 countries).

instance, arts organizations that sell tickets as part of their business model, normally have customer relationship management (CRM) software or, more concretely, a box office ticketing system, which they can leverage to generate data about their customers. More specifically, a ticketing system *“links ticketing transactions to a single central customer database”*.⁵⁹ This customer database collects and stores information on customers. For instance, they contain information on all ticket purchases, their memberships or subscriptions with the organization, any donation they have made to the organization and even what they have bought at the café or gift shop. Customer databases are nowadays centrally integrated systems that collect all this disparate data that helps organizations create customer profiles and better understand their needs and desires. According to O’Sullivan and others, *“because of the importance of personal relationships in the arts, where customers feel strong affinity with venues, art forms and artists, this kind of technologically enabled personalisation is a very attractive strategy”*.⁶⁰

In addition, there is another source of data available to organizations with or without ticketing systems. Nowadays, websites, social media, digital advertising, and various online applications generate data and statistics on customer behavior and, if studied and analyzed, they can be leveraged by marketing teams to create targeted and successful campaigns. Such data analytics include, amongst others, information on how many people visited the organization’s website, how they found the website, what webpages they visited before and/or after, which webpages of its website are most viewed including how much time visitors spend on average, what are the search terms that are most popular or how many people open an organization’s e-mails. This data is extremely useful to an arts organization, and its marketing department, as it offers new insights into consumers’ preferences and helps identify fitting ways to engage with consumers and identify and approach new audiences.

Marketing communications

Marketing communications support the Promotion aspect of the marketing mix mentioned earlier. In terms of communication techniques, the

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

arts have used PR, advertising, and direct marketing (database marketing) to reach their customers. Digital technologies have greatly impacted marketing communications given that, as O’Sullivan and others put it, the internet “*has enabled organizations to talk with, rather than at, their customers. Web 2.0 has also got customers talking to each other, sharing experiences on social media and review sites like TripAdvisor*”.⁶¹ O’Sullivan and others further clarify that digital marketing has effectively framed customers “*as active participants rather than passive recipients, and plays to arts marketing’s distinctive ambition to develop the appreciation of the arts in customers rather than treating them simply as means to a commercial end*”.⁶²

Websites, social media, and e-mail marketing may be separate tools of digital marketing but work together towards one common goal: spread the word about the organization, and the work that is being done, and communicate interactively with the audience. The website of the organization is the storefront and ultimately, both social media and e-mail marketing aim to direct traffic there, where people can be informed about events and activities, make purchases or donate. In what follows, I treat website, social media, and e-mail marketing separately, as they use different tools to achieve this goal, but as I already mentioned, they all work together.

Focus on websites

The website is an important element of the organization’s brand, often described as the “shop” of the business. As Preece and Johnson characteristically mention, “*the most fundamental function of online activity for an arts organization is to provide a persistent presence that enables the organization to communicate with potential audience members before, between, and after performances*”.⁶³ This is especially relevant for festivals, whose focus is one big annual event or series of events, so they have to be well communicated. The website can provide information and teasers as a means to

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² *ibid.*

⁶³ Stephen Preece and Jennifer Wiggins Johnson, ‘Web Strategies for Engaging Audiences’ in Daragh O’Reilly, Ruth Rentschler and Theresa A Kirchner (eds), *The Routledge companion to arts marketing* (First issued in paperback, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group 2018).

a “*direct lead-up to a performance*”⁶⁴ as well as include clear and practical information “*such as: where, when, what, who, and how much?*”⁶⁵

Communication strategies commonly used through the website are, according to Camarero and others,⁶⁶ *content orientation* (namely “*extension of physical space, showcasing and interpreting objects and events*”),⁶⁷ *interaction orientation* (namely “*building relationships with customers – engaging them as active participants in arts experience*”)⁶⁸ and, *transaction orientation* (“*supports business exchanges with customers – using the power and flexibility of the web to sell tickets, merchandise and philanthropic opportunities*”).⁶⁹

The organization can use the website to build its customer database. Building the organization’s customer database is one of the most valuable marketing assets, so it needs to be done carefully and over time. According to Maitland, there are some tips for successful sign-ups: first, the content on the website needs to be relevant to the customer, second, the sign-up opportunity needs to be obvious and easy to use, third, the website needs to demonstrate that the organization can be trusted with the customer’s data and sustain that trust in the use of data.⁷⁰

In addition, there are several digital tools that can help bring traffic to the website. These tools are: search engine marketing (“SEM”), which includes search engine optimization (“SEO”) and search engine advertising (“SEA”), content writing, and online advertising. More specifically, according to Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick “*Search Engine marketing is the practice of promoting an organization through search engines to meet its objectives by delivering relevant content in the search listings for searchers and encouraging them to*

⁶⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ Carmen Camarero, María José Garrido and Rebeca San José, ‘Efficiency of Web Communication Strategies: The Case of Art Museums’ (2016) 18 *International Journal of Arts Management* 42.

⁶⁷ O’Sullivan and others (n 31).

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰ Heather Maitland, ‘*A Guide to Audience Development*’ (Arts Council of England 2000).

click-through to a destination site".⁷¹ SEO improves the organic search results while SEA deals with paid advertising online (*pay per click*).⁷²

When it comes to online advertising, SEA is not the only way to spread the word about your brand. There are several types of online advertising including: "banner ads" which feature on many websites at the top of the page; "sidebar ads", which are similar to banner ads but appear vertically instead of horizontally on a website; "pop-up or pop-under ads", which open in a new window when you visit a website; "floating ads", which *float* around the website you visit for several seconds often accompanied by images and audio; "unicast ads", which are similar to a television commercial.⁷³

Finally, additional ideas that can drive traffic to the website include inserting QR codes on printed publicity and developing interesting and creative content such as blog articles, engaging audio, images and video, unique logos, fonts, and color schemes.

