

Article

Balancing Tradition and Digitalization: Enhancing Museum Experiences in the Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract

This study analyzes how museums in Brașov County integrated digital technologies into their activities during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on online communication and audience interaction. This research is based on a mixed-methods approach, including content analysis, semi-structured interviews with museum representatives, and a questionnaire applied to the visiting public. The aim is to identify the digital strategies used, the challenges encountered, and visitors' perceptions regarding the usefulness of these tools. The results indicate an accelerated but uneven adoption of digital technologies, influenced by available resources, internal competencies, and institutional support. Frequent online interaction is positively correlated with the perceived quality of digital content, and openness to virtual activities is higher among younger and more educated audiences. Identified limitations include the lack of specialized personnel, reduced budgets, and administrative difficulties. This study emphasizes the need for institutional reforms and investments in digitalization to ensure the sustainability of the digital transition, without losing the value of the physical museum experience.

Keywords: museum digitalization; virtual experiences; user-centered design; organizational adaptation; digital–traditional integration; visitor satisfaction



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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted societal norms, accelerating the adoption of digital alternatives across multiple domains, including education, entertainment, and services. Institutions that rely on physical presence, such as museums, were particularly affected by restrictions on mobility and public gatherings. As a result, museums were compelled to adapt rapidly, shifting from traditional, in-person exhibitions to digital formats.

This transition posed unique challenges for museums, which traditionally rely on the materiality of historical artifacts and physical interaction. The shift to digital environments required both infrastructural changes and a redefinition of the museum's role in a digitally saturated cultural landscape [1,2]. Situated between the preservation of the past and the innovation required by modern technology, museums have had to navigate a complex reorientation toward online visibility and engagement.

This study examines how museums in Braşov County, Romania, responded to the challenges brought about by the pandemic. In line with broader European trends, these institutions were forced to reassess their operational strategies to remain relevant. This involved not only adopting virtual exhibitions and online communication channels but also rethinking their position as cultural stakeholders in an increasingly competitive digital environment [3].

While digitalization has expanded outreach and increased access to cultural content, it has also exposed critical gaps in digital infrastructure, human resources, and institutional flexibility. Particularly in underfunded or regionally governed museums, these limitations have hindered sustainable digital integration. The role of the museum visitor has also shifted from passive observer to active participant, requiring more personalized and interactive experiences [4,5].

Though museum digitalization predates the pandemic, the health crisis served as a catalyst, accelerating existing trends and forcing rapid innovation. Digital technologies emerged as essential tools for maintaining public engagement and institutional visibility when physical access was no longer possible [6,7].

Since the late decades of the 20th century, museums have begun to use technology for administrative and marketing purposes through electronic brochures, databases, or digital catalogs [7]. Over time, digitalization has expanded to all museum functions: from conservation and research to exhibition, education, and public communication [8,9]. The pandemic has turned this trend into a strategic necessity, with museums developing online collections, 360° virtual tours, interactive exhibitions, and educational workshops conducted in the digital space.

Li et al. [10] emphasize that digitalization has allowed museums to extend the visitor experience beyond the physical boundaries of the institution, offering global access, round-the-clock availability, and customization opportunities. This ability to overcome temporal and spatial limitations has been described by Navarrete [11] as a “revolution without walls”, whereby museums become hybrid spaces built around the concept of an extended experience.

Conceptually, contemporary museology has undergone a significant mutation, shifting from an object-oriented vision to one centered on the visitor. Research by Gensler Research and UNESCO [12] (2020) reveals that the future of museums will be shaped by interactivity, customization, and community participation. This direction is also supported by De Bernardi & Gilli [13], who state that digitalization can transform the museum into an active player in the information society, capable of analyzing the emotions, preferences, and behaviors of the public in real time.

This democratization of museum authority involves a new dialogical approach, where the public participates in constructing meanings rather than just receiving them [11]. In this equation, the role of the curator is redefined: they become a mediator between heritage, technology, and the user, assuming increased responsibility in constructing digital narratives [14].

Google Arts & Culture offers a prominent example of a global platform that connects museums and audiences through virtual tours, thematic exhibitions, and open-access educational content. Other international examples include:

- National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art—Korea, which has launched digital guided tours and online symposiums.
- Leventis Gallery—Cyprus, which has significantly expanded its presence on Facebook, YouTube, and SoundCloud.
- European museums that have integrated augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) in educational exhibitions [15].

Some argue that social media (Instagram, Facebook, YouTube) has become an essential communication channel, allowing museums to expand their audience and stimulate participatory engagement. Although the opportunities are evident, digitalization is not without obstacles [16–18]. Weber [19] identifies three critical directions in evaluating museum performance online: reach, engagement, and ROI. Vlachvei and Notta [20] complement these with dimensions such as digital effort intensity (number of posts), content richness (text, image, video), and responsiveness to feedback.

Styliani et al. [15] warn that virtual museums cannot completely replace the physical experience. Online tours offer access, but they cannot fully replicate tactile sensations, atmosphere, and direct contact with cultural objects. Therefore, specialists recommend a complementary strategy—a hybrid model that combines the narrative strength of the physical experience with the advantages of digital accessibility [10].

Specialized literature supports the digital transition of museums as an opportunity for modernization and democratization, but it also emphasizes the limits and necessary conditions for sustainable impact: managerial vision, dedicated resources, digital infrastructure, and legislative adaptation [21]. This study fits within this theoretical framework, providing an applied contribution on how a local museum system—that of Brasov County—responds to these challenges and proposes a balanced path between tradition and innovation.

Although the literature documents the implementation of various digital tools—from virtual tours to social media campaigns—there is limited research that comprehensively analyzes how real museums, in a local context with financial limitations, manage to balance traditional practices with digital innovation in the post-pandemic period [22].

Facebook is widely used by museums for online promotion due to its flexibility and ability to foster group formation and sharing. It serves as the primary hub for audience engagement, while YouTube is less utilized, often reserved for specific content types like video storytelling or event coverage [23,24]. Posts unrelated to core museum activities (e.g., holiday greetings, celebrity visits) often generate higher engagement than collection-focused content, mirroring findings that posts about culture, nature, or popular themes attract more likes and shares [25,26]. Higher posting frequency and regular updates are strongly linked to increased user engagement (likes, shares, comments [27,28]).

Many museums still approach social media as a broadcast tool, reflecting their offline identity rather than fostering genuine online interaction [29,30]. Many organizations struggle with insufficient funding, which restricts their ability to invest in specialized staff or advanced digital tools needed for effective adaptation to new communication landscapes [31,32]. Instead of dedicated digital marketing teams, organizations often rely on existing personnel to manage online presence, limiting the sophistication and reach of their digital strategies.

In the Romanian context, issues are amplified by a lack of human and financial resources. Case studies on museums in Brasov show that public budget legislation does not allow the use of institutional cards for paid promotion on social media. The organizational structure does not include specialists in digital communication, cultural marketing, or graphic design. These administrative limitations reflect an urgent need for institutional adaptation, not only technological but also strategic.

Museums in Braşov County operate in a functional but financially fragile environment. While their cultural relevance and community roles are well sustained, their economic sustainability is heavily reliant on consistent public support. The modest growth in self-generated income and occasional project-based funding indicate an effort to adapt yet highlight the need for structural reforms and strategic investment to enhance financial resilience and institutional autonomy [33,34].

This local situation reflects broader international trends. According to [35], over 70% of European museums reported significant revenue losses, especially from ticket sales, events, and related services such as museum shops and cafés [35]. In large museums, losses reached up to €600,000 per week. Furthermore, the ICOM report [36] highlights that 82% of museums did not have a digital strategy at the onset of the pandemic, and 13% lacked dedicated staff for online activities [36]. Similarly, Burke et al. [37] point out that museums in Central and Eastern Europe faced rigid budget constraints, limited managerial autonomy, and an inability to access digitalization funds through flexible procedures [37].

Additionally, ref. [29] emphasizes that most cultural institutions were forced to adopt ad hoc solutions due to the absence of a strategic crisis framework and a lack of personnel trained in digital communication [29]. Some authors further note that such improvisation had a direct impact on the quality of audience engagement, with many museums failing to establish a sustainable digital presence [38].

In this regard, the current research aims to fill an important gap in the literature by providing a contextual perspective from Romania on this complex process of museum adaptation and reinvention. The aim of this study is to analyze how the county museums in Braşov have integrated digital technologies to maintain their cultural relevance and enhance visitor experience while seeking to balance digital innovation with the traditional values of the museum institution in the post-pandemic period.

Based on the stated objectives, this study formulates the following research questions, intended to provide a coherent analytical framework for investigating how museums have adapted to the post-pandemic digital context. These questions support the overall direction of this research and enable a systematic exploration of the topic under analysis.

