CultureCase

Social media can increase engagement with museum collections

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Summary

This paper explores the potential for social media to democratise access and increase participation with museums. The study looked at the Facebook posts of nine Italian archaeological museums over the course of one year – the content of the posts as well as the engagement they generated. It found that information about a museum's upcoming programme was not likely to engage users online. Posts about the stories and contemporary relevance of museum collections did attract attention and interaction, suggesting that social media is a complementary channel to on-site learning and enjoyment of the collections themselves.

All the posts were assigned to one of six categories

These were: 'Cultural Encounters' (posts about a special museum event involving an important project or a distinctive guest); 'History Today' (posts highlighting the collection's connection to a current perception or issue); 'Museum Programme' (talking about the museum's upcoming events); 'Open Museum' (announcing events with unusual museum opening times for things like "Lates" or concerts); 'Symbolic Artwork' (posts on the stories of iconic or curious objects from the museum's permanent collections); and 'Exhibitions' (posts that refer to temporary exhibitions or special displays).

The engagement level for each post was calculated from a combination of likes, shares, comments and reactions

The more online followers a museum had the greater the number of posts it tended to make. This relationship did not extend to engagement levels. The museum with the largest online following generated only two interactions per 1,000 followers, while those with the smallest produced twelve interactions per 1,000 followers.

Museums' use of social media was not strategic or efficient

Six of the nine museums concentrated their social media efforts on engaging with their online community in themes where engagement is low. Symbolic Artwork posts were most likely to increase engagement, History Today and Exhibitions also had above-average levels of engagement. By contrast, Open Museum, Museum Programme and Cultural Encounters had below-average levels of engagement.

Keywords

social media **museum** **Italy**

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