Focus on social media

Social media, defined as "*freely accessible digital tools to share content online with peers*"⁷⁴ are nowadays an important marketing communications tool. Social media are a great way for brands to build a large, diverse audience and communicate their message. Given the enormous reach of social media, brands are nowadays able to become known to everyone around the world. In addition, given the metrics that social media platforms offer, brands can also measure their performance, understand their audience's preferences and adjust. This is in principle what Gallagher and Sowa refer to as the "*social media cycle*", namely a tool for managing social media focused around three actions: "*listen – converse – measure*".⁷⁵

When it comes to the first component of this model, "listen", "*social media is best understood as a conversation which you are joining, so it makes*

⁷¹ Dave Chaffey and Fiona Ellis-Chadwick, *Digital Marketing* (8th edition, Pearson 2022).

⁷² "Pay-per-click" means that the organization only pays when someone clicks on the advert's link. Google's advertising service is called "Google Ads".

⁷³ O'Sullivan and others (n 31).

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ B Kathleen Gallagher and Jessica Sowa, 'Leveraging Social Media to Engage and Retain Arts/Culture Organization Donors, Members, and Volunteers' in Daragh O'Reilly, Ruth Rentschler and Theresa A Kirchner (eds), *The Routledge companion to arts marketing* (First issued in paperback, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group 2018).

sense to understand who is talking, where and what about".⁷⁶ The second component, "converse" refers to the organization joining in the conversation and "*finding its social media voice*".⁷⁷ Strategic decisions at this stage include decisions on how often to post and what the focus and format of these posts should be.⁷⁸ The last component of the model, the "measure", includes self-evidently monitoring the performance of the campaigns launched and identifying what needs to change.

Even though social media marketing does not specifically aim at inviting people to purchase a ticket, subscribe, or donate, it is a great investment for arts organizations, especially festivals most of which produce events once per year or every other year. It aims at engaging with people and building future, consistent and loyal followers of the organization. Social content should therefore be of high quality and relevance to the festival's audience and should respond to its needs.⁷⁹

When it comes to specific tools and tips to manage social media presence, Diaz suggests some ways to create a following on social media⁸⁰ including by posting regularly, targeting the messages, using (but not overusing) hashtags, following and engaging with the organization's immediate network, by using the affiliated artists, by connecting with local community and businesses, restaurants, leisure companies, accommodation providers, and by developing brand ambassadors and online partnerships, amongst others.

Several online tools exist to manage online content including scheduling and timing content posting according to when the targeted audience is online.⁸¹ Lastly, several social media platforms offer the possibility for paid advertising (e.g., Facebook or Twitter ads), which can support the other online advertising campaigns, can help bring traffic to the organization's website and increase sales and/or donations.

⁷⁶ *ibid.* O'Sullivan and others (n 31).

⁷⁷ O'Sullivan and others (n 31). Gallagher and Sowa (n 74).

⁷⁸ O'Sullivan and others (n 31). Gallagher and Sowa (n 74).

⁷⁹ Kristy Diaz, 'Managing Festivals in a Digital World' in Chris Newbold and others (eds), *Principles of Festival Management* (Goodfellow Publishers, Limited 2019).

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ E.g. Buffer (<https://buffer.com/>), TweetDeck (<https://tweetdeck.twitter.com/>), Sprout Social (<https://sproutsocial.com/>), Hootsuite (<https://www.hootsuite.com/en-gb>)

Focus on e-mail marketing

The final aspect of digital marketing is e-mail marketing, which can be a very effective way of communicating with your audience. E-mails can be utilized to promote specific events or sent regularly in the form of newsletters to keep the audience informed about upcoming events and news.⁸²

E-mail marketing is a cost-efficient way of reaching large audiences and less active people on social media.⁸³ However, several steps need to be taken before seeing any large-scale results with e-mail marketing. Building a mailing list compliant with data protection laws is time-consuming and thus expensive from a resource perspective.

E-mail marketing is a valuable tool for monitoring and measuring results, allowing marketers to adjust content to increase the open rate. Email analytics provides data on the number of opens and clicks, providing insights into what works and what doesn't. Customer relationship management (CRM) systems such as Salesforce, Hubspot, and Mailchimp can manage e-mail marketing and offer operational benefits.⁸⁴

2.4 The digitalization of fundraising

2.4.1 General

Since most festivals are non-profit organizations or are run by non-profit organizations, fundraising is an essential aspect of their daily work. Fundraising refers to the act of seeking income sources other than earned income, which is derived from commercial activities or ticket sales. It is also a professional sector within the non-profit industry that has undergone significant transformation as a result of the proliferation of digital technologies.

From a general standpoint, funding for arts organizations, including cultural festivals, can come from four sources: individuals, corporations, public administrations, not-for-profit organizations or foundations.⁸⁵ These four sources

⁸² Diaz (n 78).

⁸³ *ibid.*

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵ Marta Massi, Alex Turrini and Piergiacomo Mion Dalle Carbonare, 'Turning Crowds into Patrons - Democratizing Fundraising in the Arts and Culture' in William J Byrnes and Aleksandar Brkić (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Arts Management* (Routledge 2020).

of fundraising “ensure the sustainability of the fundraising efforts”.⁸⁶ When drafting a fundraising strategy, development officers are aware of the fact that different funders give for different reasons and adapt their strategy accordingly. In addition, as Turrini and others put it “Arts organizations typically follow three golden fundraising principles in their everyday practice”,⁸⁷ namely that “People give to People for other People”,⁸⁸ that people who are closer to the organization are the ones who are more prone to giving (the “constituency rule”)⁸⁹, and last but not least, that “arts organizations typically rely on their mission to attract and retain donors interested in the arts”⁹⁰ (the “mission rule”).

Digital technologies have had a significant impact on the world of fundraising, especially in the realm of individual giving. However, utilizing digital tools to increase fundraising income for arts organizations is not a separate task but rather complements the organization's overall fundraising strategy. Digital fundraising is closely related to offline fundraising and supports the goals and objectives of traditional fundraising methods. In other words, digital fundraising should always refer back to these goals and objectives.