RQ₁: In what ways have digital technologies been used by museums in Braşov to enhance public engagement during and after the pandemic?

RQ₂: What type of experiences (virtual or physical) do visitors prefer, and how do they influence satisfaction?

RQ₃: What are the main challenges identified by museum managers in the digitalization process?

RQ₄: How does the transition from a collection-centered approach to a user-centered approach influence the identity of museums?

RQ₅: What best practices can be identified for a balanced integration of traditional and digital methods?

2. Materials and Methods

The main objective of this research is to analyze how county museums in Braşov adapted to the pandemic context in terms of online promotion activities, with a focus on social media, and to assess the future prospects of these practices.

Our analysis involves a triangulation of research methods, consisting of documentation, followed by a semi-structured interview, and later an online questionnaire. This research is both quantitative, through content analysis and analysis of questionnaire responses, and qualitative, through thematic analysis of the interview data.

Triangulation of methods provides a more complete understanding of the investigated phenomenon, ensuring internal validity and consistency of interpretation [39]. The choice of the mixed-methods approach is supported by the necessity to correlate institutional perspectives—gathered through documentation and interviews—with those of the public, measured through a survey. The mixed-methods strategy was selected to address research questions that involve both subjective, qualitative dimensions and descriptive or explanatory quantitative elements. This approach not only helps to understand institutional behaviors and public perceptions but also enables data validation through triangulation, enhancing the credibility of conclusions [40]. According to [41] Creswell and Plano Clark,

mixed methods are particularly useful when qualitative data provides in-depth context and quantitative data ensures generalizability and statistical support.

Moreover, considering the unique constraints and opportunities of the epidemiological context during the COVID-19 pandemic, this approach was deemed the most appropriate at the time to yield reliable and relevant results. The goal was to develop a three-fold perspective: first, an overview of the online media space in relation to museum promotion efforts; second, an institutional viewpoint provided by museum representatives; and finally, an understanding of how these practices were perceived and evaluated by the end beneficiaries—museum visitors and followers of cultural content online.

The research design followed these steps:

1. Documentation and content analysis of online communication by museums- this stage provides a contextual and comparative framework between the analyzed institutions, enabling an initial understanding of the museums' digital behavior [42];
2. Semi-structured interviews with museum representatives to explore their strategic responses—this method is suitable for exploring the complex views of involved actors (e.g., managers, public relations specialists), offering flexibility and thematic depth [43];
3. Distribution of an online questionnaire to the public to measure perceptions and expectations—this technique allows for the validation of perceptions and partial generalization of results in a broader framework, proving effective during and after the pandemic context [44].

These methods were triangulated to produce a validated, multi-faceted understanding of institutional adaptation during the pandemic.

2.1. Documentation

To document how county museums in Braşov aligned themselves with the demands and needs of the pandemic context, we began by gathering contextual data about the analyzed institutions. This data was useful for correlating with the findings of the actual research, in order to establish a “balance of power” between the institutions at different levels or to justify any disproportionate results in specific areas.

Subsequently, we conducted a content analysis of the online communication carried out by the four museum institutions (County Museum of History, Museum of Ethnography, Museum Casa Mureşenilor, Museum of Art) under the authority of the Braşov County Council, during the period 16 March 2020–15 March 2021.

This one-year period begins with the declaration of the state of emergency in Romania due to the COVID-19 virus. We chose this date as a starting point because, with the suspension of physical activities, museums were able—for the first time in their existence—to focus exclusively on online promotion efforts, with objectives such as increasing awareness, attracting virtual (and later, physical) visitors, and reshaping public perceptions of museums.

Following the content analysis, we extracted the projected image, the concrete communication and public relations activities carried out by Braşov museums on social media.

To understand how county museums in Braşov responded to the demands and constraints of the pandemic context, we began by gathering a series of contextual data regarding each institution. These included:

- administrative documents (e.g., annual reports, organizational charts, internal communication strategies);
- external communication materials (e.g., brochures, press releases, official website content);
- and digital traces extracted from the institutions' official social media accounts.

This contextual information was complemented and cross-validated with insights obtained from interviews with institutional representatives. This allowed us to account for institutional disparities in terms of communication resources, staffing, internal organization, and digital strategy. It also helped clarify potential differences in visibility or performance across the analyzed museums and provided a foundation for later triangulation of findings.

The analysis focused specifically on Facebook and YouTube, as these were the only platforms on which all selected institutions maintained active, official accounts during the study period. Although one museum had an Instagram account, it was excluded due to the lack of comparable usage across institutions and the absence of a unified communication strategy on that platform. This decision ensured consistency and comparability in the analysis.

2.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

The interviews were conducted face-to-face, between 5 February and 27 May 2021, preceded by email messages requesting consent and explaining the educational purpose of the initiative, in order to establish a trust-based relationship and ensure sincere and detailed responses. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews was to explore, in depth, the internal institutional practices, constraints, and strategies adopted by museums in Braşov County during the COVID-19 pandemic. This method allowed us to obtain contextual insights that could not be captured through documentation or quantitative tools, particularly regarding decision-making processes, internal resource limitations, and perceptions of digital adaptation.

Before each interview, a plan was drawn up regarding its structure. The interview was semi-structured, with basic questions prepared in advance. These were accompanied by brief introductions and explanations, again with the aim of obtaining unaltered and complete answers.

The semi-structured interview was chosen for its flexibility, allowing for the collection of detailed and nuanced data, providing room for deeper exploration of responses and personal opinions.

The method was particularly appropriate in this research context, as it allowed for the exploration of institutional perspectives regarding adaptation to the pandemic, supplementing the data obtained through content analysis and surveys with insider views from those directly involved in decision-making and implementation. The selection of semi-structured interviews is supported by the literature, which highlights their value in institutional and organizational studies due to their balance between guidance and openness [45].

The interview guide was structured around four major thematic axes:

- I. General information about the institution (structure, heritage, exhibitions);
- II. Resources and internal organization (promotion and communication staff);
- III. Online promotion activity during the pandemic (strategies, outcomes, challenges);
- IV. Pandemic impact and future perspectives (plans, inspirations, paid promotion).

The data obtained from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke [46], which allows for identifying recurring patterns of meaning across the data set. The analysis followed six clearly defined steps:

1. Familiarization with the data (transcription and repeated reading);
2. Generating initial codes;
3. Searching for themes by grouping codes;
4. Reviewing and refining themes for coherence and relevance;
5. Defining and naming the final themes;
6. Writing the final interpretation and integrating findings into the broader research narrative.

This method provided a structured yet flexible framework to extract meaningful insights from the interview material and to connect institutional narratives with broader patterns observed across this study.

2.3. Online Questionnaire

This quantitative component aimed to assess visitor perceptions of how county museums in Braşov utilized the online environment during the pandemic period (March 2020–March 2021), as well as to identify expectations regarding the continuation of digitalization in the post-pandemic period.

This research is descriptive and explanatory in nature, using the survey method via an online questionnaire, applied to a non-probabilistic convenience sample. The questionnaire was distributed online during the period April 2021–May 2021 and promoted through social media pages and local themed groups. The target audience included individuals who had physically or virtually visited one of the four county museums in Braşov during the pandemic, active users of the museums' social media platforms, and visitors interested in cultural and digital activities in the museum field.

The data was collected through a Google Forms questionnaire distributed online. Responses were anonymous and statistically processed to obtain descriptive quantitative results, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Analyzed Variables.

Variable Code	Label	Type
V1	Respondent's gender	Nominal
V2	Age	Ordinal
V3	Level of education	Ordinal
V4	Museum visit during the pandemic	Binary
V5	Online interaction with the museum	Ordinal
V6	Perception of the quality of online content	Dependent
V7	Agreement on the necessity of digitalization	Dependent
V8	Interest in virtual tours	Dependent
V9	Willingness to participate in online activities	Dependent
V10	Overall evaluation of the museums' online presence	Dependent

Being a convenience sample, the results cannot be generalized to the entire population, but they provide a relevant picture of the perceptions of active and engaged visitors.

According to the methodological framework illustrated in Figure 1, the questionnaire was designed and implemented only after completing the documentation phase and the semi-structured interviews. This sequence allowed the formulation of survey items to be grounded in the insights, challenges, and thematic categories that emerged from the previous two methods. As Creswell and Plano Clark [41] argue, such a sequential exploratory design is particularly effective when the goal is to use qualitative findings to inform instrument construction. Likewise, Flick and Bryman [47,48] support the integration of prior qualitative evidence into the development of survey tools, as it enhances construct validity and contextual relevance.

