

Digital Audience as an Element of a Digital Strategy of Cultural Institutions

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Introduction

The digital transformation of cultural institutions is a phenomenon that has been increasingly discussed in recent years (e.g. Tim et al. 2018; de Bernardi et al 2019; Pöllmann & Herrmann 2019a; Massi et al. 2020; JoCMaCP 2021). At the same time, however, it is also a process that has been underway for many years and is not new at its core. Due to the long time we have been dealing with digital transformation processes, the term "post-digital phase" is also used in the discussion (Mäenpää & Suominen 2021, p.15).

Since around 2000, new digital communication structures of global polylogs have developed with the emergence of social media. Around 2010, this development already led to a strong discussion of digitization in cultural management - at that time under the term Web 2.0 and social media, less under the term digital transformation (e.g. Scheuer & Spiller 2010; Janner et al. 2011; Henze 2011). At that time, the focus was on the new possibilities for exchange between the cultural sector and visitors, especially from a marketing perspective.

What has changed now is that today it is not just about the digitalization of production conditions and framework conditions of cultural management. What is special about the current debate is that it is now about digital arts or the offerings of cultural institutions, and thus the offerings of cultural institutions are changing. Especially theaters, orchestras and museums, whose core offerings are analog services, the new digital possibilities raise many questions. This is even more urgent for club events and festivals, which essentially live from the gathering of people, which can only be virtualized to a very limited extent.

The audience has also changed and undergone a transformation process by significantly expanding its own digital competence and acceptance - not least during the time in the pandemic. Thus, new digital offerings are now meeting a new (digital) audience.

The aim of this article is to give a concise outline the potential of digital audiences, embedded in considerations of fields of action for a digital strategy of cultural institutions.

Digital strategy

Since digital cultural management issues are no longer primarily about individual tools to solve specific problems, but rather about the transformation of the entire institution and the interlocking of different digital practices, the institution as a whole should be considered first.

For a holistic approach to developing a digital strategy for cultural institutions, a canvas model was published in 2019 (Pöllmann & Herrmann, 2019b). This will be outlined below in an expanded form in order to situate the considerations of digital offerings and the digital audience in the context of a digital strategy. The canvas defines eight fields of action for which management decisions must be made. In some fields, the scope for decision-making is more restricted, for example, by legal framework conditions (e.g., in questions of data protection), while in others important fundamental decisions have to be made, such as in the positioning of the institution as a whole. Figure 1 shows the digital strategy canvas.

Vision and objectives of the cultural institution		Digital positioning and digital brand	
internal perspective: (digital) working principles and forms of organization	Offers from the cultural sector digital core services	target audiences - visitors on site - digital audience > reach > diversity > participation	
data protection and data usage	digital benefits	digital communication - own channels - earned media - paid media	
digital infrastructure			

Fig.1: Digital strategy canvas for cultural institutions

This form of representation was chosen to support agile processes of idea and concept development within workshops. It is suitable for use in joint brainstorming sessions or design thinking sprints and can be used as a structural aid at an on-site meeting or decentrally online. In addition to this practice-relevant approach, the structure of a canvas is also intended to illustrate that a digital strategy or a digital transformation process of cultural enterprises is not based on a clear linear plan. Rather, the areas of action in the canvas are interrelated and interdependent: the content of a cultural institution, for example, determines its orientation and positioning, which in turn determines communication and the audience. Despite the interconnectedness of the named fields of action, the structure shown is not arbitrary - of course, considerations about an institution's vision and goals must be made before decisions are made about work structure, data protection, or digital infrastructure.

For a better understanding of the content of the canvas model, the eight areas are briefly explained (Pöllmann 2020).

Vision and objectives

The impact of digital transformation on all areas of society is of such intensity that it has long since ceased to be a question of individual instruments, but rather of fundamental questions about an institution's own working culture and core values. If these questions are not clarified at an early stage, cultural institutions repeatedly run the risk of paralyzing fundamental discussions in the context of comparatively uncomplicated projects and plans. A vision is therefore also a management tool that defines a jointly agreed attitude and objective for dealing with digitization in an institution. For example, the question of how openly one deals with one's own digital data can be discussed. In an *open policy*, should all digitized material be made available free of charge, or are there access restrictions because an open policy model may not be compatible with economic goals?

Also of particular relevance is the attitude toward the (digital) audience: Is the audience only an addressee and consumer or recipient of offerings, or an equal partner and co-producer (see comments below on digital audience)?