In what follows, I try to explain how technology has impacted fundraising and how it can, and has been, used to bring more donors to arts organizations in general, and festivals, in particular. In essence, this chapter addresses the question of “*how to use digital technology to convert arts and culture audiences into donors*”.⁹¹

Before delving into the specific tools that digital technologies have brought to fundraising, it is important to highlight the interrelationship between digital marketing and digital fundraising. As stated by Bowcock in his report, the question is how to use digital technology to convert arts and culture audiences

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ Alex Turrini, B Kathleen Gallagher and Marta Massi, ‘The Impact of Digital Transformation on Fundraising for the Arts’ in Marta Massi, Marilena Vecco and Yi Lin (eds), *Digital transformation in the cultural and creative industries: production, consumption and entrepreneurship in the digital and sharing economy* (Routledge 2022).

⁸⁸ Henry A Rosso, *Achieving Excellence in Fund Raising* (1st edition, Jossey-Bass 1991).

⁸⁹ Michael J Worth, *Fundraising: Principles and Practice* (First edition, SAGE Publications, Inc 2015). Eugene R Tempel, Timothy L Seiler and Dwight F Burlingame, *Achieving Excellence in Fundraising* (4th edition, Jossey-Bass 2016).

⁹⁰ Turrini, Gallagher and Massi (n 86).

⁹¹ Matthew Bowcock, ‘Digital Giving in the Arts - Democratising Philanthropy’ (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport 2012) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/digital-giving-in-the-arts-democratising-philanthropy>>.

into donors. Therefore, the first step to a successful digital fundraising strategy is to build a strong audience base, which, as previously discussed, is marketing's main role. As we will see later, the key to a successful organization lies not only in the digitalization of specific aspects of its operations but also in the transformation to a digital culture that fosters collaboration and communication.

In Massi, Turrini, and Carbonare's words,

*The support of the marketing and public relations area is fundamental for successful fundraising. The link between fundraising and marketing is particularly true when the organizational structure and the proximity between the marketing and fundraising department are taken into consideration, which often depends on the same manager.*⁹²

2.4.2 The fundraising cycle

The fundraising cycle includes several steps, including researching and identifying prospects, cultivating prospects, soliciting gifts, acknowledging gifts and recognizing donors, and stewarding gifts and relationships with donors.⁹³ Fundraising professionals use an array of strategies and communications tools to facilitate each step of the fundraising cycle. According to Turrini, Gallagher, Massi, “*digital technologies offer complementary tools that substantially support arts organizations' offline fundraising strategies...*”⁹⁴

They enumerate the ways in which digital technologies do that: there are several digital tools that facilitate the identification and cultivation of prospects (what they refer to as “e-attract”), the transformation of these prospects into donors (what they refer to as “e-transform”), the recognition and thanking of the donors after a gift (what they refer to as “e-recognize”), the ongoing relationship with the donors (“e-retain”) and the gift solicitation and stewarding (what they refer to as “e-upgrade”).

⁹² Massi, Turrini and Mion Dalle Carbonare (n 84).

⁹³ Worth (n 88).

⁹⁴ Turrini, Gallagher and Massi (n 86).

For instance, arts organizations can attract new donors and cultivate relationships with existing donors through the use of social media, which can “*enhance social interactions between nonprofit organizations and prosocial donors or ticketholders*”.⁹⁵ The use of fundraising platforms (e.g. peer to peer fundraising) may “*satisfy arts patrons in their search for reputation from peers*”,⁹⁶ and donor management systems and AI coupled with e-newsletters or interactive reports can “*cultivate and turn ticketholders or free visitors into novel donors*”⁹⁷ as well as strengthen “*the relationship with constituents such as major leadership gift donors*”.⁹⁸

The list goes on; they argue that virtual walls “*might be forms of gift recognition resulting in higher donor retention rates*”,⁹⁹ while crowdfunding, e-appeals or mobile technologies “*might attract the interest and facilitate gifts or online donors who are not part of the arts’ folks but might be sensitive to the outcomes arts institutions aim at achieving inscribed in their overall social mission*”.¹⁰⁰

Researching and identifying prospects (e-attract)

There are several ways in which digital tools can help arts organizations attract new donors. According to Turrini, Gallagher and Massi,

*“New technologies have opened endless opportunities to attract new online donors (e-attract), who might not even be interested in the arts but in supporting some social or community project that an arts institution is carrying forward. Driving traffic to the arts institution donation webpage and increasing online visibility of arts institutions is the main step to attract new donors.”*¹⁰¹

More concretely, arts organizations can use Search Engine Optimization (SEO) techniques to make their website more visible and have it ranked higher in the organic Google search results. This means that by adapting their website’s content (either through quality blog posts, visuals, and videos), arts

⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*

organizations have the possibility to have their website appear in higher positions in Google search results, under keywords of their choice.

In addition to SEO, which is a cost-free way to make their website more visible, arts organizations may use paid advertisements and banners on third-party websites to direct visitors to their website. Both options were already discussed in the section on digital marketing communications (*Focus on websites*).

Arts organizations can also use social media tools to attract more audiences, who can potentially be transformed into donors. By using online ambassadors and influencers, arts organizations can gain access to these individuals' followers. However, the choice of individuals to associate with is tricky and important; arts organizations need to ensure that these people reflect and represent the organization's values and ethical standards.¹⁰²

Cultivation of prospects (e-transform)

In this fundraising stage, in an offline context, organizations build relationships with prospects by sharing the work that the organization does and learning more about potential donors. According to Kaiser and Egan, "*Cultivating new donors is the second step in the fundraising process. Just as it would be considered rude to walk up to someone you just met and ask them for money, it is incorrect to ask a new prospect for a contribution without building a relationship first*".¹⁰³

Cultivation is the longest step in the fundraising cycle. Digital technologies have, however, made this step more straightforward and less formal. One important element in this "digital cultivation" process is to understand the motivations of people who give; individuals' motivations "*are often the most complicated and difficult to understand*".¹⁰⁴ According to Kaiser and Egan:

"Our favorite, most loyal donors are those who give out of a love for our mission and the programs that embody that

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ Michael M Kaiser and Brett E Egan, *The Cycle: A Practical Approach to Managing Arts Organizations* (1st edition, Brandeis University Press 2013).