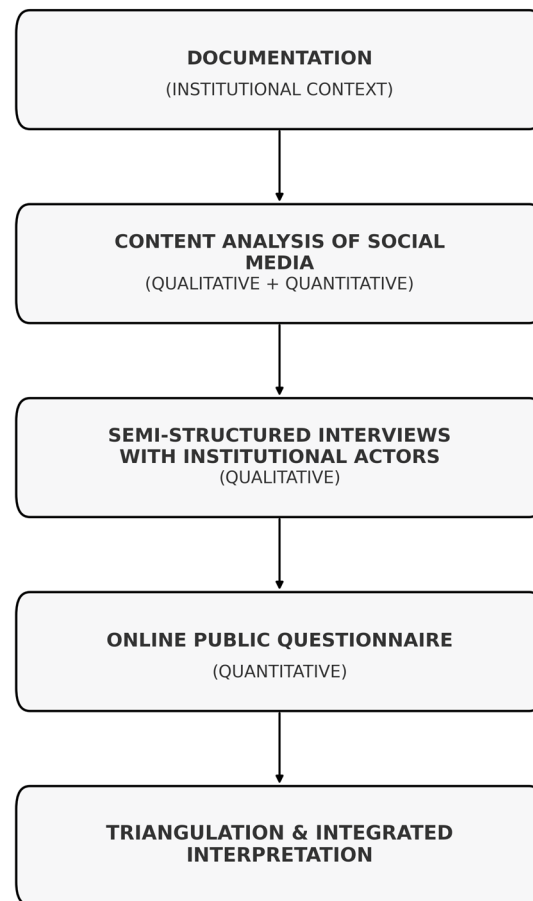


Figure 1. Methodological scheme.

Based on the literature and preliminary observations, the following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1:** *There is a positive correlation between the frequency of online interaction and the evaluation of the quality of museum content.*
- H2:** *Young people are more interested in digital museum activities than older individuals.*
- H3:** *The level of education influences the agreement regarding the necessity of digitalization.*
- H4:** *Those who visited a museum during the pandemic give a higher rating to the online presence of museums.*

Our study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Transilvania University of Braşov under decision number 19, on 5 February 2020.

Finally, to better understand the audience engaged in this study, a demographic profile was constructed based on gender, age, and educational background. The sample included 241 respondents, with no missing data, ensuring the reliability of statistical interpretations. In terms of gender, the distribution was relatively balanced, with a slight predominance of male participants (56.8% male vs. 43.2% female). Age-wise, the largest group consisted of individuals aged 26–35 years (31.5%), followed by those aged 36–50 (19.1%) and over 50 (17.8%). Younger participants, aged 18–25 (16.6%) and under 18 (14.9%), were also represented, allowing for intergenerational comparisons. Educational attainment was notably

high: 53.5% of respondents held a university degree, 23.7% had completed postgraduate studies, and 22.8% reported secondary-level education.

3. Results

The results of this study are presented in three subchapters, as follows: the results of the documentary analysis, the results of the interview analysis, and the results of the questionnaire analysis. Subsequently, these findings are compiled and triangulated in Section 4. Thus, in the first subchapter, the documentary analysis presents the main findings regarding the online activity of the museums. The second subchapter, dedicated to the interview analysis, outlines the key responses and insights provided by museum representatives. Finally, the third part highlights the perceptions of cultural consumers regarding this phenomenon. We believe that through these three stages, this study successfully captures the essence of museum activity in Braşov during the pandemic period.

3.1. Results of the Documentary Analysis

The need for museums to promote themselves online and especially on social networks stems from the “battle” between the various forms of leisure available in urban environments, for the leisure time of the local population and tourists. But before delving into how the county museums in Braşov understood and succeeded in promoting themselves on social media, we reviewed some contextual data about each institution separately (knowledge and characterization data), necessary for understanding the means and methods used, the resources thrown into the “battle” for the leisure time of the target audience, and the results obtained. The data in Table 1 were collected from open sources, primarily from the websites and social media pages of the four institutions, and subsequently verified and supplemented during the interviews conducted with their managers.

As it can be observed (Table 2), the County Museum of History in Braşov has three exhibition venues in the city of Braşov and one in progress (the Museum of Sports and Mountain Tourism), the Museum Casa Mureşenilor—2 exhibition venues; the Museum of Ethnography—2 exhibition venues in Braşov and another 2 in the county; and the Museum of Art—a single venue. The Museums of Ethnography and Casa Mureşenilor have Facebook pages created 4–5 years earlier than those of the other institutions analyzed, and this advantage can also be seen in the number of likes for each page: 7 and 10 thousand likes, respectively, versus 2.6 and 1.4 thousand. The numbers are roughly similar for the number of followers. Analyzing the data about YouTube channels, the relationship between the age of the channel and the number of subscribers is not as evident, although it exists. From here, we can draw a first conclusion: beyond the content, the age on social media really matters!

A surprising finding regarding the reviews of each page: the data was collected twice, with an interval of about 2 months (one interim, one final). Compared to the first “reading” on 14 January 2021, the only page that had the same number of reviews at the final check was that of the County Museum of History in Braşov. And, at the same time, the only page that had a 5-star rating in both the first and final checks. The other 3 pages showed fewer reviews at the final check than at the interim check, with ratings below 5 stars at the interim check. This means that in the meantime, some reviews—and all those that awarded less than 5 stars—were deleted. Coincidence or not, between the interim and final check, all 4 museums were notified of the intention to conduct interviews with the managers and, implicitly, about the progress of the current study. It could not be definitively established that a relationship exists between the two actions: announcing the research and the disappearance of negative reviews.

Table 2. Comparison of Key Information Across Museums in Braşov County.

	County Museum of History	Museum of Ethnography	Museum Casa Mureşenilor	Museum of Art
Staff	50 employees	28 employees	16 employees	20 employees
Establishment Date	1949 (under the name “Regional Museum of Braşov”)	1967 (as a section of the Regional Museum of Braşov), 1990 (as an independent institution)	1968, 1998 (as an independent institution)	1949 (as a section of the Regional Museum of Braşov), 1990 (as an independent institution)
Museum Patrimony	159,255 pieces	Data not available	Over 35,000 pieces	4624 pieces
Current Exhibitions	2 permanent exhibitions, 5 temporary exhibitions	5 permanent exhibitions, 3 temporary exhibitions	2 permanent exhibitions	1 permanent exhibition, 1 temporary exhibition
Heritage Pieces	85 treasures, 95 major pieces	11 treasures, 24 major pieces	44 treasures, over 900 major pieces	Data not available
Website	https://www.brasovistorie.ro	https://www.etnobrasov.ro	http://muzeulmuresenilor.ro/	http://www.muzeulartabv.ro/
Social Media Links	Facebook, YouTube	Facebook, YouTube	Facebook, Youtube	Facebook
Facebook Page	facebook.com/muzeuljudeateandistoriebrasov	facebook.com/etnobrasov	facebook.com/CasaMuresenilorMuzeulImnuluiNational	facebook.com/MuzeulDeArtaBrasov
Facebook Page Creation Date	18.03.2016	14.06.2012	02.05.2012	06.02.2017
Facebook Page Likes	2655	7503	10,191	1418
Facebook Followers	2804	7888	10,468	1471
Interim Reviews/Rating (Facebook)	12 people/5 out of 5	30 people/4.9 out of 5	74 people/4.9 out of 5	11 people/4.6 out of 5
Final Reviews/Rating	12 people/5 out of 5	28 people/5 out of 5	65 people/5 out of 5	8 people/5 out of 5
YouTube Channel Address	YouTube Channel	YouTube Playlist	YouTube Channel	YouTube Channel
YouTube Channel Creation Date	16.06.2016	22.05.2013	29.07.2010	11.03.2008
Number of Subscribers	18	115	90	163

The reviews are very few, compared to the number of likes and followers, from which we can conclude that it is easier for a page to become popular than to engage the community actively. With the help of the Google Trends application, we analyzed, in comparison, in the specified interval, the interest manifested in the virtual space for the four museums, resulting in each of them having some peaks of interest in terms of online searches, the most searched being the Museum of Art in Braşov (13 February) and the County Museum of History in Braşov (in the interval 14–20 February 2021), each with 100 searches per week. As a result of the data cross-referencing, the search peaks did not indicate a connection with events held by the museum institutions (Figure 2). All searches were conducted locally, in the Braşov county area, with no significant numerical queries from other regions (country or abroad).

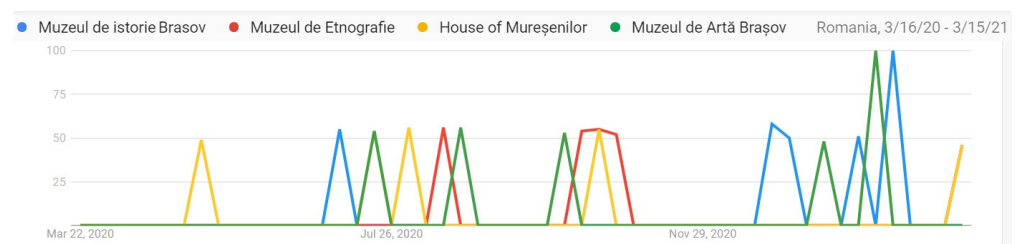


Figure 2. Tracking the online activity of museums using Google Trends.