Digital positioning

The relevance of strategic positioning based on a unique selling proposition is not new for cultural institutions and an established part of strategic marketing. With digital offerings, many cultural institutions are now developing an audience that may no longer visit an institution on site and only experience it virtually or online. This leads to the question of how a cultural institution wants to position itself, especially in the context of seemingly endless global competition from other institutions. After all, a music school that corona-conditionally provided its students with learning videos on YouTube suddenly finds itself compared with countless other tutorial providers, and a museum's digital collection is just a click away from the collections of numerous museums worldwide. So what does this mean for a digital cultural brand and its (re-)positioning? The conclusion of this paper goes takes up this question again later on.

Digital cultural services

The core of a cultural organization's digital strategy is its cultural products. These do not necessarily have to be digital themselves, but can also be better presented through digital additions. In recent years, two main approaches have been observed: On the one hand, a

technology-driven approach, in which new technologies have been used to explore the potential of the new possibilities in a practical, experimental way. On the other hand, the content-driven approach, where existing content could be better communicated through digital tools. In this context, for example, the development of digital collections of museums is obvious, since often most of the collection is stored in archives and is not freely accessible.

Ideally, when digital cultural services were developed, content was made accessible in a way that also aligned with the needs of the target audiences. This was certainly not always the case. During the pandemic, it was obvious to offer stage programs such as theater performances or concerts as (live) streams. This form of telemedial availability is not new, as stage programs have been broadcast on television for years. However, a pure documentation of stage events is not promising and would not meet with a great response even with most sports broadcasts - imagine, for example, the broadcast of a soccer or field hockey game shown only from the long shot and without commentary. Precisely because the atmosphere and aura of the live moment on site cannot be transmitted well via audio-visual media, a digital offering must provide more than just limited documentation.

Structurally, too, there are more possibilities for digital cultural programs than the selective transmission of individual performances. For example, the first theaters are developing their own digital sections and producing digital cultural products specifically for these sections, as can be seen at the German theaters in Augsburg or Ingolstadt.

A great potential that also has a significant impact on the digital product is the interaction with the digital audience. In most streaming formats, the audience is ascribed a passive role. Unlike a cinema or television broadcast, there is at least still the possibility of commenting in real time. However, the possibilities for interaction go far beyond this. Thus, the above-mentioned attitude question of how one would like the audience to behave also arises in the development of formats. An active audience will not necessarily appear suddenly, but is the result of an evolving relationship between the cultural institution and its interested parties. Thus, community management as part of communication policy lays the foundation for a participatory audience.

Communication

The digital transformation of cultural institutions has often been equated with the use of digital communication channels such as social media. Of course, the digital transformation of cultural

organizations encompasses much more, considering, for example, long-established digital lighting and sound technology. Nevertheless, digital communication plays a central role in communicating the new products, because it provides the necessary communication channels. In the last 15 years, versatile possibilities have developed for dialog, interaction with interested parties and potential visitors, as well as for the mediation of cultural products. For this reason, the communication channels of cultural institutions should not be reduced to tasks of advertising. For cultural institutions, communication channels are more than just a part in the "digital visitor journey". Rather, they enable content that goes far beyond announcements to be made available to a digital audience that may not have the opportunity to visit an institution on site. Thus, communication channels such as websites or social media presences are an important part of the digital infrastructure of cultural institutions.

Digital infrastructure

The need for digital infrastructure can be broken down into three areas: Firstly, infrastructure for internal work processes such as cloud services and internal communication systems that are not perceived by an institution's visitors. Next, digital infrastructure is needed for the organization of the on-site visit, which also supports the accessibility and the mediation of the cultural performance, such as digital ticketing systems or digital audio guides. The third area comprises the technical infrastructure for the production of digital products that are perceived indirectly by visitors through their results, such as streams.

The need for and the design of the digital infrastructure go hand in hand with the organization of the internal mode of operation.

Internal processes

Most of the discussion about digital transformation of cultural enterprises focuses on the new products. However, just as significant and relevant for digital cultural management is the changed organization of internal processes. Departments are becoming teams, processes are to become flexible and agile, and the pandemic has introduced decentralized structures through home office work in many places. In addition, cultural institutions are facing a generational change and with younger cultural managers come people with changed values (Mandel, 2020) and priorities, which will have an impact on the culture of management in cultural management. These changes are associated with very practical challenges - on the one hand, there are fears of job losses in some cases, while on the other hand, a rebound effect can currently rather be observed, since digitization is creating numerous additional tasks - for example, through the new digital divisions.

