

#ArtToThePeople ?
Instagram, Art Museums and Democratising Practices

MA Thesis Creative Industries

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Summary:

Today, virtually every museum in Europe and in the United States strives to present itself as a democratic institution. At the same time, scholarly literature puts much emphasis on the democratising potential of social media for museum practice. Prompted by the lack of factual data on museum's employment of social media bemoaned in scholarly theorisation, this thesis carried out an empirical study on how museums use Instagram. In particular, the thesis focused on the extent to, and the ways in which, museums are harnessing Instagram's democratising potential in order to fulfil their democratic aspirations (RQ). Through a mixed method involving content analysis and semiotic analysis, the thesis concludes that, currently, Instagram's potential for a more democratic museology is harnessed only to a very partial extent. For the main part, museums stepped foot on Instagram either animated by non-democratic promotional purposes or adopting an authoritative knowledge-telling attitude. Some virtuous exceptions were nevertheless registered, showing that museums are starting to experiment with non-conventional practices that allow them to fulfil Instagram's democratising potential to a greater extent. These virtuous practices mainly push in the direction of a more visitor-centred and a more inclusive online museology. Instead, Instagram's potential for participatory museum practices still has to bear fruit.

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1. Introduction

This thesis spurs from the intersection of my personal experience with the analysis of scholarly literature. I personally have an Instagram account, and through it I follow many art museum accounts. For me, this has always been a way to explore and extend my interests in a self-directed way, keep myself informed and also, indirectly, create my online identity. In certain cases, the exploration of these museum accounts proved very meaningful to me. In other cases, it left me with a sense of dissatisfaction as if, while scrolling down their account's feed, I could not really find what I was looking for. Certain posts published by these museums, in other words, were not relevant to me. Yet, before a few months ago, I hardly ever lingered on the reasons for this dissatisfaction. I did not pause to analyse the differences between the posts I reputed meaningful and those considered on par with spam on my Instagram feed. A more critical attitude was embraced only when I came in contact with the latest scholarly literature regarding museum practice. Through this lens, I started to consider that museums step foot on Instagram with specific purposes. Their purposes inform the kinds of posts published on their account; eventually, the kind of posts published determines the difference between my satisfaction and dissatisfaction when I encounter them. At that point, I became determined to analyse what museums are trying to achieve on Instagram. One aspect of museum Instagram activity, in particular, interested me more than others: namely, its democratising potential. This is because, despite the particular emphasis put by scholarly theorisation on social media's democratising potential, I do not believe that museums are in practice employing Instagram in a very democratic way. My unverified hypothesis is thus that art museums are currently not fulfilling social media's democratizing potential. The title of the thesis, “#ArtToThePeople?”, wants in fact to convey my questioning of the democratic nature of museum online practices. It indeed places a question mark after #arttothepeople, the hashtag used by the Pirelli Hangar Biccocca (one of the museums taken into consideration in the thesis) to brand itself as democratic on Instagram.

Hence, in my thesis, I will study the relation existing between the democratic aspirations of art museums and the way these museums use institutional Instagram accounts. Once again, this particular focus is the result of both my personal attitudes and a literature-driven interest. As an art museum frequent visitor, I have always been concerned with those strategies adopted by art

institutions to create a welcoming and meaningful museum experience. However, in my volunteering experience in cultural promotion, I also developed a certain attentiveness towards the needs of non-frequent visitors. The same attentiveness seems ubiquitous in contemporary scholarly literature regarding museum practice. At the moment, the idea of the democratic museum generates a lot of buzz among scholars and museum professionals (see Barret 1; Black 124; Hooper-Greenhill 133; Marstine *et al.* 75). After all, in virtually every country, only a slim slice of population is composed of frequent visitors. Therefore, to remain relevant in contemporary democratic societies, the museum needs to abandon elitist moves and make their presence meaningful also for those people that traditionally felt excluded by the art museum (Black 124). In this discussion, a theme is particularly recurrent: the potential of the Internet for a more democratic museum (see Iversen and Smith 126; Kelly 54; Marselis and Shutze 66; Meecham 33). In other words, the Internet, and social media in particular, is regarded as a powerful tool to fulfil the democratic aims that most museums claim to have, may these be to be more inclusive, visitor-centred or participatory.

However, considering the topicality this argument has in contemporary museum studies, empirical research supporting its theorization proved scarce. The scarcity of factual data is bemoaned by Giaccardi (1) and Hagedorn-Saupe *et al.* (125). Similarly, Reeve and Woolward (562) pointed out that, while museums substantially invest in social media technologies, there has been little understanding of their potential or assessment of their use (see also Russo 146). Consequently, Drotner and Schroder (9) call out for a “much needed dialogue around the communication, rather than technological, dimension of social media for engagement, learning and inclusion for museums”.

Moreover, the few existing empirical studies on museums’ use of social media do not provide any information about Instagram – a platform where museums are quite active. For museum studies, Instagram is an interesting field of research for four main reasons. First, despite its relative novelty, Instagram is one of the most used social media platforms worldwide (Laestadius 2). Second, it uses pictures as means of communication (Laestadius 4); it is therefore characterized by a highly visual culture with which art museums tend to be familiar. Third, Instagram users tend to be younger than thirty-five and – at least in the United States – display a significant ethnic and social diversity (Laestadius 5). Finally, Instagram is a primarily mobile app. If, as identified by Black (127), “by 2020 mobile technologies will be the main means to access the web”, Instagram’s popularity is likely to thrive in the coming years. An understanding of its dynamics is thus pivotal for the future of a museum seen as an increasingly democratic institution.

Furthermore, I believe that focusing specifically on art museum accounts may turn out even more relevant, as the presence of art institutions on social media is controversial. In fact, Bell and

Ippolito (476) registered resistances to adopt social media in particular among art museums. According to Cornell (qtd. in Arnold 334), this is because art and the Internet are somehow “axiomatically polarised”, as “the art world is vertical while the Internet is horizontal”. Similarly, Marstine *et al.* (82) identified this reluctance in embracing the Web’s democratising potential as the result of art museums’ attachment to canonicity. By holding their role as defenders of cultural canons online, art museums are creating barriers to social participation and thus failing to fully harness social media’s democratizing potential. This is probably why existing studies on museums online tend to focus on science museums while omitting art institutions. Nonetheless, art museums are widely present on social media, and the lack of studies regarding their online activity represents a missed opportunity for both museum professionals and the society these museums claim to serve.

Having identified this gap in the existing research, I intend to provide, with my thesis, empirical data on the actual use of Instagram by art museums. Confidently, these empirical data may support subsequent scholarly theorisation regarding art museums’ presence on social media in relation to their role in democratic societies. Also, they may raise awareness among museum professionals regarding the nature of theirs and other museums’ social media activity. Greater awareness will hopefully result in a more conscious way of using Instagram, where the institution’s purposes online are clearly delineated and strategies to reach them are selected knowingly. Certainly standing in the realm of digital humanities, this thesis wants to focus more on communication issues rather than on technological ones. Therefore, instead of focusing on the technological affordance of this social media platform, the thesis will assess how museums’ authority and expertise manifest itself among democratic Instagram communities, how (and whether) engagement, inclusivity and participation are nurtured by museum accounts and, ultimately, to what extent Instagram’s democratizing potential is being harnessed by museum professionals.