As can be observed, the most active institutions on their own Facebook pages were the Museum of Ethnography and the Museum Casa Mureşenilor, with approximately equal numbers of posts: 379 and 368, respectively (Table 3).

That is, on average, just over one post per day in the one year under analysis, with some days having two or (very rarely) even three posts. Both institutions have the same specific posting pattern: generally posting on weekdays (Monday–Friday), even though on Mondays, both museums were closed to the public during periods that allowed physical visits. In special circumstances, there are also posts on weekends or holidays. For example, the Museum of Ethnography had posts on Easter holidays (in 2020, Orthodox Easter was celebrated between 21 April).

The County Museum of History in Braşov posted an average of about 2–3 times a week, while the Museum of Art posted slightly more frequently, about one post per week. Suppose there is not a significant difference in the number of posts, in terms of public interactions. In that case, the Museum of Ethnography leads by a wide margin, both in the actual number and the average of likes, comments, and shares on each post:

- Over 24,000 likes, compared to almost 2000, which is the second position (County Museum of History);
- Over 300 comments, compared to 84, which is the second position (Museum Casa Mureşenilor);
- Over 14,000 shares, compared to about 750, the next highest value (Museum Casa Mureşenilor);
- An average of approximately 64 likes per post, compared to 12—the next highest being the County Museum of History;
- Almost one comment per post, compared to 1 comment for every 2 posts, the second position (Museum of Art);
- Almost 38 shares per post on average, compared to 2–3 shares per post on average (County Museum of History and Museum Casa Mureşenilor).

Table 3. Top Social Media Posts by Engagement Metrics for Museums in Braşov County.

Institution Criteria	County Museum of History	Museum of Ethnography	Museum Casa Mureşenilor	Museum of Art
Total number of posts in the period	148	379	368	71
Total likes on posts	1828	24,358	1074	632
Total comments on posts	31	326	84	35
Total shares of posts	411	14,339	741	59
Average likes per post	12.35	64.26	2.91	8.9
Average comments per post	0.2	0.86	0.23	0.49
Average shares per post	2.78	37.83	2.01	0.83
Past events promoted	19	17	1	8
Future events promoted	0	0	0	6
Posts with video content (total on page/during analyzed period)	20/0	95/8	111/63	8/6
Post with the Most Likes		24.06.2020—Free photo sessions on “Day of the Romanian Blouse,” with traditional props provided by the museum—294 likes	05.08.2020—Visit of actor Mitică Popescu to the museum—167 likes	25.02.2021—A photo of paintings by N. Grigorescu exhibited in the museum and 01.03.2021—a Mărţişor-themed painting by Eftimie Modâlcă—31 likes each
Post with the Most Comments	23.12.2020—“Happy historic but good years, Casa Sfatului!”—celebrating 600 years of attestation: 65 likes, 10 comments, 89 shares	08.07.2020—Folk art from the Şapte Sate area, painted peasant furniture exhibited at the Săcele Ethnographic Museum—15 comments	24.08.2020—Passing of Braşov actor Marius Cisar—12 comments	02.03.2021—Painting by Alexandru Ciucurencu and a “challenge” launched in comments (“you tell us something good that happened to you today!”)—10 comments
Post with the Most Shares		24.06.2020—Free photo sessions on “Day of the Romanian Blouse,” with traditional props provided by the museum—332 shares	18.06.2020—About student celebrations of Şaguna College, “Comanda” and “Maialul”—56 shares	01.03.2021—A Mărţişor-themed painting by Eftimie Modâlcă—19 shares

From a numerical perspective, it seems that the Museum of Ethnography has managed to build a consistent audience that appreciates the high frequency of posts, because 1 or 2 posts per day is quite a lot, and constantly interacts with the page, both through likes and shares.

However, what has not been achieved to a large extent, in the case of all museums, is the active engagement of the audiences through comments [49]. Commenting on a post indicates a higher level of engagement and adherence than liking or sharing, which require a much smaller effort than one or more clicks [50]. Analyzing the numbers, it is easy to see that the posts of the analyzed institutions receive many more likes and shares than comments. On Facebook, however, this is a general fact, applicable to most posts. In fact, according to recent studies, the most likes and comments on Facebook are given to video posts (likes—62%, comments—86%) [51]. In comparison, photos receive likes at 32%, and comments at only 14%. Looking at the number of video posts made by the four institutions, we see that only the Museum Casa Mureșenilor paid attention to this format (63 videos in the analyzed period, meaning more than one per week), while the County Museum of History has 0, and the other two institutions have very few: 6 and 8. Interestingly, the number of videos posted by Casa Mureșenilor did not result in an increase in comments, which is why an analysis of the content of these clips is necessary, or their migration to the video content platform: YouTube.

It is important to know that the audience needs to be cultivated to achieve interactions. Things do not happen miraculously; there needs to be a gradual and natural growth of adherence to the organization, which in turn will generate a greater number of interactions. Generally, the public is slow to adhere and quick to forget, and loyalty requires a significant amount of time, combined with careful selection of each post. An example of this is the raffle organized by the Museum of Art and promoted on their Facebook page on 17 February 2020. The post mentioned the need for a selfie of the participant with their favorite painting to be published on the institution's social media page. There were 3 prizes related to the temporary exhibition at that time ("Great Artists of the World")—not too substantial, but not excessively "poor" either. Since the audience was not used to such posts, only one comment was recorded (i.e., one entry for the raffle). Likes and shares were not at the expected level, probably because they were above the period's average: 16 likes—compared to a maximum of 31 likes and an average of 9 likes per post—and five shares, compared to 19 shares (maximum obtained on a "Mărțișor" post) and an average of 0.83 shares per post. On the other hand, the Museum of Art successfully tested interaction through comments in a post that proposed: "You tell us something good that happened to you today!" (text accompanied by a picture of a painting from the institution). The post received the maximum number of comments for a post in the analyzed period: 10, compared to an average of less than 0.5 comments per post, which is 20 times more.

From the perspective of the shared content, it is evident that the Museum of Ethnography has a successful strategy, applicable to its specific focus: almost exclusively posts related or tangential to the field of ethnography, ranging from presenting exhibits (with minimal details for easy digestion by readers) to photographs from exhibitions or openings, relating religious holidays with traditions/popular costumes, publishing old images depicting traditional costumes from the past, etc. Interestingly (but somewhat expected), the post with the most likes and shares announced a free photo shoot, with thematic props provided by the museum, in the context of celebrating the "Day of the Blouse." The material received almost 300 likes (5 times more than the average, about 65 likes per post) and over 300 shares (compared to an average of about 38 shares per post). It seems that the museum's audience—and probably beyond that—was attracted by this unique proposal, indicating that this type of activity should be replicated and possibly adapted by

other museums, as it ensures a double success: increasing virtual audience and physical visitors—as the photo shoot took place at the Museum of Urban Civilization, a section of the Ethnographic Museum.

At the opposite end, in terms of post homogeneity, is the County Museum of History in Braşov, which addresses various themes, depending on the projects it is involved in. It is true that the museum has a much broader range to cover than the Museum of Ethnography, which is niche and focused on a single aspect—ethnography. In the one-year period analyzed, the County Museum of History in Braşov had 41 posts about the project “Weaver’s Bastion—Artists’ Bastion,” 35 posts about the 2020 Comic Book Festival, titled “Heroes Making History,” 23 posts about the development works of the Museum of Sports and Mountain Tourism currently taking place in the Olimpia complex, 17 posts about the exhibition “Braşov 1987. 2 years too early.” 13 of the posts referred to collaborations with other institutions—mainly from the perspective of the traveling exhibition “Heroes Making History,” and 6 posts presented the project won by the museum, in collaboration with international partners—“CAN for BALKANS—Comics Alliance Networking for Balkans”. We can see that the range of interests covered by the museum’s posts is extremely vast—from comic books to the Workers’ Revolt in Braşov, from artistic performances at the Weaver’s Bastion (concerts, shows, theater, recitals, etc.) to mountain tourism, etc. Although there is no post that is off-topic (the mentioned themes fall under the “jurisdiction” of the institution through regular activities, won projects, or concluded partnerships), this fragmentation may prevent the formation of a solid group of stable followers, a consistent audience. Although the museum ranks second in the average number of likes and shares (after the Museum of Ethnography), it is last in terms of comments per post, on average. Additionally, the County Museum of History has set up independent Facebook pages for each important project it carries out, as well as for some of its exhibition venues (some of the posts on the main page are reposts, taken from or specific to these derived pages)—these will be analyzed further, along with the derived pages of the other museums.