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

*mission. They simply believe we are doing the right thing for our community and want to be helpful; their greatest reward is the psychological contentment that comes from seeing our mission fulfilled".*¹⁰⁵

In the digital world, the cultivation process can be facilitated by using social media, building a solid e-mail list (compliant with data protection laws), sending e-newsletters, texts, and communicating the work of the organization. In addition, encouraging participation in (online) exclusive events or talks can be a way to build a loyal following who admires and supports the organization.

Given that people who buy tickets to art exhibitions are already aware of the organization, cultivating them should be a priority for arts organizations. Ultimately, ticket holders shall be cultivated to become members and then more regular donors.

Solicitation of gifts

This is the step in the fundraising cycle where the arts organization asks for a gift. This step is critical and how fundraising managers deal with it will determine, to a large extent, the success of the fundraising campaign. Arts organizations should, therefore, not move to this step lightly, or at least without carefully considering the prospect and the relationship that they have built with them.¹⁰⁶

The organization can send out fundraising e-mails or text messages, which should be carefully crafted and tailored to the specific audience. Additionally, these should be monitored to comply with data protection laws in any given country. A CRM information system is essential in these cases to have visibility over the number of e-mails sent by different departments and to coordinate between the marketing and fundraising (or “development”) departments.

Another popular way to attract funds to an organization is through the use of crowdfunding platforms. According to Belleflamme, crowdfunding is “a process aimed at raising external financing from a large audience (the crowd)

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*

*instead of soliciting a small group of sophisticated investors”.*¹⁰⁷ Crowdfunding can be a very useful fundraising tactic for festivals, as people are more likely to support specific events and, if done properly and accompanied by a solid and engaging communications plan, it can become an additional source of income.¹⁰⁸

Crowdfunding platforms have become widely popular over the last decade and revolutionized art patronage by democratizing fundraising and empowering donors.¹⁰⁹ According to Massi, Turrini and Mion Dalle Carbonare,

*Fundraising has been shifting from an activity that was once a prerogative of wealthy people to a participated process that can involve millions of people (e.g. crowdfunding). Once arts projects and artists were funded mainly by the aristocracy, popes, and the royalty, while now we are witnessing a fragmentation of the traditional patronage paradigm, which is spread out to different patrons who have an interest in the project. (...) while the classic concept of patronage involves a process where the rich exchange their material resources for a share of that intangible good, cultural credibility, crowdfunding functions as a more inclusive form of fundraising, leading to a democratization process”.*¹¹⁰

Stewardship - Acknowledging gifts and recognizing donors (e-recognize, e-retain, e-upgrade)

The last step in the fundraising cycle is stewardship and it involves not only acknowledging and thanking donors after a gift but also maintaining the relationship with them. It is a common theme in fundraising that acquiring new donors is way more difficult and expensive than maintaining the existing ones.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Belleflamme, Thomas Lambert and Armin Schwenbacher, 'Crowdfunding: Tapping the Right Crowd' [2012] SSRN Electronic Journal 58 <<http://www.ssrn.com/abstract=1836873>> accessed 28 December 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Kelly, 'Funding Your Festival' in Chris Newbold and others (eds), *Principles of Festival Management* (Goodfellow Publishers, Limited 2019).

¹⁰⁹ Turrini, Gallagher and Massi (n 86).

¹¹⁰ Massi, Turrini and Mion Dalle Carbonare (n 84).

In the digital sphere, recognizing gifts has become extremely easy and can be done in a timely fashion; by sending an e-mail and/or text message to thank the donor after the gift has been processed, the organization can ensure that the donor is appreciated and recognized.¹¹¹

Additional digital ways to recognize and acknowledge donors include virtual donor walls, namely virtual spaces where donors' names and their gifts are listed, and donor memorial websites, namely websites that recognize donors who passed away.¹¹²

When it comes to building an ongoing relationship with donors, digital technologies also offer great, and cost-effective, opportunities. Social media, blogs and e-newsletters allow the organization to inform and update donors on all new events, what is happening in the organization and general topics of their interest.

Additional tools can include sending "e-anniversary cards",¹¹³ offering virtual experiences (e.g., virtual visits to a museum's collection, online lectures and tutorials, reserved access to virtual libraries, concert streaming online amongst others) or engaging audiences through the use of proprietary apps (including gaming, and in general offering enriched content about the arts organization).¹¹⁴

As Turrini, Gallagher and Massi mention,

"Even if all these tools can be utilized to appeal for funds, the focus should remain on the institution and its accomplishments. In other words, all these online tools are not meant to immediately get donations but to cultivate and steward existing donors".¹¹⁵

Finally, organizations can use e-mail marketing to "upgrade" donors from either member to donors or from occasional donors to more regular ones. Additional tools that arts organizations can use to keep cultivating and, ultimately, upgrading their donors include "text-to-give appeals", whereby

¹¹¹ Turrini, Gallagher and Massi (n 86).

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*

donors respond to a text from the arts organization with a small donation, usually billed to the phone account.¹¹⁶ These texts can be very effective as they rely on the urgent character of the appeal and the small amount that the donor offers without going out of their way.

Matching gifts is another effective way of engaging current donors; the existing donor donates with the expectation that their gift will be doubled or tripled by the sponsoring institution or another company.¹¹⁷ The donor, therefore, sees the value of their gift rise exponentially, which can be very satisfying and engaging. The sense of community and the fact that another party also supports the same cause can make donors more committed to the organization. Last but not least, peer-to-peer fundraising campaigns can not only bring in much-desired donations but can leverage existing loyal followers and donors to bring in their contacts; the logic of peer-to-peer fundraising is that people are more eager to give if someone they know does so too. According to Turrini, Gallagher and Massi, this type of fundraising relies on “*social pressure or other online users or members and triggers imitative behaviour*”.¹¹⁸

Another attractive option for non-profit arts organizations is the use of Google Ad Grants, which is a service offered by Google to non-profits to help them spread their message and increase their impact. The offer includes a \$10,000 in-kind advertising credit per month for search ads shown on www.google.com.¹¹⁹

2.5 The digitalization of corporate functions

Digitalizing the corporate functions of arts organizations can have several benefits, including streamlining operations and increasing productivity and efficiency.¹²⁰ These functions, which encompass all “back-office” or supporting tasks, such as human resources/ workforce management, account and contract management, and subscription services, help support the organization and enable it to achieve its main mission. Even festivals, which are organizations

¹¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹¹⁹ <https://www.google.com/grants/>

¹²⁰ ‘Arts and Culture Digital Roadmap’ (n 21).

that employ people and have formal corporate structures, to some extent, can benefit from digitalizing these functions.