In view of the emphasis put by scholarly literature on the democratizing potential of social media within museum practices, I focused my research on those museums which openly stated to have democratic aims. My research question thus was: **To what extent and in what ways do art museums with declared democratic aspirations make use of the democratizing potential of Instagram institutional accounts?** In order to provide a more analytical answer, I reputed opportune to split my research question into three different, but intertwined, sub-questions. The first sub-question was: *What are the main practices undertaken by the museums in the sample in their use of Instagram?* By answering this sub-question, I was able to assess what part of museums’ activity on Instagram can be considered democratising. As for my second sub-question, I investigated *how, when there is any, the relation between each museum’s democratic aspirations*

and its use of Instagram is shaped. In other terms, looking at how the museums' image is shaped on their Instagram accounts, it emerges which democratic aspects of the institution are emphasized over others – if any at all is. The predominance of given aspects was regarded as the way in which institutions operationalise their purposes on Instagram. Eventually, the results were read in light of the democratic aspirations declared by museums. Finally, my third sub-question was: *What kinds of posts contribute to a more democratic use of Instagram on behalf of museums?* With this last sub-question, I focused exclusively on those practices reputed, to some extent, democratising. I analysed what features a post should have in order to harness Instagram's democratising potential. My hope is that, by focusing on already existing virtuous practices, museums willing to fulfil their democratic aspirations on Instagram will be offered some hints to do so.

The research question was addressed applying a mixed method to a selection of eight art museums (located in Europe and in the United States) and related Instagram accounts, considered as a collection of case studies: in a first phase, I undertook a content analysis of a sample of fifty posts uploaded by each museum's Instagram account; consequently, I performed a semiotic analysis of a selection of the same posts. The content analysis is supposed to provide hard evidence regarding museums' online activity, without which any further theorisation would result in unsupported conjectures. The semiotic analysis, on the other hand, prevents the thesis from being too descriptive, allowing to gain insights into strategies and communication modalities adopted by art museums on Instagram.

In order to provide a deeper understanding of the object of research and to make the research method as clear as possible, the thesis is structured as follows: in the second chapter, I provide a historical overview of how, in the past two centuries, the idea of the democratic museum emerged and on how it is currently theorised. This part offers a glimpse of the origin and the nature of the democratic aspirations most museums claim to have. Subsequently, the focus moves on the potential of the Internet and social media for fulfilling art museums' democratic aspirations. Scholars' most relevant perspectives in this regard are presented, paying specific attention to the extent and the ways in which museums are making use of this potential. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the empirical research into museums' use of social media produced so far. The third chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the thesis – the lens through which the research was carried out and the results were interpreted. Drawing on the theories presented in the previous chapter, it defines the democratic museum as it must be intended in the present work: an inclusive and participatory institution devoted to the creation of visitor-centred museum experiences. The fourth chapter is reserved for the presentation of the methodology adopted during the research phase. Besides providing a definition of the two methods employed (content analysis

and semiotic analysis), it describes how the two were operationalized. In such a way, the chapter intends to make the study replicable and thus reliable. The data gathered during the research phase are presented in the fifth and sixth chapters. Specifically, in the fifth chapter, after an individual presentation of the museums selected as case studies, the most relevant data from the content analysis of each museum account are displayed. Subsequently, they are discussed and interpreted in the light of the institution's characteristics and democratic aspirations. In the sixth chapter, on the other hand, the semiotic analysis of five Instagram posts from the content analysis sample is performed. The five posts were selected because reputed examples of posts harnessing, to some extent, Instagram's democratising potential. Finally, in the concluding chapter, the main findings of the study are restated, providing an answer to my research question and the related sub-questions. With this, I hope to contribute knowledge on a topic that, addressing issues as the role of the Internet and the role of the museum in democratic societies, is likely to hold a much important place in the very next years.

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter aims at exploring the relations between the idea of the democratic museum and the presence of museums on social media. It does so by presenting the theoretical contributions and the empirical research which, so far, have been produced in this regard. Since virtually no literature on how museums use Instagram¹ exists, I have decided to broaden my literature review to include perspectives on the use of social media by the democratic museum. The chapter starts with an overview of the gradual emergence of the democratic museum idea during the last two centuries, thanks to the contributions of scholars, museum professionals and policymakers coming from both Europe and the United States. Once described its origin, the chapter focuses on the contemporary theorisation of the democratic museum, in which social media play a major role. The second part of this chapter tries to define the democratising potential of social media and to assess the extent to which museums are making use of this potential. Moreover, it identifies the strategies a museum should adopt to truly fulfil it – but also the risks implied. To conclude, I present some of the existing empirical research on museums’ experiences on social media.

2.2 The democratic museum

2.2.1 *The occurrence of the “democratic museum” idea.*

Scrolling through museum web pages and consulting their mission statements, it seemed that nowadays every museum wants to present itself as democratic, visitor-centred and inclusive.² However, this has not always been the case. Indeed, the belief that the museum must be a democratic institution emerged gradually starting from the late nineteenth century. After all, the idea of the inclusive museum is strictly correlated to the discussion around the role of museums in

¹ Instagram is a mobile photo-sharing application launched in 2010. With its 30 million registered accounts (McNely 2), Instagram qualifies as one of the most popular visual social media platforms in the world (Laestadius 2). In the intention of its creators, Instagram should use images to facilitate connections between users (Laestadius 3). The application indeed affords the publication of posts which must necessarily include a picture or a video. The visual can be accompanied, in the caption, by an optional text and hashtags. As it has been demonstrated by various studies (see Lestadius 4), hashtags are hardly ever used as a mean of communication *per se*. Instead, their function is limited to providing the context for posted images. The type of communication afforded by Instagram should thus be classified as visual rather than textual. The fact that visual communication is predominant is proved also by the fact that, despite the application affords the contribution of other comments to other users’ posts, comments are usually scarce and short (Lestadius 3). Other than this peculiarity, Instagram shares many of the key affordances with other popular social media, “including a reverse chronological timeline, liking [...] features, and asymmetric follower relationships” (McNely 2).

² See Trustees of the British Museum, *About us*; The Museum of Modern Art, *About Us*; Pirelli HangarBicocca, *About Us*.

societies, and this has changed consistently in the past century. If we want to fix a starting point in this transformation, we can say that the model of the museum, born after the French revolution, which aimed at the construction of a unified and univocal national memory (Brown and Mairesse 528), started to be challenged in 1891 with the work of Brown Goode. Goode, an American museum administrator, indicated in his notorious *The Museum of the Future* that the museum was an institution devoted to the advancement and the diffusion of knowledge not only among specialists, but also between non-professionals. More specifically, Brown Goode indicated that the museum should intellectually stimulate both the educated few and the uneducated masses (434). A step ahead in this direction was taken in 1920 by John Cotton Dana, another American museum professional. With his trailblazing *A Plan for a New Museum*, the author pointed out how any public institution should give returns for their costs. As such, museums should be of use to their communities (12-13). The trend towards the development of the “democratic museum” idea had thus been set; yet, an acceleration in its theorization started only in the last thirty years of the twentieth century. A crucial year in this sense is 1970, when the International Council of Museums (ICOM) strongly started the discussion on the social function of museums for a democratic society (Brown and Mairesse 528). In this occasion, museums were indicated as institutions for laypeople, while the focus moved from a museum’s collections to their relationship with society (ICOM, *"Ethics of Acquisitions" Statement*). The event must have caused an only partial shift in museum practices, if in 1989 Peter Vergo published *The New Museology*. Defining the “new museology” as “a state of widespread dissatisfaction with the ‘old’ museology” (iii), Vergo advocated a more self-reflective museum practice which would focus on the museum’s purpose rather than on museum methods (iii-iv).

During the 1990s, the view of museums as agents of societal development proposed by the ICOM in 1970 was consistently embraced throughout Europe and the United States (Norton-Westbrook 347). European policymakers fostered museums to tackle social issues to enhance social inclusion (Black 124; Norton-Westbrook 347; Ciolfi 73). The most notorious example in this regard is the push of the New Labour government in the United Kingdom for greater engagement with communities on behalf of public museums. This approach resulted in the 2001 report *Renaissance in the Regions: a new vision for England’s museums*. Raised out of concern for the state of English regional museums, *Renaissance in the Region* clearly defined its aim as empowering museums “for the greater good of an audience” (5). More in detail, it attributed to the public museum “an important part to play in education, learning, access, (and) social inclusion” (5). Around the same years, in the United States, Weil identified the ongoing transformation of the American museum as a passage from being “about something” to being “for somebody” (229). This meant a reshaping of

museum practices, with the museum's primary activity shifting from the growth and study of its collection to the educational services provided to the public. Under these terms, an institution's success is proportional to its effectiveness in serving the public (Weil 229-230). The function of this new model of museum is therefore "to contribute positively to the quality of individual human lives and to enhance the well-being of human communities" (Weil 231).