The above-mentioned important issues of digital infrastructure are also far from being resolved in all institutions, as people often work with their own equipment according to the "bring your own device" approach. This was particularly the case with home office work. However, this way of working makes it difficult to establish uniform standards, and in the worst case scenario, different software components with unclear security standards are used, which makes the institutions' commitment to data protection a challenge.

Data protection and data security

Every institution has its own interest in the security of its data and the associated feasibility of its work. The options for handling users' data depend on individual legal regulations, which sometimes differ significantly from country to country.

An interface arises between the handling of data and the attitude or vision of a cultural institution, because ultimately it is a matter of deciding how much data sovereignty an institution grants to its stakeholders. On the one hand, it is fair to hold back with regard to one's own audience. On the other hand, digital audiences in particular offer special potential for understanding and getting to know visitors much better than is possible on the basis of random audience surveys.

Digital audience

The new offerings transmitted through digital channels, such as streams, online collections or virtual worlds, lead to a new kind of audience: The digital audience. This holds great potential for communicating cultural content to an expanded audience in new ways, as will be shown by three key dimensions of potential (Pöllmann 2021):

(1) Worldwide target groups for digital offerings

Digital content can be accessed anywhere in the world, which greatly expands the potential audience. This is particularly true for music and art, which can be received regardless of language barriers. In addition, the products are not rival goods, i.e., users do not influence each other and everyone can have a "front-row seat".

The reach may also be extended by giving educational institutions such as schools easier access to the digital performances and formats and making it easier to integrate them into their events. Field trips are not intended to be replaced by digital formats. Rather, this is intended to increase the quality and quantity of engagement with cultural content and thus also contribute to cooperative audience development.

(2) Reduction of barriers through individualization

In addition, digital products offer numerous individualization options depending on the needs of the user: from adjusting the volume, to the character size of the typography, to addressing the audience in multiple languages. The latter is possible, for example, through the insertion of translations or picture-in-picture formats with sign language interpreters, which enables a significantly more diverse audience to access the offerings and reduces access barriers.

(3) Audience Generated Content: Audience Participation

Digital formats also lead to greater potential for interaction between a cultural institution and its digital audience. This could make streams much more than a documentation of a stage program that was actually created for a different medium (live on site). This would be an important step towards the development of digital cultural performances as an art form in their own right.

At the latest with the establishment of social media, the role of users has changed: Instead of passively receiving, they can actively participate. Not everyone takes advantage of this opportunity, but the abundance of user-generated content - although its quality is very heterogeneous - shows the diversity of creators.

Holst also calls for an expansion of the inside-out orientation of cultural production, as the production of artistic performances is no longer subject to the sole control of cultural institutions, but is increasingly becoming the subject of co-creative negotiation processes (Holst 2021, p. 32). Active participation does not always have to lead immediately to a new value creation accessible to third parties. One could say, "the work emerges in the screen of the viewer." An active intervention already arises through the individual adjustment of the volume or (in the case of a recording) the repetition or skipping of a passage, as this sometimes significantly changes the staging or experience with a work. In addition to these subtle interventions, there are, of course, completely different approaches to the involvement of visitors through comments, decisions and other contributions, such as in 2008 with the "crowdcuration" exhibition "Click!" of the Brooklyn Museum in New York, in 2020 with the action #Vorstellungsänderung of the Burg Theater in Vienna or in 2020 the interactive children's theater project and digital escape room Nibelungenpunkt.de.

Conclusion

The preceding remarks show that the digital transformation of cultural institutions must be managed from a holistic, strategic perspective, as the individual areas affected by digitization are interrelated. Through the digital divisions, the various user dimensions of cultural events

are served with varying intensity - for example, personal contact with other visitors and multisensory experiences are significantly less pronounced in digital formats than in an on-site visits. On the other hand, content is becoming even more important. As mediators of cultural content, the institutions are becoming stronger educational brands than before and can expand their positioning as cooperation partners for other educational institutions.

In addressing digital target groups, however, cultural institutions are now also competing with other media formats that, for example, are courting viewers with their streaming offerings.

Cultural institutions are thus developing into media brands themselves to a certain extent.

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