Stakeholder management services can also be considered part of its corporate functions. According to Singapore Arts Council's report, "*this stage covers the inbound resources received by arts and culture organizations and practitioners. Arts and culture organizations and practitioners can enhance their engagements and improve relationships with stakeholders through digitalization*".¹²¹ Volunteer management software can help manage incoming and outgoing volunteers, while donor management software can assist with fundraising functions, as described earlier.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

3 Questionnaire Results

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the digitalization tools and methods discussed in the previous section, I designed a questionnaire with relevant questions and distributed it among European photography festivals. There are several advantages to using an empirical method such as a questionnaire, including the researcher's ability to obtain participants' "insider point of view". Depending on the formulation of the questions (closed-format as opposed to open-format questions), the researcher can obtain comparable results. Furthermore, it is easier for participants to respond to a set of closed-format questions than to compose full answers. In my questionnaire, I included closed-format questions with a fixed set of responses, while also including some open-ended questions primarily aimed at understanding how festivals experienced the COVID-19 pandemic and to what extent this influenced their use of digital technologies.

The disadvantages of using a questionnaire as a research method should also be mentioned. One important caveat is that the participants answer questions from their point of view, which the researcher cannot verify or test. In addition, questionnaires rely on the participants' honesty and integrity. Some other factors that affect the quality of the data collected are that participants can choose not to answer some questions and give incomplete or inconsistent answers. Despite these challenges, choosing the questionnaire method for the type of research I set out to conduct was the most appropriate method as there is no other way to get information about how photography festivals have used digital technologies and how they structure their internal teams.

The questionnaire consisted of several sections, including an introduction asking for information about the festivals' identity and financial information, a section dedicated to questions about digitalization of art creation and presentation, a section about digital marketing, a section on digital fundraising, and a section about digitalization of corporate functions. The final section was dedicated to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the festivals' use of digital tools.

I submitted the questionnaire, in the form of a Google Form, to 80 festivals based in European cities, of which fourteen provided answers, one provided answers through a telephone interview, two replied saying that they had no time to dedicate to answering the questionnaire, and one replied saying that it was not active anymore. Unfortunately, the questionnaire could not be delivered to two other festivals for reasons that are unclear.

You can find the full questionnaire in the Annex section below. In the following sections, I present the findings of this survey.

3.1 Profile of festivals

The festivals that answered the questionnaire are all located in European cities, three in France, three in Germany, two in Portugal, two in Greece, one in the UK, one in Sweden, one in the Netherlands, one in Belgium and one in Luxembourg.

Most of the festivals questioned are relatively young, as they have been founded in the last 20 years (11 festivals were founded between 2001 and 2022, when the survey took place). Two festivals were launched in 1989, one festival in 1970 and one in 1988.

In terms of budget, the festivals can be divided into three categories¹²²:

- Small festivals (four), having a budget of less than €100.000
- Medium festivals (seven), having a budget of between €100.000 and €1.000.000
- Large festivals (two), having a budget of more than €1.000.000

I divided the festivals according to their revenue because financial resources seem to determine to a large extent the financial and human resources dedicated to digitally transforming their operations.

The number of visitors is also often correlated to the budget but not necessarily; for instance, the two festivals with the highest budgets also had a high number of visitors (namely 127.000 & 212.000 visitors) but a medium-budget festival (reported a budget of more than €100.000) stated that it had around 200.000 visitors. Two small festivals (with a budget of less than €100.000) reported between 10.000 and 21.000 visitors while medium festivals

¹²² Two festivals did not disclose their budget.

(budget between €100.000 and 1.000.000) reported between 3.000 and 26.000 visitors.

When asked to report their last edition's revenue, many festivals chose not to answer. One small festival stated that they do not yet have these numbers, while another reported a revenue of less than € 1.000. Most festivals that answered this question, reported a "revenue-to-budget ratio" varying between 16 and 20% while two outliers, a large and a small festival, reported a revenue-to-budget ratio of 52% and 60% respectively.

Festivals were also asked about when their latest edition took place and whether their festival was interrupted for any reason during their existence; eight reported that their last edition was in 2022, while six stated that their latest edition was in 2021.¹²³ Many festivals reported an interruption of their operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021 (seven), while others stated that there was no interruption but adjustments had to be made, such as organizing an online festival during those years or reducing their activities (five). Three festivals mentioned that there was no interruption.

3.2 Art creation and presentation

My goal in examining art creation and presentation at photography festivals was to determine whether they have incorporated digital art into their artistic programs and whether they have adopted digital tools for presenting these programs to their audiences.

Most of the festivals (12 out of 15) stated that they prioritize their physical presence and are not digital festivals. During an interview, one festival director emphasized the importance of having the audience physically present at the festival location as it formed a significant part of the overall festival experience. The director also mentioned that their attempt at running an online festival during the COVID-19 pandemic did not yield the desired results, and they preferred to bring the audience to their curated physical locations instead.

¹²³ One festival reported that their last edition is in 2023, which was not taken into consideration as it lies in the future.

Regarding the inclusion of digital art in their exhibitions, eight festivals sometimes include digital art (including one big and one small festival), one festival regularly does, and six of them never do.

When it comes to how the festivals present their exhibitions and include their audiences, eight festivals said that they do not offer online exhibitions, four do so only sometimes, while three do so regularly. What is interesting is that from the three who do so regularly, two of the festivals are of medium size and one is of small size, showing that the highest-budget festivals do not offer online exhibitions.