A further institutional acknowledgement of this view, at least in Europe, arrived in 2005 with the European Union's *Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society* (Council of Europe), otherwise known as the 2005 Faro Convention. Even if it does not address museums specifically, the 2005 Faro Convention highlights the potential of cultural heritage "as a resource for sustainable development and quality of life" (Council of Europe, Preamble). Also, it stated the need to improve access to heritage especially among young people and the disadvantaged, together with the right of every individual to engage with social heritage and contribute to its enrichment (Council of Europe).

2.2.2 *The contemporary democratic museum*

We now see how, in the past decades, the discourse around the social function of the museum embedded the notion of inclusivity, participation and centrality of the visitor as pivotal aspects for the accomplishment of the museum's public mission. In scholarly literature, the idea of a museum informed by these principles is often defined as a *post-modern museum* (Hooper-Greenhill 143) or *post-museum* (Meecham 33; Wellington and Oliver 592). The post-museum marks the overcoming of the nineteenth-century modernist museum, with its stress on education and power, its emphasis on the curator role and its poor understanding of the importance of an audience's interpretative practices (Russo 146). More specifically, the post-museum resulted from the acknowledgement, which occurred in the 1960s, that visitor learning is highly influenced by prior experience and knowledge (Russo 146), so that the visitor's response to the collection eludes the curator's control (Falk and Dierking 26). The post-museum moved from a collection-driven to an audience-driven approach, while trying to appeal to specific target groups, traditionally excluded from the museum's walls (Hooper-Greenhill 134). As noted by Dodd (132), introducing these groups to museums is less about achieving high educational levels and more about negotiating meanings, building confidence and provoking opportunities. This is achieved, in practice, by promoting visitors' participation in the interpretation of the museum collection, for example through lectures, workshops, hands-on activities and outreach programmes (Ciolfi 73). Consequently, education in the post-museum is conceived of as based on experience, active and structured (Hooper-Greenhill 137).

In the early 2000s, Weil (qtd. in Lord 34) introduced the term *civil society institution* to describe the twenty-first-century post-museum. The museum as civil societal institution is characterized by consistent social, economic and cultural involvement with its community (may this be meant as the neighbourhood, city, nation *etc.*). Both the private and the public sector, as well as individuals and organisations, should be involved in the governance of the museum, all sharing “sense of responsibility to and for the maintenance of a healthy, creative (and) innovative society” (Lord 34). In other terms, the museum gains social relevance in that it supports the well-being of contemporary societies. According to Davidson (505), this can be achieved only if museums become more democratic and give more attention to the community they are supposed to represent. Similarly, Marstine *et al.* (75) defined the twenty-first-century museum as an ethical museum which supports democratic pluralism, shared authority and social justice. Barret (1) justifies the social relevance of the museum with its status of democratic institution that supports democracy by facilitating public discourse. Indeed, drawing on Habermas' notions of public sphere and public space (17-23), Barret identifies the museum as a site where public discourse occurs in an inclusive and yet monitored environment (85). As a place where communication is regulated by normative modes and a rational approach (25), the museum allows dialogue on matters of “public importance, such as processes of democracy” (82). Barret’s view of museums as spaces of dialogue and conversational exchange is shared also by other authors. Black (135) and Henning (93) see museums as safe environments for the negotiation of meanings within a community – at least as long as the museum experience emphasises pluralism, tolerance, engagement and inclusiveness. According to Arnold (136), bringing the voice of the under-represented and less-privileged into the public discourse is at the very core of the museum’s function. Interestingly, the author claims that the museum’s imperative must be to rebalance society, while its “ultimate goal (is) to make better and more critical citizens” (136).

That being said, the one name that cannot be forgotten when addressing the museum as a space of dialogue is Nina Simon. Simon essentially conceives the (ideal) museum as a platform that connects different users while supporting multi-directional content exchange (3). This is opposed to the information flow in traditional institutions, where museum professionals univocally provide contents for visitors to consume (2). For a museum, working as a platform for the exchange of cultural content implies a partial loss of control over the contents circulating within its spaces. As Simon herself puts it, “this means the institution cannot guarantee the consistency of visitor experiences. Instead, the institution provides opportunities for diverse visitor co-produced experiences” (2). In other terms, the museum that works as a platform for public discourse gains democratic relevance, but at the same time loses curatorial authority.

The loss of curatorial authority is indeed one of the most discussed features regarding the shift from the modernist institution to the contemporary museum (Barret 4; Falk and Dierking 24; Giaccardi 4; Marstine *et al.* 75). Even though the primary aim of the curator was once to gather, expand and preserve collections, the organisation of these collections and their presentation to the public were soon embedded in the role of the curator (Arnold 317; Norton-Westbrook 431). In the modernist museum, the curator's authority in presenting the collection went unquestioned. However, things started to change in the 1980s under the influence of Bourdieu's work (Norton-Westbrook 434). Bourdieu demonstrated that the appreciation of art, far from being an innate quality of human nature, was strongly linked to each individual's education and social class (Bourdieu 1). By leaving the reasons for aesthetic judgment implicit, as if they were objective (Bourdieu 4), museums and curators were in fact excluding from the appreciation of art those who (for education or social class) did not possess the means to make such an aesthetic judgment (Bourdieu 7).

Drawing on Bourdieu's theories, Vergo pointed out that curatorial choices in fact of display are not as objective as they claim to be. He thus advocates a more "transparent" way of making exhibitions, a way that does not impose on the artwork any meaning attributed to it by the curator. Rather, it leaves the object open for resignifications on behalf of the visitors (Vergo 48). With this, Vergo made a crucial point. After his work, museology had to deal with the fact that the curator is not the only figure in the museum to develop interpretations and provide aesthetic judgments: visitors do it too. What is more, the new role of the curator is to grant visitors with the right to do so. Today it is generally accepted among academics that the interpretation of a piece of art does not belong to the museum but to the community that the artwork is most representative for (Arnold 330; Marstine *et al.* 372). In conclusion, the view of the curator as the authoritative voice in the museum and society is now outweighed by the view of the curator as a facilitator (Falk and Dierking 24; Reeve and Woolward 562; Silberman and Purser 13; Simon 27). Curators are now supposed to broaden the access to cultural objects to as many people as possible (Hooper-Greenhill 136), and provide audience with the means to develop personal interpretations and meanings (Falk and Dierking 14; Norton-Westbrook 341; Reeve and Woollard 560). Arguably, the fact that curators share authority with audiences in interpretative practices does not lessen the relevance of their role. According to Arnold (317), "curators have increasingly emerged as some of our most significant cultural leaders: impresarios with an acute ability to make relevant the dizzying world of stuff around us". Arnold continues: to fulfil their duty, curators and museums must avoid "a vox-pop culture that has, arguably, championed the known, safe and mediocre, over and above the innovative, bold and risky" (326). In other words, museums and curators are now expected to make

culture more democratic without lessening its value. However, the ways in which this can be achieved are still matters of debate.