The County Museum of History also conducted an “experiment” on social media, in the period 1–7 September 2020, when it attempted to excessively promote the Braşov Jazz and Blues Festival 2020, which was held at the Weaver’s Bastion. During that period, 22 posts were recorded, which is over 3 posts per day, compared to an annual average of about 0.5 posts per day—six times more. Either the event was not to the liking of the page’s audience, or the readers did not appreciate the aggressive promotion—the fact is that this “batch” of posts received a total of 97 likes, which is 4.4 likes per post, three times less than the annual average of over 12 likes per post. The same goes for the other forms of engagement: 0 comments and only 10 shares, which is about 0.5 shares per post, compared to nearly 3, the annual average—six times fewer.

The Museum Casa Mureşenilor focused, in the first part of the analyzed period, on posts with photos of interesting or important documents from the institution’s collection. Later, the themes were diversified, with materials about museum education programs for children during the summer vacation of 2020, online openings, and even an online guided tour, adapted to the context. This last post, in video format, was well-received by the public, with over 1200% more likes than the average per post (37, compared to nearly 3), 2 comments (compared to an almost negligible average of 0.23), and 5 shares, compared to an average of 2 shares.

The Museum of Art mainly focused on photographs of works from the collection, accompanied by brief explanatory or engaging texts (like the post with the highest success in the analyzed period: “Let’s make a deal: we entertain you with Alexandru Ciucurencu’s flowers, and you tell us something good that happened to you today! P.S. Nothing is too small to matter.”—2 March 2021). Additionally, materials about some representative artists

were published on their anniversaries/commemorative days. Of course, the museum also posted about its temporary exhibitions, with the “Great Artists of the World” exhibition being featured in 9 posts, including preparations and the previously mentioned raffle, and the “Moon Impact—a geological story” exhibition (opened outside the analyzed period) with 5 posts in the analyzed period.

When it comes to promoting the past and future activities of the four institutions, the only one that seems geared towards the future is the Museum of Art, as only on their page can you find information about upcoming events. In connection with the fact that a museum is an institution focused primarily on the past, this observation takes on an entirely different meaning. However, considering the presentations from the first two chapters of this study, it would be desirable for institutions to promote their future events to a greater extent, including in the dedicated section, not just through posts on the page.

If we carefully analyze the section of posts with the most interactions—whether they are simple likes, shares, or comments (Table 2)—we will find that successful posts often have content that does not correspond to the specific focus of each museum or is only tangentially related to it: a visit from an iconic actor to the museum or the passing of another (Museum Casa Mureșenilor), the anniversary of the documentary attestation of a building (which is also an exhibition venue—County Museum of History), Martisor greetings—admittedly, “seasoned” with an artwork (Museum of Art), the mentioned photo shoot (Museum of Ethnography). Although not highlighted in the table, posts with Easter or Winter Holiday greetings always had interactions above the average of each institution. The fact that a museum’s page gains popularity through posts that are not necessarily dedicated to its purpose or specific focus is not a negative thing, as long as things are not pushed too far from the institution’s area of activity. It can be concluded that the audience is more receptive at certain key moments (holidays) or to certain stimuli/elements that are already widely known—both Casa Sfatului and actor Mitică Popescu are elements of notoriety among the local population. Including, intermittently, in the content of posts, keywords with resonance can be beneficial, as long as they can be associated with the museum’s image and, even tangentially, with its specific focus. Ultimately, it is about marketing; any association that ensures increased notoriety is desirable, as long as the audience does not feel “cheated” and as long as the association is not forced or inappropriate.

The first easily extractable observation is that—although established for less than a year—the Bastionul Artiștilor page has the highest numerical values for all the criteria listed in the table, with considerable differences compared to the other 5 pages (Table 4).

In general, the derived pages contain much more focused posts, centered on the specific topic of the page—the difference is mainly noticeable in the County Museum of History in Brașov, which, as mentioned earlier, has the most varied range of themes addressed on the main page. Furthermore, it is the only museum that maintains almost the same average number of interactions per post as the main page, in all chapters: likes, comments, and shares. The derived pages of the other museums have, without exception, considerably lower values than the main pages of the institutions they belong to, from which we can conclude that the online marketing activity was focused, in the case of the other two museums, on the museum’s page, not on the secondary venue pages. Moreover, this fact is also evident from the qualitative analysis of the posts: the derived pages belonging to the Museum of Ethnography and the Museum Casa Mureșenilor predominantly contain reposts and redistributions of materials posted on the main pages: the Museum of Urban Civilization has 57 redistributions (out of a total of 73 posts), Muzeul Etnografic Săcele—2 out of 4 posts (the other 2 were about the museum’s working hours), Muzeul Etnografic “Gheorghe Cernea” Rupea—42 redistributions out of 45 materials, and Casa Memorială “Ștefan Baci” —37 out of 89 posts.

As an observation that could justify these decisions, dividing the content distributed by the same institution across multiple derived pages—when not solidly grounded—can generate a division of the audience, a fragmentation that is not beneficial to promoting the museum’s image as an entity. The County Museum of History, which is responsible for a broader range of local history-related issues, made the right choice by creating, for secondary venues—with more niche competencies—their own pages, especially since these have different content than the main page. The Olimpia Museum has a different focus compared to the Weaver’s Bastion or Casa Sfatului, although all are exhibition venues of the same institution. This could have been the choice of the Museum of Ethnography regarding posts on distant venue pages, especially since it is the only museum in Braşov with venues in other localities (Săcele and Rupea), which most visitors associate with separate institutions rather than extensions of the museum from the county seat.

None of the 4 museums had paid promotion for the posts published in the analyzed period—the difference between organic interactions and paid ones would have been visible from analyzing the posts, even though the promotion period is already over. Explanations for the lack of paid promotion were provided during interviews with the representatives of the analyzed institutions.

The Museum of Art uses, in addition to the institution’s page, a personal account: Muzeuldeartabrasov Mab. This account has 3981 virtual friends (being a personal account, it has the possibility to “befriend” other accounts). According to the information provided during the interview with the institution’s marketing manager, the account was created before the institutional page, and initially, after the establishment of the latter, the posts here were just shares of those published on the personal account (which already had a circle of “friends”). Later, they were migrated to the institutional page, and eventually it will be completely abandoned.

On 4 April 2020, the County Museum of History in Braşov posted material drawing attention to the fact that “museum visits cannot be done only virtually” and that “a museum is as valuable as a hospital,” emphasizing that although the current situation requires, in the short term, additional funds for medication, hospitals, and COVID-19 tests, in the long term, investments in culture are just as important. Another post from the institution, on 5 May 2020, refers to the reduction in employees’ salaries during the state of emergency. Of the 4 museums analyzed, it is the only one that addressed the issues faced by the cultural sector during the pandemic period.

During the one-year period under analysis, the only institution that was active on the YouTube platform was the Museum Casa Mureşenilor, which posted only one video clip. This video is titled “The First Online Guided Tour of the Museum Casa ‘Ştefan Baciu’” and features a guide giving explanations and answering the questions of a “virtual” visitor from the other end of the conversation in front of the camera (Table 5).

In terms of the total number of video clips, the Museum Casa Mureşenilor and the County Museum of History are at the top, with 70 and nearly 60 materials, respectively, but the Museum of Art has the most views obtained from its 29 videos: almost 85,000.

Table 4. Social Media Activity Metrics for Museums in Braşov County.

Page	Olimpia—Museum of Sports and Mountain Tourism	Bastionul Artiştilor (Artists' Bastion) [1]	Museum of Urban Civilization of Braşov	Ethnographic Museum Săcele	Ethnographic Museum "Gheorghe Cernea" Rupea	Memorial House "Ştefan Baciuc," Braşov
Belongs to	County Museum of History, Braşov	-	Ethnographic Museum of Braşov	-	-	Museum Casa Mureşenilor
Establishment Date	20.08.2020	12.06.2020	09.08.2017	25.08.2017	21.07.2017	29.07.2013
Page Reviews	0	0	5/5 (14 reviews)	0	5/5 (4 reviews)	0
Page Likes	307	1286	1032	532	427	103
Page Followers	324	1407	1076	558	433	103
Posts in the analyzed interval	31	146	73	4	45	89
Total Likes	279	1938	296	19	53	94
Average Likes/Post, compared to the main page	9	13.27	4.05	4.75	1.17	1.05
	(Main Page Average): 12.35	-	(Main Page Average): 64.26	-	-	(Main Page Average): 2.91
Total Comments	5	40	4	0	2 [4]	8
Average Comments/Post, compared to the main page	0.16	0.27	0.05	0	0.04	0.09
	Main Page Average: 0.2	-	Main Page Average: 0.86	-	-	Main Page Average: 0.23
Total Shares	44	481	56	3	19	59
Average Shares/Post, compared to the main page	1.42	3.29	0.76	0.75	0.42	0.66
	Main Page Average: 2.78	-	Main Page Average: 37.83	-	-	Main Page Average: 2.01
Video Posts (total/within interval)	2/1	7/7	19/1	3/0	5/0	0/0

Table 5. Video Content Statistics for Museums in Braşov County.