When it comes to offering virtual tours of physical exhibitions, 11 festivals said that they don't, two said they do so sometimes, while only three said they do so regularly. However, most of the festivals asked, do offer virtual workshops or webinars either regularly (three) or sometimes (six). Six festivals do not offer virtual webinars at all, including one big festival and two small ones.

The participants were also asked whether they use AR or VR technologies to organize exhibitions. 13 of them answered negatively while two medium-level ones said that they do so sometimes. Furthermore, during my research, a festival director emphasized that offering AR/VR or online exhibitions should not be done just for the sake of it, but rather as a way of adding value to the exhibition.

When it comes to using technology tools to improve their audience's diversity and inclusion (e.g., for vision impaired, disabled, elderly members of the audience), nine out of 15 answered that they do not, five do so sometimes and one does so regularly (a small festival). From a presentation point of view, festivals were asked to report whether they have an online archival system. Seven festivals have an online archival system for their art while eight don't.

3.3 Marketing

The use of digital tools in the field of marketing has been an ongoing topic for years now and a big topic in festival management. In my survey, I wanted to identify how advanced photography festivals are in their use of digital marketing tools. For instance, all festivals that participated in my survey, except one small one, have their own dedicated website. All are active on at least two social media platforms, the most popular being Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

The importance of digital marketing also becomes obvious from the fact that most festivals have dedicated marketing teams, either internal (seven) or external (two). Still, six out of the 15 festivals (including four medium-level, one small and one n/a) do not have a dedicated marketing team.

The festivals' approach to monitoring website visitor analytics for digital marketing varies. Out of the 15 festivals surveyed, eight (two big, four medium, one small) monitor website visitor analytics regularly, while six (two small, three medium, and one n/a) do so sometimes. One festival that does not have its website monitors social media analytics instead. In terms of using more advanced analytics software, only five festivals use it regularly, five use it sometimes, and four do not use it at all.

3.4 Fundraising

By integrating digital fundraising into my inquiry, I wanted to explore this newer field of digitalization and to what extent photography festivals have responded to the new developments. Most festivals do not seem to do so, with 14 out of 15 stating that they are not using any online fundraising platforms. Only one does. Also, 10 out of 15 festivals do not have a donation button on their website. Five do, of which one is small, two are medium, and one did not disclose their budget.

In addition, most festivals do not send fundraising e-mails (11 out of 15) and only four medium-sized ones send e-mails sometimes. Also, the crashing majority do not organize online fundraising events (13).

3.5 Corporate Functions & Stakeholder management

Regarding the corporate functions of the photography festivals, I aimed to understand their internal organization and operational structure. I asked whether they utilize HR Management Systems, Contract Management Systems, or Account Management Systems. The responses were largely negative: none of the festivals uses an HR management system, only one medium-sized festival uses a contract management system, and just two use an accounts management system. Only two festivals, and one partially, use online project management tools such as Asana and Trello.

In terms of stakeholder management, none of the festivals use Donor or Volunteer Management systems.

3.6 COVID-19

Finally, I asked the festivals to share their views on whether and to what extent the COVID-19 pandemic had impacted their use of digital technologies. Six festivals said that the pandemic had no impact on their use of digital tools (including two big ones). Three festivals mentioned that it had an impact on all the areas studied, while others mentioned art presentation (two) and marketing (one).

4 Discussion

In general, photography festivals seem to be slow in adopting digital technologies to create and present their art to wider audiences. In terms of artistic content, only a few festivals stated that they include digital art in their programming. This may have been a misleading question, as the definition of “digital photography” as part of digital art is not clear in the literature and is not understood the same way by everyone. Digital photography as a genre of photography refers to not only the use of the digital camera as a “tool”¹²⁴ but also photography that adopts the aesthetics and characteristics of new media art,¹²⁵ including amongst others, photography that exploits digital technologies for artistic purposes, or photography that merges new media with old media or even photography that challenges our understanding of a “unique” object.¹²⁶ Digital photography is therefore omnipresent but not acknowledged as separate from photography as a medium; interestingly enough, there are festivals entirely dedicated to analogue photography.¹²⁷

In addition, when it comes to using technology tools to engage broader audiences online or introduce more playful and interactive ways to present photography, such as AR or VR tools, most photography festivals have not taken that route. Given the event-based character of festivals, offering online exhibitions or virtual tours of physical exhibitions has not been a priority for festivals that wish to bring people on location and focus on creating a live experience for the audience. “Gaming” with AR apps or other interactive activities could form part of the experience on location, but still many festivals have not invested in this. It derives from the study that the festivals’ priority has been to present photography in a more traditional way which implies physical

¹²⁴ Christiane Paul, *Digital Art* (Third edition, Thames & Hudson 2015).

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Bilyeu and others, ‘*Understanding New Media Art*’ (Portland Community College 2022). Available online <https://openoregon.pressbooks.pub/understandingnewmediaarts/>

¹²⁶ *ibid.* According to Bilyeu and others, viewing digital photography as part of new media art makes us think about the following questions: 1. *How does photography expand the definition of art?* 2. *How does photography democratize access to art?* 3. *How do photographers exploit new technology for artistic purposes?* 4. *How does photography merge new media with old media?* 5. *How does photography capture a moment in time, or expresses time in other ways?* 6. *How are photographs replicable? How can images be copied multiple times and exist in different states?* 7. *What other elements of New Media Art are found in photography?*

¹²⁷ For a list of analogue photography festivals: <https://www.analogphoto.net>

presence. However, given the current trend of digitalization and the increasing use of technology, it may be worth considering incorporating online exhibitions or virtual tours as an additional offering. This could potentially broaden the festival's reach and engage audiences who are unable to attend in person.

On this point it is interesting to note that another pattern emerged through the survey; medium-level festivals (namely festivals with a budget between €100.000 & 1.000.000) are the most innovative ones, with more established festivals taking fewer risks. One way to see this is that smaller and younger festivals are driven by innovation and are launched in order to bring something new to the festival landscape. Given the high competition for funding and visitors, these younger festivals are taking more risks to differentiate themselves from others.