2.3 The democratic museum online

2.3.1 The transformative impact of the Internet: museums' current practices online

A crucial point made by the 2005 Faro convention is the need, for the signatory countries, to develop digital technologies to enhance access to cultural heritage, as well as to secure the diversity of language and culture in informational society (Council of Europe). The need to digitize cultural material and promote access to it was restated in 2010 with the *European Parliament Resolution on a new Digital Agenda for Europe* (European Parliament). The focus on digital technologies did not come out of the blue. Indeed, in the discourse around the democratic museum, much emphasis is put on the participatory potential of the Internet. A consistent group of scholars sees the Internet and its promises of digital democracy as a powerful tool in the hands of the democratic museum. Among this group stands out the enthusiastic perspective of Meecham, who argues that digital technologies can cause a shift in power relations between the established authorities and the public. According to this scholar, ICT fosters a transition to a more democratic post-museum (33). Similarly, Giaccardi emphasizes the transformative impact of social media on our understanding and experience of heritage, relying on the notion of grass-root convergence (Giaccardi 1). Fairclough holds a similar opinion, specifying that social media change heritage “by asking everyone to participate in its construction, encouraging openness not closure of interpretation and valuation” and by “making flux, uncertainty and doubt critical” (xvi). In fact, the potential of the Internet for the democratic museum is virtually universally recognised. However, the debate is split between those who enthusiastically embrace the transformation as already happened, and those who warn for confusing the Internet democratizing potential with its actual employment.

The fact is that, how Silberman and Purser (26) point out, the mere employment of digital technologies does not necessarily imply democratisation. Instead, digital media fulfil their democratizing potential only if they are designed with this purpose. Silberman and Purser's perspective is shared by Russo, for whom “digital technologies alone should not be assumed to foster structural change within cultural and memory institutions. [...] Rather, cultural institutions would need to ‘reinvent’ themselves if they were to implement technological initiatives that were to benefit their mission” (155). The 2002 DigiCULT Report (European Commission) supports this statement. After assessing the impact of communication and information technologies on museums, archives and libraries, the report had to conclude that at the moment “the high promises” of ICT “are not yet fulfilled” (12). Many authors proved to be sceptic about considering this democratizing

process as having already occurred (Henning, *Museum, Media and Cultural Theory* 74; Hull and Scot 132; Meecham 35; Parry 23; Russo 146). In particular, Parry (23) points out that, compared to the rest of the Internet, museums remain fairly conservative in their online practices. Considering museums' presence online, the scholar claims that, at the moment, museums are embracing a heavily informative-oriented approach and emphasising their curatorial and interpretative role. Likewise, Hull and Scot identify the "knowledge-telling mode" as prevailing in museums' online spaces (132). In other terms, institutions are replicating online the social order existing in the brick-and-mortar museum (Meecham 35; Russo 146).

This is not to say that ICT did not affect museum practices at all. The Internet does have a transformative impact on these institutions. However, so far, museums are not fully exploiting the democratizing potential of the Internet. As Henning (*Museum, Media and Cultural Theory* 74) puts it, thanks to digital media "the museum's relation to its audience changed". Yet, this happened "both in the direction of democratization *and* in the direction of control".

2.3.2 Fulfilling social media's democratizing potential

Once acknowledged that adopting digital technologies does not necessarily imply democratization, another issue has to be addressed: What should museums do to fully exploit the democratizing potential of the Internet? Being the "hot topic" of the moment, the scholarly discussion in this regard is broad and yet somehow confusing. The theorization often lacks a distinction between the employment of social media inside and outside the museum walls; it does not trace a clear cut between the use of mainstream social media and the use of the Internet in general; and it blurs the boundaries between digital heritage and the digitization of museum material. To avoid this confusion, I present here only the literature reputed most relevant to my research question. I will thus focus only on those authors who address museums' use of social media for activities designed to happen outside the museum walls. Once narrowed down, the discussion around the strategies in which social media's democratizing potential can be fully exploited can be organized into five main themes: *engagement*, *participation*, *multivocality*, *digitized museum objects* and *online museum experience*.

First of all, social media serve the aims of the democratic museum in that they afford a broader *engagement* with the museum's communities (Higgins P. 320; Kelly 54; Meecham 36; Russo 154). Compared to museums' websites, social media have the advantage to engage with audiences where they already are (Drotner and Schroder 4; Hagedorn-Saupe *et al.* 125; Iversen and Smith 127). This means that, on social media, those who would never step a foot inside a brick-and-mortar museum may accidentally stumble on museum content (Arnold 322; Bell and Ippolito

477). In this regard, social media are useful to reach the 18-30 year old audience which, on average, is very active on social media. This age group is the hardest to reach for museums (Higgins 325; Hull and Scot 131). It thus is clear that, to use social media in a truly democratic way, museums should not engage solely with those social media users that are already museum visitors. Rather, they should use social media to reach, and be of service to those individuals traditionally excluded from the museum, in addition to those who already frequent museums. Therefore, if this broader engagement does not evolve into participation, museums will fail their democratic mission. Pursuing engagement for engagement's sake will reduce it to corporate-like practices that conceive users only as potential customers. Instead, a broader engagement should serve to create a sustained base for participation (Iversen and Smith 127; Fairclough xvi; Russo 151).

Second, it has been said that the role of the democratic museum is to work as a hub that sustains dialogue on matters of public interest. In this perspective, the museum provides a platform for *participation*, namely the contribution of content and knowledge on behalf of communities and individuals (Russo 151). Social media, as sites where people share content and comments, provide museums with the infrastructure to sustain participation (Davidson 519; Fairclough xvi; Giaccardi 5; Iversen and Smith 127; Kelly 64; Reeve and Woolward 560, Russo 147; Wellington and Oliver 577). Indeed, as noted by Kelly (54), “social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest are becoming standard places for people to share their experience and communicate with others, increasingly via a mobile device”. In other words, social media developed a participatory culture (Drotner and Schroder 4). The participatory museum should thus take advantage of the possibilities already existing on social media for a dialogic exchange between the institution and its audience. It should leave behind the univocal communication model, typical of traditional museums, and attempt a bi-directional knowledge exchange with its audience (Drotner and Schroder 3). In such a way, museums can foster socially-distributed curation (Liu 31). Simply put, this means moving to a co-creation model where museums communicate with multiple audiences regarding issues important for society (Hagedorn-Saupe 113). Many authors commented on what true socially-distributed curation looks like. Marselis and Schutze (90) emphasise how museums should find a way to incorporate user-generated content into the discussion space. Similarly, Iversen and Smith (142) pointed out how dialogue should not be created as a consequence of an already existing project, but rather be at the very base of the project design. On the other hand, Ciolfi (79) observed that, even though “it is impractical to demand the same degree of participation to all the stakeholders, [...] it is important to communicate to stakeholders that there is an underlying will to represent them somehow”. This means that different stakeholders can have different roles, based on their expertise, background and ideas. Still, they will all find a place in the conversation thanks to

the mediating position of the museum (Bell and Ippolito 477). Interestingly enough, Ciolfi's model of socially distributed curation reserves a predominant role for the institution. A predominant position of the museum can be found also in Hull and Scot's (150) participation model where, by mediating between the interaction of different digital narratives, museums narrate art history while at the same time incorporating users' personal narratives. In other words, fostering participation does not undermine museums' social significance, because "in a digital world of multivocality, professional expertise will always be useful" (Silberman and Purser 14).

Third, inviting users to contribute perspectives on issues of public importance on social media will inevitably bring together conflicting messages. Thus, to be of service to democratic societies, a museum must be well aware of the antagonistic stances its voice can elicit (Kelly 57) and at the same time be prepared to handle strategies of conflict management. According to many scholars, the best strategy for conflict management is fostering *multivocality* (Barret 111; Giaccardi 5; Hull and Scot 150; Meecham 36; Silberman and Purser 14). This means allowing different perspectives in the same online space without giving predominance to any of them. In a multivocal environment, no single opinion can claim to be truth. When conflicting ideas are presented as personal perspectives rather than universal truths, different perspectives can coexist. For museums, the mission is to encourage dialogue with peers that "promote(s) intercultural understanding and a cosmopolitan disposition to imagining and understanding the other" (Hull and Scot 150). In museum practices, multivocality is most commonly fostered in relation to the interpretation of art and artefacts (Meecham 36).