Criteria	County Museum of History (MJI Braşov)	Museum of Ethnography	Museum Casa Mureşenilor	Museum of Art
Total number of videos uploaded	58	9	70	29
Number of videos uploaded during the analyzed period	0	0	1	0
Total views	1047	7684	54,991	83,402

3.2. The Results of the Interview Application

Thirteen interviews were conducted with representatives of the listed institutions—both from management and executive levels—in order to identify each institution’s desired public image and the actions taken to increase visibility, attractiveness, and to reach new audience segments.

Four interviews were obtained from the Braşov County History Museum, including one with a management representative and three with staff from the executive level. At the Casa Mureşenilor Museum, five interviews were conducted—one from management and four from the executive level.

At the Braşov Art Museum, two individuals responded to the interview invitation, both from the executive level. From the Ethnographic Museum, two interviews were collected—one from management and one from the executive level. In total, 13 interviews were conducted, 3 of which were with management representatives.

The 13 respondents, coming from both leadership (3 people) and operational (10 people) areas, described the institutional structure as rigid, with a standardized organizational chart that does not allow for rapid adaptation in crisis situations. Tour guiding is carried out on a rotational basis by existing staff, primarily by museum curators.

“We don’t have dedicated guides—this activity is handled on a rotational basis by curators or by whichever staff member is on duty at that time.”

(R4, executive level, Braşov County History Museum)

“The pandemic lockdown didn’t allow us to have direct contact with the public, but we also didn’t have a clear plan to restructure our activity. We just continued with what was listed in the job description.”

(R6, executive level, Casa Mureşenilor Museum)

Furthermore, it was highlighted that none of the museums have staff allocated exclusively for guiding activities—this being due to the organizational structure imposed by the current legislative framework, which does not allow for such arrangements. As a result, guiding duties are performed on a rotational basis by museum staff, especially by curators. Thus, during the periods when the institutions were closed, the staff focused only on the tasks outlined in their job descriptions.

One of the most emphasized issues was the lack of personnel specialized in communication and digital promotion, as well as the bureaucratic difficulties in allocating budgets for online marketing.

“We took turns updating the website, depending on who had a bit of free time. There’s no specific person assigned to it, and there are no clear responsibilities in this regard.”

(R8, executive level, Braşov Art Museum)

“The Facebook page was maintained by the director, sometimes by us. It was a collective effort, but without a clear strategy.”

(R5, executive level, Casa Mureşenilor Museum)

“Online promotion was left to a younger colleague who happened to know how to use Canva. We don’t have any expertise in the team.”

(R11, management level, Ethnographic Museum)

Based on the analysis of the statements, regarding website updates and social media interaction management, at the Braşov County History Museum, the person responsible for these tasks is the institution's manager. At the Casa Mureşenilor Museum, six employees—including the manager—handle online promotion on a rotating and occasional basis. Only one of the museums (the Art Museum) appointed, starting in 2021, a person specifically dedicated to promotion, although with additional responsibilities, not exclusively for communication. Previously, Facebook posts were made by several employees as an extra duty, including the manager, department heads, and curators.

All respondents stated that the pandemic forced museums to turn to the online environment, but due to the lack of a solid digital infrastructure, their efforts were fragmented and reactive.

"We tried to post daily on Facebook, but without a clear plan. We simply promoted whatever we had available."

(R3, executive level, Braşov County History Museum)

"Some posts had an impact, others didn't. We lacked analytical tools, and the content was quite simple: photos of artifacts and short texts."

(R9, executive level, Casa Mureşenilor Museum)

A critical aspect mentioned by several respondents is the lack of equipment for video content production.

"We would have liked to create virtual tours, but we don't have a video camera or proper lighting. We tried using a phone, but the quality was poor."

(R10, executive level, Art Museum)

"We have a YouTube account, but we don't use it. We don't have the means to produce video content, and Facebook gives us better results."

(R12, management level, Ethnographic Museum)

Another legal obstacle, unanimously mentioned by the interviewees, is that museums are not allowed to allocate budgets for promotion or marketing. According to the official definition, these are not institutions that "promote" themselves, but rather ones that "exhibit". Moreover, during the pandemic, the budgets of all four institutions were cut by 60% to 88%, with the savings redirected by the Braşov County Council to hospitals (this reality is also reflected in a post by the County History Museum, mentioned in the previous chapter).

In contrast to major museums abroad and other well-funded organizations, county museums in Braşov do not have the financial capacity to purchase specialized equipment for producing visually appealing content: they would need professional cameras, advanced editing software, and trained personnel to use them. Similarly, for video content, equipment for image and sound capture is needed, as well as resources for post-production. These shortages explain why video materials are limited in number and sometimes poor in quality, potentially creating a negative impact—for example, poor audio in a virtual tour or an online guide can irritate users, and insufficient lighting in exhibition rooms can lead to dark or unclear images. It is important to note that these rooms are not equipped with lighting designed for recording, but only with spotlights meant for in-person visitors; some spaces have no natural light at all.

All interviewees emphasized that the lack of updated legal regulations for the digital era prevents museums from hiring staff based on digital competencies (e.g., IT specialists, graphic designers, marketing experts), let alone creating a dedicated department or role

focused exclusively on online promotion. Additionally, the lack of funding makes it impossible to outsource such services. Despite this, the Casa Mureșenilor Museum plans to organize training courses to develop the digital skills of its staff as a partial solution to reduce these gaps.

The absence of dedicated personnel is also why none of the four institutions has prioritized YouTube promotion, even though they all have active accounts: a greater impact is achieved on Facebook, so the limited resources were allocated to the platform that offers the most engagement.

Beyond these aspects, several respondents noted the negative effect of paid promotion when it is not consistent. An interesting point raised by a representative of the Art Museum, and supported by the manager of the Casa Mureșenilor Museum, is that after the end of a paid campaign, Facebook's algorithms significantly reduce the visibility of organic posts, in order to encourage the start of another paid campaign.

"Facebook 'penalizes' pages that don't pay consistently. After a paid campaign, regular posts reach very few people."

(R7, executive level, Art Museum)

Thus, if an institution cannot consistently support paid promotion, its negative effects may outweigh the temporary visibility benefits. A similar view is shared by the manager of the Casa Mureșenilor Museum, who carried out paid campaigns in the past (outside the analyzed period) through advertising agencies. He mentioned that no clear connection was observed between those campaigns and an increase in the number of visitors, which is why this option was abandoned. Moreover, the "visual bombardment" of social media users with ads can have a counterproductive effect and does not support the formation of an active community around the institution's page.

The information provided indicates that paid promotion is not a viable option, as it is not regulated by current legislation, and Facebook's payment requirements are incompatible with the financial system of museums: treasury accounts held by public institutions do not come with bank cards, and online payments require a card. The only museum that conducted a paid promotion campaign was the Ethnographic Museum, and that was through sponsorships, not institutional funds.

Following the 13 semi-structured interviews conducted with representatives of the four county museums in Brașov—from both the management and executive levels—a number of relevant conclusions emerged regarding the ability of these institutions to adapt to the digital context imposed by the pandemic.

Most respondents pointed to a rigid organizational structure that does not allow for quick adaptation or diversification of roles in crisis situations. Guiding activities were carried out on a rotating basis, and during the institutional closures, staff limited their work to the standard duties listed in their job descriptions.

A central theme was the absence of personnel specialized in communication and digital marketing, which led to an improvised approach to online promotion, managed by various employees without specific training in the field. The online communication activity was mostly reactive, lacking a clear strategy, and the digital content was limited due to a lack of equipment and technical skills.

All respondents mentioned the legal impossibility of allocating budgets for paid promotion, and the only museum that conducted a sponsored campaign was the Ethnographic Museum, supported by external funding. Additionally, interviewees highlighted that inconsistent paid promotion can lead to negative effects, such as a decline in organic visibility on social platforms. In the absence of proper funding and updated legal frameworks, digitalization efforts remained fragmented and limited, despite a clear awareness of the

need to adapt. As a short-term viable solution, some institutions expressed their intention to provide digital skills training to existing staff.