When it comes to marketing, it derives from the survey that most festivals use in one way or another, digital tools to communicate with their audience, advertise their events or share information about their mission, vision, and organization in general. It is therefore surprising that, still, six out of the 15 festivals do not have a dedicated marketing team, implying that people tasked with other responsibilities also deal with marketing. This reveals that even though digital marketing is a priority for photography festivals, it is not always done by specialized professionals, which may have adverse effects on the overall performance of online and social media marketing.

The reasons behind this may include a lack of resources, resulting in few permanent staff being assigned a variety of tasks and responsibilities, with more detailed or technical being left out (such as monitoring website or social media analytics, which many festivals only do “sometimes”). One solution would be to hire specialized volunteers to support these functions, providing them with the opportunity to gain experience while supporting and professionalizing the marketing function. Alternatively, festivals could invest some of their budgets in a specialized consultant who could structure the marketing team and train the staff. Ongoing training is also important for non-specialized staff, given the constant developments in the field of digital marketing.

A closely related function to digital marketing, namely digital fundraising seems to be an untapped resource for photography festivals. Most festivals that answered the survey stated that they do not use online platforms for fundraising

and do not send fundraising e-mails. A lack of expertise and knowledge about fundraising platforms and fundraising, in general, may be the reason behind this reluctance to resort to alternative sources of funding.

Furthermore, some of the biggest and more established festivals are primarily government funded with multiple partners and media partners, so additional fundraising efforts may not be deemed necessary. In addition, government funding is a long process and implies a lot of reporting and administrative tasks, which take up a lot of the employees' time. These could be reasons that deter organizations from looking for alternative sources of funding.

However, relying solely on government funding can limit the festivals' flexibility and creative freedom. By diversifying their funding sources, festivals can have more control over their programming and events. Online fundraising platforms can provide opportunities for smaller donors to contribute to the festival's success. Additionally, sponsorships from businesses and partnerships with media outlets can provide additional financial support.

A well-organized fundraising function should therefore be part of every festival. Sources of funding shall be diversified, and this can be key to the long-term financial sustainability of the festival. This requires an initial investment in specialized human resources (or external support) in order to explore all possible ways of funding and revenue structures that fit the festival's business model and vision. Apart from government grants (incl. central, local government and European grants), there are ways to leverage online digital tools to attract more donors.

Additionally, the number of visitors is not necessarily correlated to the budget a festival has, as we see smaller budget festivals having a large number of visitors, compared to festivals with a much higher budget. The capacity to attract such a broad number of audiences with smaller budgets is a great opportunity for festivals to build their audience of loyal and returning visitors. By investing in digital technologies including marketing and fundraising, but also professionalizing some of their operations, they could increase their impact and secure their financial viability.

Overall, the questionnaire results show that many festivals are still not fully professionalized in terms of their business structure. This lack of strategy may lead to missed opportunities for fundraising and create difficulties in

recruiting and retaining volunteers, which are crucial to the success of many festivals. A well-structured donor management system can help identify and maintain relationships with donors, as well as track donations and donor preferences. Similarly, a volunteer management system can help track volunteer preferences and availability, as well as provide a platform for communication and recognition.

Investing in these systems may require an initial cost, but it can lead to long-term benefits such as increased revenue, better communication with donors and volunteers, and a more streamlined process for managing these important aspects of the festival. It is important for festivals to not overlook the importance of professionalizing their business structure and implementing effective donor and volunteer management systems, in order to ensure their long-term success and sustainability.

5 Conclusion

The research question I posed at the beginning of my enquiry was whether and to what extent photography festivals in Europe have adopted digital technologies and in which fields of their operations. With this research question in mind, quite broad and open-ended I started off a quest to not only understand the literature around the digital transformation of cultural and arts organizations, and more specifically festivals, but also to combine it with an empirical approach.

Exploring the digital transformation of photography festivals is a useful and enriching quest and valuable not only *per se* but also for the implications such digitalization may have on the success of the festivals. It also reveals to what extent photography festivals can follow new developments in business models and in the cultural sphere, discussions and research on the conception and presentation of art but also in business operations.

In other words, it reveals all the different areas in which festivals have to excel in, in order to succeed in the new, digital landscape. As Jordan rightfully puts it “*producers of cultural and social goods, festival leaders and managers operate in a complex environment, juggling artistic judgments, and social and community demands, at the same time as finding ways to balance the budget or make a profit*”.¹²⁸

Which leads me to an additional research question that I posed at the beginning of my thesis, which now needs to be answered; What are the criteria of a successful festival? Is it its longevity? Is it their ability to increase their “revenue-to-budget ratio”? Is it the number of visitors they attract or is it their ability to offer a new and fresh approach to photography? And more than this, does digital transformation contribute to this success?

In the business field, success has been till now defined as “financial” success, namely financial sustainability associated with profit. With the rise in popularity of social enterprises, this model has been challenged with other elements such as social or environmental impact counting towards the

¹²⁸ Jennie Jordan, ‘Festival Leadership, Structures and Roles’ in Chris Newbold and others (eds), *Principles of Festival Management* (Goodfellow Publishers, Limited 2019).

assessment of an organization's "success". However, in the non-profit and arts and cultural world, the concept of "success" still remains notoriously elusive; as the questionnaire results reveal, only a few festivals manage to generate some revenue, with most relying on external funding and donations to continue their venture.