Another topic of scholarly discussion is indeed the role attributed to *museum objects*. An interesting insight in this regard is offered by Hagedorn-Saupe *et al.*, who apply Paris' criteria for developing well-designed media in the physical space of the museum to social media (see also Paris 6). In explaining how digitized museum objects should be used on social media, the authors claim that museum collections should be exposed to users so that, drawing on the special qualities of the artefacts, users can construct personal meanings in ways that are challenging, motivating and satisfying. Objects should promote conversation, enhance self-perception and promote the sense of identity of a community (Hagedorn-Saupe *et al.* 115). Similarly, Hull and Scot (37) invite the use of digitized museum objects as prompts to build personal stories and communal narratives, which preserve the artefact's original meaning while at the same time highlighting their relevance for the public. This object-as-prompt mode is seen in opposition to the traditional object-centred model of curation, where objects acquire meaning only in relation to the art history framework, and the viewer is seen solely as a recipient of information. In fact, all the mentioned scholars claim that viewers should be supported in engaging with objects actively rather than passively assimilating

information about them (Hagedorn-Saupe *et al.* 115; Hull and Scot 37). Henning brings this statement a step further, drawing on Benjamin's (qtd. in Henning, *With and Without Walls* 584) idea that photographic reproduction "gives art back an active social and political role which it had lost when it entered the museum". According to Henning, digitized collections on social media free artefacts from the social norm of aesthetic contemplation attached to the original in the museum, so that viewers can approach the art object through an intellectual mode closer to technical problem-solving than to aesthetic enjoyment (Henning, *With and Without Walls* 585). Be this as it may, all these scholars highlight a fundamental feature of digitized collections: once uploaded on a social media platform, the museum object becomes a tool for the construction of personal meanings and active learning. After all, there is preliminary evidence that social media are considered by its users as sites for informal learning (Hagedorn-Saupe *et al.* 114). In order to meet these expectations, museums active on social media should present museum objects in a way that encourages users to take an active stance and become architects of their own learning experience.

The possibility to personalize the *museum experience* is actually the last main theme in this debate. Social media are assumed to provide tools to meet the individual interests of the audience while enabling users to contribute something personal to the museum experience. Moreover, the emphasis on the visitor experience online is considered as a way, for museums, to get rid of their authoritative modes and fully embrace the democratic nature of social media. Emblematically, Parry (18) sees museums' authoritarian stance online as a response to the anomic nature of the Web. Simply put, if museums are struggling to integrate users' perspectives in their online practices (Hull and Scot 132), it is because they are not confident with the fictive, relativistic and disorganised nature of the Web (Parry 19; Russo 155). In such an unregulated world, how can a museum place itself as *the* trusted voice? According to Parry (28), this can be achieved only if museums give up their privileges as keepers of the "the authentic objects" and move towards a self-conceptualisation as providers of "authentic experiences". Museums should enable people to construct, control and share their own experience online. Afterwards, museums can still capture the audience's customized experience and link it to the authoritative presence of the museum within the online community (Russo 153). In such a way, observes Russo (147), "experience-focused online curatorial communication can maintain the museum's traditionally remit as an authoritative source while enhancing the relationship between institution and audience by means of new forms of cultural participation".

2.3.3 Criticism towards the democratic museum online

The past paragraphs focused on the potential attributed to social media to make the museum a more democratic institution. However, it must be noted that the idea of museums online also raised criticism. For instance, Drotner and Schroder (4) caution us from embracing the concept of the democratic web too enthusiastically: after all, the most popular social media are property of large corporate companies. “In adopting [...] social media”, the two scholars wonder, “do museums [...] compromise on their aims of public accountability, service to the community, and social inclusion?” (4). In other words, Drotner and Schroder fear the profit-driven interests of private social media companies as an obstacle to fulfil museum’s public mission online. Doubts on the potential of social media for social inclusion were expressed also by Wellington and Oliver (589). After all, by adopting social media as a communication channel, museums are already excluding those who do not have access to digital technologies or do not have the digital capital to use them. This is why, Wellington and Oliver continue, it is important to avoid signing up for an acritical digital imperative nurtured by technological determinism (588). Before colonizing a new platform, museums should assess whether that platform meets their specific needs and whether the institution presents the infrastructure to support that platform (587). This is even more important, points out Arnold (335), since while museums are investing consistent resources in social media management, it still has to be assessed whether museums online allow a more meaningful experience.

2.4 Existing research

With much speculation going on, it is surprising to notice how the existing theorization suffers from a lack of empirical data. As a matter of fact, when compared to the ongoing theoretical discussion, the existing research on the actual use of social media by museums is scarce; on top of that, the ever-changing nature of online practices makes the existing research quickly out of date. The following are some of the existing studies on the use of social media on behalf of museums. Fletcher *et al.* (2012) investigate the use of social media by American museums. Through online surveys and interviews of museum professionals, they observe that American museums mainly employ social media as Twitter and Facebook with one-way communication strategies which prioritize promotional purposes. Nonetheless, museums are also starting to experiment with multi-directional communication modes. A similar research is carried out, for Latvian museums, by Lotina (2012). Through semi-structured interviews of museum professionals, Lotina explores museums’ participatory activities on Facebook, Twitter and the Latvian social media Draugiem. Her conclusion is that Latvian museums do not promote participation online as much as they do onsite –

seeking on social media a balance between participation and marketing strategies. Wong (2011) explores ethical issues concerned in museums' use of social media using the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as a case study. Drawing on her experience as social media manager in this museum, the author reviews the moral dilemmas and the difficulties she encountered while embracing Twitter, Facebook, Flickr and You Tube. In conclusion, she cautions museums' social media manager to carefully ponder issues of transparency and accountability in the light of each museum's peculiar ethic, as well as to develop strategies to cope with the multivocal nature of social media. Finally, using a mixed qualitative method to gather information regarding how people with disabilities use social media, McMillen and Alter elaborate on how art museums could use social media to inclusively improve their disability access.

Yet, in academic studies on museums' use of social networks virtually no attention is reserved to Instagram. The only partial exception is constituted by the work of Budge and Burness (2018), which explores the relationship between museums' objects and visitor-generated content on Instagram. In the view of the scholars, visitors' engagement with museum objects on Instagram is informed by agency and authority on the part of the users. As a result, Instagram pictures shot in expositive spaces are a powerful tool for museum professionals to understand visitors' motivation and museum experience. Still, Budge and Burness' work addresses the relationship between the museum and Instagram from the visitors' perspective. The use of Instagram from museums' perspective is something unheard of in the research field. This research gap can partly be attributed to the relative novelty of Instagram. Yet, Instagram's novelty did not prevent the platform from receiving scholarly attention in the field of tourism studies (see Sean) or corporate companies research (see McNely). Considering the consistent presence of museums on this platform, the absence of empirical data on the use of Instagram on behalf of museums represent a missed opportunity in the field of museum studies.