3.3. The Results of the Questionnaire Application

To outline a general profile of the analyzed sample, a statistical description of the main demographic characteristics was created, including gender, age, and education level. The analysis was based on a total of 241 respondents, with no missing values, ensuring the accuracy of the interpretations. The educational level of participants is predominantly high, reflecting a well-educated sample. Over half of the respondents (53.5%) reported having completed higher education, while 23.7% pursued postgraduate studies. Only 22.8% of participants fall into the secondary education category. This distribution indicates a high level of academic qualification, which may influence participants' level of information, willingness to engage socially, or the attitudes expressed in this research. Overall, the data reflects a balanced and diverse sample, dominated by well-educated young adults with a relatively even gender distribution.

Similar demographic trends, with a concentration of highly educated and digitally literate respondents, have been documented in international studies of museum audiences during the COVID-19 pandemic [52].

Continuing the descriptive data analysis, it was observed that 66.8% of respondents (n = 161) stated they visited a museum during the reference period, while 33.2% (n = 80) did not. This distribution indicates a relatively high level of physical cultural activity, despite the restrictions specific to the pandemic context.

In terms of online interaction with museums, the majority of respondents reported a medium to high level of engagement: 38.2% (n = 92) interacted "often", 35.3% (n = 85) "very often", only 2.1% (n = 5) never interacted, 16.2% (n = 39) interacted rarely.

These findings indicate that museums managed to attract a notable level of online engagement during the analyzed period. However, the results also suggest age-related differences in digital adoption, with younger respondents showing a greater openness to such interactions. These observations align with broader evidence showing that museum lockdowns prompted a rapid surge in digital engagement, although participation remained uneven across age groups [53].

The moderate negative correlation coefficient ($r = -0.429$) indicates that as respondents' age increases, their willingness to participate in online museum activities decreases. This relationship is statistically significant at the 99% confidence level ($p < 0.01$), meaning the likelihood that this association occurred by chance is extremely low. In other words, younger individuals are significantly more inclined to engage in online cultural activities—such as virtual tours, workshops, or museum-organized conferences—compared to older individuals (Table 6). However, other factors may also contribute to this association, such as varying levels of digital literacy [54], unequal access to technology, differences in lifestyle-related time availability [55], or individual interest in cultural content [56].

Table 6. Pearson correlation between Age and Willingness to participate in museum online activities.

	Age	Willingness to Participate in Museum Online Activities
Age	1	−0.429 **
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	241	241
Willingness to Participate in Museum Online Activities	−0.429 **	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This pattern of younger demographics being more engaged in digital museum offerings is similarly documented in cross-institutional surveys and highlights how digital offerings may perpetuate existing inequalities in access or familiarity [57].

The evaluation of the quality of digital content offered by museums is generally acceptable, but not sufficient. Nearly one-third of respondents (30.7%, n = 74) gave a score of 3, and 12% (n = 29) awarded the maximum score of 5. However, a significant portion of participants gave low evaluations: 36.9% (n = 89) selected a score of 2 on the Likert scale. Only a very small percentage (2.5%, n = 6) rated the quality of online content as very poor (score of 1).

Moreover, perceptions of the necessity of digitalization are clearly favorable. The most frequent responses were scores of 4 (31.5%, n = 76) and 5 (25.7%, n = 62), indicating a high level of consensus regarding the relevance of this process. Only 2.9% of respondents (n = 7) do not consider digitalization necessary.

Regarding respondents’ willingness to access virtual tours, the answers lean toward high interest. 32% (n = 77) declared themselves very interested, and 29% (n = 70) fairly interested. Only 5.4% (n = 13) expressed no interest at all. These results highlight a strong potential to attract audiences through immersive digital museum products.

The analysis continued with a series of statistical correlations between the research indicators. The findings reveal a clear pattern of relationships between the frequency of contact with digital museum content and positive attitudes toward both its quality and necessity (Table 7).

One key observation is the very strong correlation between the frequency of online interaction with museums and the evaluation of the content’s quality (Pearson coefficient $r = 0.912, p < 0.001$). This result indicates that respondents who frequently access museums’ digital resources tend to give higher ratings to their perceived quality. While this finding shows a strong statistical association, it should not be interpreted as a direct cause–effect relationship. It is possible that individuals already interested in museums are more inclined to both seek digital content and evaluate it favorably. Moreover, this relationship appears to be mutually reinforced, as perceived quality is also strongly correlated with other variables: perception of the necessity of digitalization ($r = 0.824, p < 0.001$) and interest in virtual tours ($r = 0.683, p < 0.001$).

Table 7. Correlations regarding the perception of digitalization processes.

		V5	V6	V7	V8	V9
V5	Pearson Correlation	1	0.912 **	0.731 **	0.608 **	−0.108
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.093
	N	241	241	241	241	241
V6	Pearson Correlation	0.912 **	1	0.824 **	0.683 **	−0.103
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.000	0.112
	N	241	241	241	241	241
V7	Pearson Correlation	0.731 **	0.824 **	1	0.843 **	−0.055
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.394
	N	241	241	241	241	241
V8	Pearson Correlation	0.608 **	0.683 **	0.843 **	1	−0.050
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000		0.436
	N	241	241	241	241	241
V9	Pearson Correlation	−0.108	−0.103	−0.055	−0.050	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.093	0.112	0.394	0.436	
	N	241	241	241	241	241

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The frequency of digital interaction is also significantly correlated with agreement on the importance of digitalization in the museum context ($r = 0.731, p < 0.001$), as well as with expressed interest in virtual tours ($r = 0.608, p < 0.001$). These results show that respondents' concrete digital experiences directly contribute to the formation of positive attitudes and openness toward new forms of cultural access. Thus, those with frequent contact with museums' online offerings appear more inclined to value these initiatives—but this is an association, not a confirmed causal pathway.

On the other hand, the analysis reveals that the willingness to participate in online activities is not significantly correlated with any of the other measured variables. The correlation coefficients are negative but weak: $r = -0.108$ with online interaction ($p = 0.093$); $r = -0.103$ with perceived content quality ($p = 0.112$); $r = -0.055$ with agreement on digitalization ($p = 0.394$); $r = -0.050$ with interest in virtual tours ($p = 0.436$).

None of these relationships are statistically significant, suggesting that despite a generally positive attitude toward digitalization, active participation in online museum events is not determined by these factors.

This discrepancy may reflect a clear separation between passive digital content consumption (watching, browsing, touring) and active engagement, which requires a higher level of involvement and time availability. Therefore, museums aiming to develop interactive online components should consider the differences between content-receptive users and those willing to actively participate in activities.

To explore the latent structure of the variables included in the questionnaire, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) method, without rotation. Ten variables were analyzed, related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as their behavior and attitudes toward the digitalization of museum activities. The results indicated the presence of four main factors, which together explain 75.2% of the total variance, reflecting good internal consistency among item sets.

a. Factor 1—Positive attitude toward digitalization

The first factor, which explains 33.3% of the total variance, brings together variables such as online interaction with the museum, perception of the quality of digital content, agreement on the necessity of digitalization, and interest in virtual tours. These suggest that respondents who have frequently interacted with museums digitally—or who express a desire to do so—also tend to have a positive perception of the content's quality, consider digitalization as necessary, and are interested in exploring virtual tours. This group forms a core segment of the digital-savvy audience.

b. Factor 2—Experience and general evaluation

The second factor (16.6% of the variance) links museum visits during the pandemic with the overall evaluation of the museum's online presence. The result suggests that individuals who have had recent physical experiences with museums are also more likely to rate their online activities highly. Therefore, it can be concluded that direct museum experience positively influences perceptions of the digital component.

c. Factor 3—Age and digital availability

A third factor (14.1%) captured the relationship between age and willingness to participate in online museum activities. A clear negative correlation is observed between these two variables, indicating that younger respondents are significantly more willing to take part in workshops, tours, or online events compared to older respondents.

4. Discussion

Our study has some important findings that highlight the necessity of digitalization in the context of health crisis, which has increased the digital transformation of cultural institutions both globally and locally in Braşov County. This research underscores the way museums in Braşov County applied digital technologies to maintain their cultural relevance and provide a better visitor experience while trying to maintain the traditional values of the museum.

The analysis covered several key directions, emerging from the triangulated methodology. First, it explored the strategies and digital tools used by museums during the pandemic, revealing uneven levels of adoption and planning across institutions. Second, it evaluated the extent to which these tools influenced public engagement and satisfaction, particularly among digitally active users. This study also examined how museums adapted internally to support this shift—organizationally, structurally, and at the level of human resources. Challenges related to this process were equally considered, from technical limitations to audience retention difficulties. In light of these findings, this research also highlights the need for integrated approaches that balance digital innovation with traditional curatorial practices. Lastly, the public's perception of museums' digital presence was analyzed, offering valuable insights into expectations for the future of hybrid cultural consumption.