Given that festivals are "social and cultural goods", namely "*products and services you buy because they have a symbolic meaning for you*",¹²⁹ success does not only refer to financial success or artistic innovation. According to one account of "success" for festivals, which can be adapted for photography festivals discussed herein,

"The most successful ones that come to mind though aren't the ones who have the biggest line-ups or the ones that have the huge sponsorship deals (and probably have a reasonable sum of money behind them to avoid the threat of bankruptcy). They're the ones who have been run independently and haven't lost sight of what they envisioned at the very beginning. It's common practice to set out your business Vision, Mission and Values in any industry, but festivals aren't just business, they are life events that form personal and long-lasting memories".¹³⁰

This extract comes from Rosanna Dean, an events manager at the Tank Museum Dorset, and sheds light on a very important aspect of festivals, and the environment in which they operate. Festivals are, by definition, experiential events, that mean something to the attendants but are also economic events, which have economic repercussions on the community in which they are active. They can build or re-build a city's image which can also lead to economic benefits for local economies (e.g., hotels, restaurants etc.).¹³¹ It becomes clear that identifying which factors determine the success of a festival, especially in a digital environment, is a difficult task which must consider all these aspects.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ *ibid.*

Moreover, understanding the complex and multi-stakeholder environment in which festivals are called to function is an additional success factor.

Technology and digitalization are part of this environment and shall be taken into account when assessing, not only the external environment but also the strengths and weaknesses of each organization. Technology developments can be both an opportunity and a challenge for festivals, while the level of digital transformation can be either a strength or a weakness. As festivals now compete internationally for innovation, consumers' attention and funding, they can leverage technology in order to gain an advantage.

Ultimately, the success of the photography festivals will not only be determined by their full digital transformation (which also depends on funding, resources etc.) but on their attitude, organizational culture, and adaptability, which are fundamental principles of all successful organizations. What I mean by that is that full digital transformation is not a sign of a successful festival *per se*; instead, a thorough understanding and analysis of the vision and mission of the festival as well as of the strategic decision to digitally transform some of its functions will ultimately determine their success. I think that while some functions are not essential to be digitalized, there are some operations that should be at least partially digitalized independent of the size of the organization, including the use of digital marketing and digital fundraising tools, as well as the use of digital tools for art presentation and creation.

In the end, the digital transformation of festivals should only be a tool that can lead festivals into a new era of the economy focusing on experience, interaction, and co-creation. I think that success will ultimately be determined by how well photography festivals understand and anticipate changes in the economic and social context in which they operate and, as Dean mentioned, how loyal they are to their vision. I shall add to that, how innovative and successful they are in communicating their vision to their audience.

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7 Appendix

Questionnaire

About you

- Please state your festival's name:
- Where is your festival based?
- What is your target audience, if any?
- How would you describe the identity of your festival?
- When was your festival's first edition?
- When was your festival's last edition?
- What was your latest edition's budget?
- What was your latest edition's income?
- How many visitors did your latest edition attract?
- Was the operation of your festival uninterrupted throughout the years and if not, what were the reasons for its temporary pause?

Presentation of art/artworks

- Do you offer online streaming of your exhibitions?
Yes – regularly No – never Sometimes
- Do you use AR or VR to organize virtual exhibitions?
Yes – regularly No – never Sometimes
- Do you offer virtual tours of your physical exhibitions?
Yes – regularly No – never Sometimes
- Do you organize webinars or virtual workshops?
Yes – regularly No – never Sometimes

- Do you offer technology solutions to include the audience's vision impaired, disabled, elderly, etc?

- | | | | |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| | Yes – regularly | No – never | Sometimes |
| ○ Are you an online festival? | | | |
| | Yes - fully | Yes – partially | No |
| ○ Do you specifically include digital art in your exhibitions? | | | |
| | Yes – regularly | No – never | Sometimes |
| ○ Do you have an online archival system for your art? | | | |
| | Yes | No | Other |

Marketing

- | | | | |
|--|-----------------|----------------|-----------|
| ○ Do you have a website specifically dedicated to your festival? | | | |
| | Yes | No | Other |
| ○ Do you have social media accounts? | | | |
| • Facebook | | | |
| • Instagram | | | |
| • Twitter | | | |
| • LinkedIn | | | |
| • Snapchat | | | |
| • TikTok | | | |
| • Any other: | | | |
| ○ Do you have a dedicated digital marketing team? | | | |
| | Yes – internal | Yes – external | No |
| ○ Do you monitor website visitor analytics? | | | |
| | Yes – regularly | No – never | Sometimes |
| ○ Do you use analytics software? | | | |
| | Yes – regularly | No – never | Sometimes |

Fundraising

- | | | | |
|--|-----|----|-----------|
| ○ Are you using online fundraising platforms? | | | |
| | Yes | No | Sometimes |
| ○ If your answer was yes, which platforms are you using: | | | |
| • Donorbox | | | |
| • Gofundme | | | |

- GlobalGiving
 - IndieGogo
 - Kickstarter
 - Patreon
 - Crowdfunder
 - Fundable
 - Mightycause
 - Bonfire
 - Fundly
 - Facebook fundraising
 - Other
- What is your online fundraising focus?
 - Crowdfunding
 - Peer-to-peer fundraising
 - Text-to-give donations
 - Recurring donations
 - Membership
 - Donation matching
 - other
 - Do you have an online donation possibility/button on your website?

Yes	No	
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 - Do you organize online fundraising events?

Yes – regularly	No – never	Sometimes
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 - Do you send fundraising e-mails?

Yes – regularly	No – never	Sometimes
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Corporate functions

- Do you use a digital HR management system?

Yes	No
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- Do you use a digital workforce management system?
 Yes No
- Do you use a digital Contract Management system (including insurance)?
 Yes No
- Do you use a digital account Management system?
 Yes No
- Do you use a digital project Management platform/application?
 Yes No
- If you answered yes to the previous question, please indicate which platform you currently use
 - Trello
 - Asana
 - Zoho projects
 - Wrike
 - Basecamp
 - Microsoft projects
 - Jira
 - LiquidPlanner
 - Other

Stakeholder management

- Do you use a digital donor management system?
 Yes No
- Do you use a digital volunteer management system?
 Yes No

Closing question

- Did the COVID-19 pandemic have an impact on your use of digital technologies? If yes, in which of the areas mentioned in this questionnaire?
 - Presentation of art
 - Marketing
 - Fundraising
 - Corporate functions
 - Stakeholder management
 - All of the above
 - COVID-19 had no impact on our use of digital technologies
 - Other
- Please feel free to give us more information about how COVID-19 has impacted your use of digital technologies