2.5 Conclusions

The chapter illustrated how the idea of the democratic museum emerged gradually starting from the end of the nineteenth century and it kept evolving ever since. It is now clear how the democratic museum, as a theoretical concept, is the fruit of scholarly theorisation and museum practice as much as it is the fruit of political and economic forces. Today, the democratic museum is an inclusive institution which strives to work as a platform for the discussion of ideas important for democratic societies – getting by between a true desire of societal development and the attempt to justify its costly relevance. While trying to present itself as a platform for content sharing, the democratic museum found a natural ally in social media, which provide the infrastructure for a participative

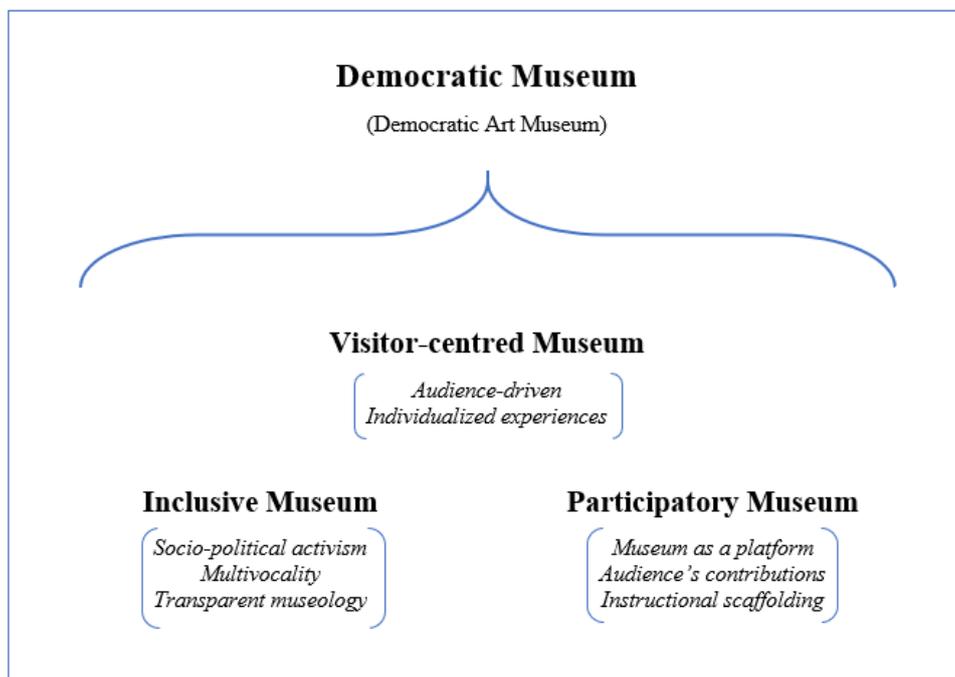
dialogue. Still, it is in doubt whether museums with democratic aspirations are actually willing to open such a dialogue. Scholars like Henning, Hull, Scot, Meecham, Parry and Russo proved sceptic in this regard. Following these authors, it appears that museums are mainly replicating online authoritative communicational models inherited from the modernist museum. Instead, to fully exploit the democratic potential of social media, museums should encourage users' contribution and socially distributed curation, be ready to manage conflicting opinions by fostering multivocality, and use digitized collection objects as a prompt for active informal learning and a customized museum experience. All this, while trying to preserve its relevance and its social function. Maybe Meecham (35) is up to something when she defines the aspiration to modify the relationship between museums and audience as "utopian". The democratic museum has still some steps to move before fulfilling social media's democratising potential. Yet, we are at a time of unprecedented change. The nature of this change is currently the topic of a multifaceted debate. Despite the existence of different perspectives, the bedrock of the discussion can be summarized in the words of McGregor and Serota at the 2009 LSE debate "The Museum of the 21st century". Here, the director of the British Museum McGregor stated: "The future has to be, without question, the museum as a publisher and broadcaster". His colleague Serota, Tate Britain director, added: "The challenge is: to what extent do we remain authors, and in what sense do we become publishers providing a platform for international conversations?" (qtd. in C. Higgins).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to establish the theoretical framework through which I will conduct my research. Drawing upon policy documents and scholarly publications, I will provide the definition of a number of key concepts which will make clear how a democratic art museum looks like. As this theoretical framework partly draws on the scholarly theorisation addressed in the previous chapter, the reader may find here some already mentioned concepts. However, only the concepts that are exposed here form the lens through which my research question will be addressed. In other words, after providing a definition of art museum, I articulate here how the idea of the democratic museum must be understood in the thesis. In the literature addressing the role of the museum in democratic societies, three words are recurrent: namely, inclusive, visitor-centred and participative. The three are often treated as synonyms, with the risk of causing a certain confusion. Indeed, even if their meanings may partially overlap, they each denote a different idea of museum. Simply put, I understand the term *democratic museum* as an umbrella-term for *inclusive museum*, *visitor-centred museum* and *participatory museum*. In other words, the democratic museum is inclusive, visitor-centred and participative. *Figure 3.1* offers a graphical representation of the theoretical framework. Following, the chapter separately elaborates on and provides a definition of each term.

Figure 3.1. Theoretical Framework



3.2 Art Museum

According to the International Council of Museums (ICOM) “a museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (*Statutes* Article 3). ICOM’s definition of the museum is certainly a good starting point. First of all, focusing on the non-profit nature of museums, it allows separating museums from commercial art galleries, which pursue profit rather than societal development. At the same time, by focusing on museums’ mission of public service rather than on the source of its funding, it affords to overcome the dichotomy between public and private museums. Indeed, at the present moment, both public and private museums share a commitment to society’s wellbeing (Lord 28). As noted by Weil (230), also private museums are expected to provide some kind of public service, as a return from the public support they receive in the form of tax exemption or donations. However, ICOM’s definition proves unsatisfactory under certain aspects (Brown and Mairesse 526). The most important issue arises in defining museums as permanent institutions which acquire and conserve heritage. The past decades saw museums spending more and more resources on temporary exhibitions. Some institutions are even completely devoted to temporary exhibitions, pursuing their mission of public service without acquiring and conserving a permanent collection. Therefore, in my thesis I will not consider the possession of a permanent collection as a requirement for being considered a museum.

Before concluding, it would be useful to remind the reader that the object of my study is a very particular, although much diffused, type of museum: the art museum. Quite intuitively, the art museum is a museum that displays artworks. The essence of artworks, however, is more difficult to be defined – relying on the heated and centuries-long debate around the definition of art and aesthetics hierarchies. This debate is too broad for the scope of my research. As a consequence, I will consider an artwork everything displayed in an art museum because reputed an artwork by those who designed the exhibition – may this be a physical object, a digital object or a performance. In conclusion, the thesis will define the art museum as a non-profit institution, open to the public, devoted to the service of society through the communication of cultural content and the display of artworks – considered as such by the institution.

3.3 The inclusive Museum

One of the earliest advocates of the inclusive museum is John Cotton Dana. Even if the term “inclusive” does not come up in his work, this American museum director supported a museum with all the main features later theorized as characteristic of the inclusive museum – as early as in 1917. Indeed, in *The Gloom of the Museum*, Cotton Dana claimed the need to make the museum more accessible to people (17-19). Drawing a pioneering comparison between museums and department stores, Cotton Dana exhorted museums to follow the department store in that

“it receives all courteously and gives information freely; [...] its collections are classified according to the knowledge and the needs of its patrons; [...] it supplies guides free of charge; and it changes its exhibits to meet daily changes in subjects of interests, changes in taste of art, and the progress of invention and discovery” (23-24).

Of course, Cotton Dana did not intend to render museums and department stores the same thing, and he did specify that they had very different functions (24). However, he made a crucial point by saying that museums should, first and foremost, be of service to their communities. In his perspective, this meant that the majority of the museum’s community should be able to easily visit it, and that the museum should use its objects to add meaning to visitors’ lives (1).

After emerging with Cotton Dana, the idea of the inclusive museum was not fully developed until the end of the twentieth century. It certainly developed as a reaction to the view of museums and art galleries as exclusive institutions, within an elitist conception of museums which owes much to the work of Bourdieu. Drawing on the assumption that “good taste” is actually the product of the higher classes’ prevailing social practices (2), Bourdieu sees the museum as a place where prevailing social practices are reproduced and social differences are thus legitimated (5). In this way, rather than redistributing cultural capital, the museum inevitably excludes those who do not possess the cultural capital necessary to fit in such a space. After Bourdieu, most institutions embraced inclusivity as the cornerstone of their conceptualization, even though some scholars, such as Leavis (3-5), had claimed that museums must be elitist in order to profit humanity (*i.e.* they should maintain their role as gatekeepers of aesthetic canons in order to safeguard and advance humanity’s highest achievements). Moreover, in the last few decades museums moved from Bourdieu’s class-based definition of inclusivity to a broader conceptualisation of the same, which encompasses issues of, for instance, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, disability, religious faith and so on (Sandell i-ii). This greater inclusivity in the representation of identity arguably followed Vergo’s call for a more “transparent” way of making exhibitions, a way that does not impose on the artwork any univocal interpretation attributed to it by the established authority (48).