Our results confirm the trends reported in the literature, showing that digitalization extends the museum experience beyond the physical boundaries of the institution, providing global access and availability [10,11]. This “wall-less revolution” transforms museums into hybrid spaces where interactivity and personalization become essential elements [58].

We report a change from a model centered around collections to a model that is focused on the visitor. Museums became important stakeholders in information society. They are capable of analyzing the preferences and the behavior of the audience in real time [13]. At the same time, our study also points to the limitations of digitalization. Specifically, the lack of financial and human resources that are dedicated to digital communication and cultural marketing represents a significant barrier for local museums in Braşov. These aspects have also been pointed out by other authors, emphasizing the need for a clear managerial vision, adequate digital infrastructure, and legislative adaptations to support the digitalization process [3,21]. Additionally, as recommended by Styliani et al. [15] museums cannot completely replace the physical experience with virtual tours but must adopt a hybrid model that uses the advantages of digital while preserving the charm of the traditional.

RQ₁: Our content analysis and interviews revealed that museums have adopted fast digital tools like social media posts, but the financial limits and the lack of staff restricted the impact and the quality of such initiatives. Even though digitalization has been implemented, it remains fragmented and dependent on the resources available.

RQ₂: Even though museums have extended their access virtually, the interviews conducted reveal that the physical experience remains essential for visitor satisfaction. This confirms Styliani et al. [15] recommendations for a hybrid model.

RQ₃: The main obstacles identified were linked to legal limitations, organizational budget, and the lack of professional equipment. These results are sustained by the observations made by [31,32]. Therefore, the lack of legal frameworks and clear policies for financing and digital promotion represents a structural problem, and it is difficult to resolve in the short term.

RQ₄: Our study highlights a change in conceptual change. Museums are more and more oriented towards interactivity and personal experience in accordance with Gensler Research and UNESCO [59,60]. This transformation is complex, and in the early stages of development, user engagement and impressions remain reduced. This highlights the necessity for creating a strong digital community, as refs. [16,61] reported.

RQ₅: A notable aspect of our research is the difference in the level of engagement and interaction of the audience on the digital platforms of the museums. The Museum of Ethnography and the Museum Casa Mureșenilor have succeeded in creating a consistent and engaged audience, while other institutions have faced challenges in generating comments and active feedback. This reflects the importance of relevant content and communication strategies tailored to the specific nature of each institution [62,63].

Regarding the questionnaire analysis, Hypothesis H1 is strongly confirmed through the Pearson correlation coefficient, which shows a very high association between the frequency of online interaction with museums and the evaluation of the quality of digital content offered ($r = 0.912, p < 0.001$). This result indicates that individuals who frequently use museums' digital resources tend to have a positive perception of their quality. The relationship highlights a mutually reinforcing effect: digital experience generates favorable evaluations, and positive perceptions increase the likelihood of future engagement with such content. This connection was also confirmed in the factor analysis, where both variables are grouped under the same latent factor—a positive attitude toward digitalization.

The results also clearly support Hypothesis H2. The moderate negative correlation between age and willingness to participate in online activities ($r = -0.429, p < 0.01$) shows that younger individuals express significantly higher levels of interest in digital museum offerings compared to older respondents. This relationship is also reflected in the exploratory factor analysis, where age and willingness for online activities form a distinct factor. The result emphasizes the presence of an age barrier in accessing and adopting new digital forms of cultural consumption—an aspect that must be taken into account when adapting museum products for different audience segments.

Hypothesis H3 is partially supported, but without direct evidence from the statistical correlation analysis between education level and agreement with digitalization. However, the educational distribution of the sample shows a predominantly higher education profile (over 77% of respondents have university or postgraduate studies), and the expressed opinions reflect strong support for digitalization—over 57% of respondents gave a rating of 4 or 5 regarding the necessity of the process. While these observations suggest a possible association between education level and a favorable attitude toward digitalization, the absence of an explicit statistical test means Hypothesis H3 remains interpretive, without full empirical confirmation.

Hypothesis H4 is confirmed through factor analysis, which reveals a clear association between cultural behavior during the pandemic (physical museum visits) and positive evaluation of the museum's online presence. These two indicators together shape Factor 2—Experience and General Evaluation, which explains 16.6% of the total variance. The result suggests that direct, recent experiences contribute to a favorable perception of the museum's digital presence. Visitors who remained active during the pandemic appear more inclined to recognize and appreciate the efforts made by cultural institutions to adapt to the digital environment.

Based on these findings, we recommend the following measures for decision makers and cultural managers:

- Creating specialized positions to manage the online presence of museums, including experts in social media, graphic design, and video production, to enhance the quality and attractiveness of digital content.
- Flexibility in regulations regarding the budgets of cultural institutions is necessary so that they can use funds for paid promotion on digital platforms, removing current barriers that limit online visibility.

- Museums should seamlessly integrate digital methods with traditional ones, offering visitors a comprehensive experience that leverages both the easy and global access of the virtual world and the authenticity and emotion of physical presence.
- Local museums should collaborate with educational institutions, cultural organizations, and local authorities to create joint programs that stimulate public participation and diversify the digital and physical cultural offerings.
- Organizing courses and workshops for museum staff in digital skills is vital to ensure efficient adaptation to the new requirements of cultural communication.
- Creating interactive campaigns, contests, and online events to stimulate feedback and active participation of the public can strengthen loyalty and interest in the museum.
- Implementing clear indicators to measure digital impact, including reach, engagement, and return on investment (ROI), will allow for adjustments to maximize communication efficiency.

Generally the digitalization of museums has a huge potential to modernize access to culture, but the success of this transition depends on an approach that values both tradition and innovation. Our study provides an applied and contextualized contribution to understanding these processes, offering a solid foundation for the development of effective strategies in the Romanian museum field.

5. Study Limitations

Although our study offers valuable insights into the digitalization process of museums in Braşov County, Romania, we acknowledge several important limitations. Firstly, this research focused exclusively on Braşov County, which means that the findings cannot be fully generalized to other regions or to the national level. The results are most applicable to similar local contexts.

Additionally, the analysis was based on online content, the perspectives of museum staff, and responses from a public questionnaire, which may introduce a certain degree of subjectivity and bias in interpreting the results. This study covers the period from March 2020 to March 2021, capturing a unique moment during the pandemic. Changes and developments that occurred afterward are not analyzed, which highlights the need for future research to monitor trends over time.

Even though this research employed triangulation by integrating three different methods of data collection—documentary analysis, interviews, and a public questionnaire—certain limitations prevent broader generalization of the findings. Firstly, the online content analysis was conducted exclusively on Facebook and YouTube. This choice was partly dictated by the fact that only one museum had accounts on other platforms, such as Instagram. As a result, this may have limited the understanding of engagement patterns among specific segments of the audience who prefer alternative social media channels.

Secondly, this study involved a relatively small number of interviews with museum professionals. This can introduce a certain level of subjectivity, as individual perceptions might disproportionately influence the interpretation of institutional practices.

Lastly, the questionnaire used a non-probabilistic convenience sample. While it offers relevant insight into the perceptions of active and digitally engaged visitors, it cannot be considered representative of the broader population of museum-goers in the region.

Despite these limitations, our study provides a clear picture of both the challenges and opportunities faced by museums in Braşov in their digital transformation process.

The pandemic radically changed the way institutions, organizations, and entities communicate and continue their activities. Unfortunately, those who relied exclusively on the physical presence of visitors—such as museums—were neither prepared nor equipped to face this new challenge. However, in a certain sense, the need for digitalization also

brought benefits: culture became more accessible to people, who were no longer constrained by space or time to experience what museums have to offer. The innovations implemented during that period have persisted beyond the pandemic, and today, new technologies and possibilities are available to enhance the visitor experience, increase awareness, and foster audience engagement.

6. Conclusions

The conducted study highlights the strategic importance of digitalization in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the transformation of cultural institutions both globally and locally, including in Braşov County. Through rapid digital solutions, museums succeeded in maintaining their cultural relevance and providing expanded access to heritage, despite physical restrictions. A clear transition was observed from a collection-centered institutional model to one focused on the visitor and personalized experience.

However, the digitalization process was marked by fragmentation, lack of specialized staff, and budgetary constraints. Interviews with museum staff revealed that online promotion was often improvised, lacking a clear strategy, and the quality of digital content was impacted by the absence of equipment and technical expertise.

The questionnaire analysis supports the hypotheses that frequent interaction with museums online is associated with a positive evaluation of digital content and that younger individuals are more willing to participate in online museum activities compared to older respondents. These results underscore both the potential of digitalization to modernize access to culture and the need for clear public policies, dedicated resources, and professional training in order to transform this transition into a sustainable and effective process.

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