Two main reasons led museums to distance themselves from an exclusive conception of cultural institutions. The first reason is economic: with an increasing number of museums relying on ticket-sales for their survival (Lord 32), they simply cannot afford to strongly limit the number of visitors. Pressure from local governments to act as agents of societal change in return of public funding pushed museums to a more inclusive approach as well (Meecham 34). The second reason is of ethical nature: may they be public or not, most museums have a social function and/or an institutional mission. In democratic societies, their institutional mission cannot serve only a privileged slice of the population (Lord 28; Weil 230). Instead, they should cater to different societal portions. This is when practical issues started to arise. How can a museum, with a single display, meet interests, aspirations and needs of its very diverse audience? How can museums deliver cultural contents to a public broader than the cultural elite without cheapening their message?

Bennet (181), Lewis and Miller (178) conclude that being truly inclusive is impossible for a museum. Indeed, museums tend to be informed by a principle of human universality in relation to which “any particular museum display can be held to be inadequate”, “whether on the basis of the gendered, racial, class or other social patterns” of representation (Bennet 181). The fact is that, how Hudson pointed out (74), “the public, as a homogenous unit, does not exist”. Therefore, inclusiveness for museums does not mean providing programs for all the different audiences, and “spreading their resource thinly as a result” (Reeve and Woolward 560). Rather, museums with inclusive aspirations should try to involve in their programmes specific communities and individuals traditionally excluded from the museum, in order to tackle social issues and foster societal development.

The habit to include different communities in exhibition design was strongly influenced by the work of Andre Malraux or, it would be more accurate to say, by the translation of his work. French art historian, Malraux complained that museums, ordering objects into rationally ordered structures, were taking away *imaginary* possibilities to interpret artworks (13). He thus advocated for a *museum imaginaire*, where different human faculties such as imagination, cognition and judgment would interact in a new understanding of the art object (16).³ So far, Malraux’s work appears more related to the theorisation of the visitor-centred museum. However, because of a deceptive common interpretation of this text, it had a major impact on inclusive museology,

³ In Malraux’s *museum imaginaire*, the viewer could “create his or her own narrative about the objects in the collections”, so that “a public and structured experience instead becomes a private and highly subjective one” (Barret 108). Under these terms, the creation of a *museum imaginaire* was accomplished with the availability of collections online, where viewers can navigate through art objects and organise them according to personal criteria (Barret 108; Wellington and Oliver 583). Museums objects digitized on Instagram could thus be seen as a *museum imaginaire*.

bringing community traditionally excluded by museums at the centre of museum practice. In the English translation, *museum imaginaire* was indeed rendered with the misleading “museum without walls”, which focuses the attention on the spatial transgression of the traditional museum building. Consequently, the museum without walls was conceptualized as “a museum with a creative flow of ideas, exhibits and people between the museum and the outside world, a museum which would influence and be influenced by the district in which it is situated” (Hudson 87). In practice, the concept of the museum without walls fostered museum professionals to bring museum objects and activities outside the physical confinements of museums, as well as bringing different communities inside the museum through outreach programmes specifically designed to genuinely represent them and meet their needs. Clearly, welcoming a diverse public inside the museum implies allowing different voices and stances in one same environment (Barret 111). The inclusive museum is thus, by necessity, also a multivocal one, which substitutes a totalizing and universal interpretation of art objects with a multiplicity of possible interpretations.

Drawing upon the ideas just mentioned, in my thesis I will consider a museum inclusive when, first of all, it makes cultural contents accessible to different competence degrees, limiting the space reserved to scholarly interpretations of museum objects. Second, pursuing socio-political activism, it represents different views from different social groups in relation to topic of debate important for the development of a society. Also, the inclusive museum does not provide a unique, established interpretation of cultural contents, presenting it as the only accepted one. Instead, seeking a more transparent way of doing museology, it embeds in its discourse many different, and maybe conflicting, views, interests and perspectives.

3.4 The visitor-centred museum

Saying that a museum is visitor-centred equals to saying that it is structured around the visitor’s needs. The idea of visitor-centred museums gained popularity thanks to Falk and Dierking’s *The Museum experience*, today considered a milestone of museum studies for shifting the point of view from the institution’s perspective to the audience’s perspective. Falk and Dierking argue that museum professionals do not have control over the visitor experience, since every experience is different and highly dependent on the visitor. Every visitor experience is shaped by, and can be understood through, what Falk and Dierking call a *contextual model of learning*. The contextual model of learning conceptualizes the museum visit as an interaction between three overlapping contexts: the personal context, the socio-cultural context and the physical context (26). The personal context can be seen as “the personal agenda with which the visitor arrives at the

museum – a pre-defined set of interests, beliefs, needs and often anticipated expectations for what the visit will be like and result in” (27). The personal context thus depends also on modes of learning and developmental level, as well as on “differences in interests, attitudes and motivations for visiting” (27). The socio-cultural context, on the other hand, is given both by the socio-cultural background of the visitor and by the social interaction occurring within the museum (with fellow visitors but also with museum staff). Indeed, according to Falk and Dierking, the attitude towards museum visiting will be influenced by country of origin, socio-economic status and race-ethnicity of the visitor. Similarly, the museum experience will vary depending on whether you are visiting the museum as a parent, a classmate, or with a knowledgeable companion (28). Finally, the physical context “includes the architecture and the “feel” of the building, as well as the objects and the artefacts contained in it” (28). It is connected to how easily visitors can visit the museum. Interestingly, Falk and Dierking include in the physical context also Internet sites with which visitors interact both prior and subsequent to the visit. Indeed, Falk and Dierking see the museum experience as something constructed over time rather than solely during one museum visit: in a way, the museum experience is something continuously constructed during a lifetime by the sum of every museum experience (onsite and online), as the individual moves through the socio-cultural and physical world (29). Consequently, “this constructed museum experience is truly unique for each and every individual; no two people experience the world in quite the same way” (29).

Arguably, part of the success of Falk and Dierking’s contextual model of learning is due to its similarities with the concept of experience as described, a few years later, by Pine and Gilmore in their successful article “Welcome to the experience economy”. According to Pine and Gilmore, we now entered in the experience economy, where experiences emerged as the next step in economic value. An experience is now something that can be sold. As every experience must meet the customer’s need, “no two people can have the same experience, because each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event and the individual’s state of mind” (99). Even if the concept of experience economy was first devised in relation to corporate firms, its pervasiveness made it natural to apply it also to cultural institutions. After all, museums started to (partly) converge with corporate firms ever since Cotton Dana compared a good museum to a department store. It is not by chance that Cotton Dana exhorted museums to follow the department store also in meeting the costumers’ interests, having convenient restrooms and advertising itself widely and continuously (*The Gloom of the Museum* 24). In such a way, Cotton Dana made three interesting points later developed by Falk and Dierking: first, that the museum visit is highly individualized; second, that it is strongly influenced by physical and practical factors which come before its cultural component; third, that potential visitors, in order to become actual ones, must be

informed about and attracted to the museum. People will come to museums only if they expect that visiting can offer them a pleasant experience. In a time when the cultural industry has to compete with other leisure industries (Silverstone 161) which fully embraced the experience economy mantra, museums decided to do the same – either willingly or forced by growing economic pressures. As a result, museums increasingly see and brand themselves as providers of cultural and leisure experiences. This is why, alongside traditional visits, in museums' programming more and more space is given to workshops, lectures, events and even concerts and DJ sets.⁴ Also, the experiences offered by the museum are often presented as exclusive and tailor-made. In this sense, social media, with their one to one communication model, offer a powerful tool for offering individualized museum experiences.

In the thesis, a museum will be considered visitor-centred if and when it presents itself on Instagram as a provider of individualized experiences. The visitor-centred museum recognizes the museum experience as highly dependent on the visitors' needs, interests and state of mind, and tries to accommodate those as a consequence. In practice, taking visitors' individual experience seriously encompasses museum-specific issues (such as the visitor's interests/competence and the grade of accessibility to cultural contents), but also more practical, corporate-like issues (such as the ease with which the museum can be reached, the need of the visitor to have restaurants, gift shops *etc.*). Furthermore, rather than on the museum collection, the visitor-centred museum is audience-driven, putting emphasis on the personalized experience visitors can have in its onsite and online spaces.

3.5 The participatory museum

Seeing a museum as participatory is particularly in line with what was affirmed by the 2005 Faro Convention about the right of every individual to participate to the enrichment of culture and cultural heritage (Council of Europe). A participatory museum is a place where visitors can give their contribution in relation to cultural topics. It is therefore a place of aggregation, discussion, and confrontation on themes most likely important for the sense of identity of a community. The urge to make museums participatory is somehow prompted by the rise of the Internet and social media. The diffusion of ICT technologies fostered contemporary societies to value participation highly – and this is especially true among the youngest generations. Millennials (people born between 1979 and

⁴ It must be noticed that the increasing convergence of the museum with other leisure industries has also raised concern. In particular, there is a widespread fear that, in the quest for an entertaining museum experience, museums will turn their back on their educational and conservational mission (Ballofet *et al.* 6). The quest for pure entertainment in museology has critically been defined as “disneylandisation” of the museum experience, implying a convergence between museums and amusement parks. From this perspective, museums that try to match education with entertainment risk to cheapen the richness of the contents they are supposed to promote (Casedas 43).

mid-1990s) and digital natives (post-mid-1990s) increasingly filter the world through new media (Graham 127). Due to the participative nature of new media, these generations are now used to create, share, comment and contribute contents. Also, the fact that “social media are increasingly becoming mobile”, is “fostering a culture of participation unrestricted by schedules and time” (Giaccardi 4). At the present day, thanks to social media apps on our mobile phones such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, “participation is expected 24/7” (Kelly 65).⁵ Or, as Black himself put it, the widespread use of new technologies and the web in every aspect of our daily life is “leading to an increased expectation of a profoundly different, much more participatory and personalized museum experience” (127).

In the theorization of the participatory museum, the most prominent name is the already mentioned Nina Simon, whose book *The participatory museum* is now a reference point in the field. Simon defines a participatory institution as a platform where visitors can exchange ideas, create, comment and connect around cultural contents. This is seen as opposed to traditional institutions, where museum professionals deliver content to the public univocally and authoritatively (2).

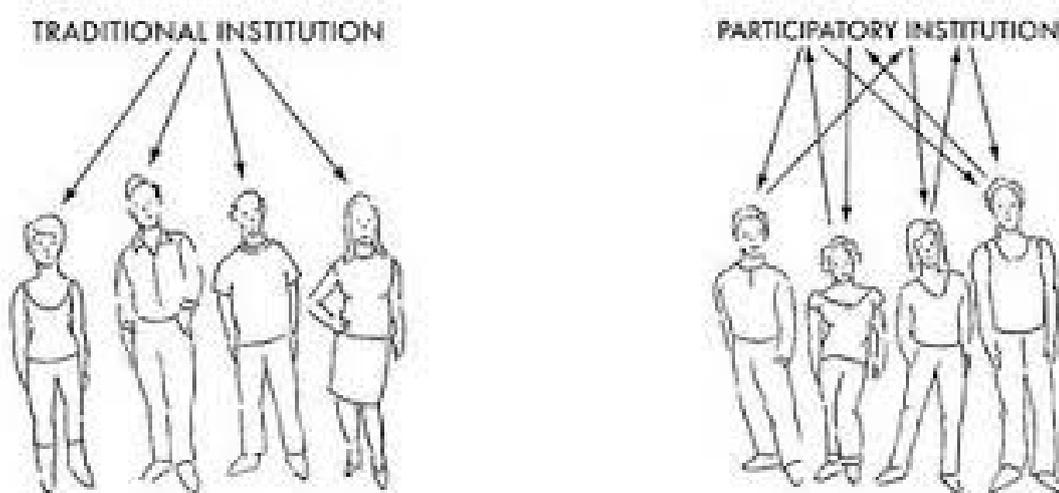


Figure 1. Simon's Model of Traditional and Participatory Institutions (Simon 2-3)

Particularly interesting is the author's observation that, in order to be considered participatory, an institution does not have to allow the whole audience to provide primary contents; rather, it has to allow every member of the audience to engage with the object in display and

⁵ The extent to which this wish of participation applies also to cultural consumption is a matter of debate. For instance, Arnold (335) thinks that, when it comes to cultural consumption, even people used to online participation would prefer ready-made experiences.

consequently foster diverse kinds of contributions. For example, not every visitor has to be a creator, but the museum should encourage all visitors to play the role of critics and meaning-makers. This is simply because the majority of the audience does not want to create primary contents from scratch, but prefers to contribute to the discussion in a less active degree (12). Borrowing a term from the study of online communities, Simon refers to this phenomenon as to *participation inequality* (9). Rather than inhibiting participation, participation inequality is the foundation of every participatory culture. As noted by Jenkins (7), participatory cultures are defined exactly by the fact that “not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued”.

This said, how should museums foster a participatory culture? With a somehow counterintuitive answer, Simon claims that a participatory institution should avoid open-ended self-expression and encourage instead very structured participatory experiences, where possibilities are balanced with constraints (12) (see also Ciolfi 81). Open-ended self-expression is indeed likely to produce low-quality outputs which are neither rewarding for the producer nor useful for any of the stakeholders involved in the activity. Also, open-ended self-expression attracts only a small number of visitors. On the contrary, “participation thrives on constraints”. Indeed, based on contemporary learning theory, Simon supports that participatory activities in museums should rest on the idea of *instructional scaffolding*, where educators provide “supportive resources, tasks, and guidance upon which learners can build their confidence and abilities”. In a well-scaffolded museum activity, visitors are provided with enough sustenance to develop personal skills and competencies; still, the outcomes of their participation are not prescribed. Also, the outcomes are taken into consideration by the institution. Indeed, to be truly participative, scaffolded activities must be of use to the institution that proposes them, to the visitors who join the activities and also to the non-participating visitors. Clearly, this implies that museum professionals, in a participatory institution, should act less as teachers and more as facilitators who sustain visitors in their meaning-making process and in their exchange of ideas.

Under this light, it can be easily seen how social media are powerful tools especially for the aims of the participatory museum. After all, social media connect people around content, which is exactly what a museum willing to work as a platform for the exchange of ideas needs. Considering that information on social media is easy to use, rich in quantity and accessible everywhere, a museum may adopt social media to create a base for participation even wider and stronger than what it can achieve in its physical space (Hagedorn-Saupe 114). It must be noted that, to foster participation in the media environment, museums are not required to annihilate their presence. For example, according to Russo (145) museums on social media can provide “a trusted, authoritative

source through which [they] create new types of active cultural online participation”. This means that well designed participatory activities can involve a predominant role of the museum which provides significant inputs for the activity. Still, the museum presence has to leave space for other users’ contributions.

In conclusion, I will repute a museum to be participatory when it encourages the audience's contribution. The contributions allowed may require a more or less active stance on behalf of the users, in line with the principle of participation inequality that rules both onsite and online communities. Yet, any contribution will be valued and displayed, in that its display is reputed to benefit the producer, the museum and the audience community. In the best participatory settings, the role of the museum is to scaffold activities in order to make them meaningful experiences for the participants. In such a way, the participatory museum works as a facilitator for the exchange of ideas between its audience.

3.6 Conclusion

The chapter provided a theoretical framework to assess if and when a museum can be considered democratic. To sum up, an art museum is to be reputed to some extent democratic if it is inclusive, visitor-centred and participatory (or if it is, at least, any of these). Drawing on the definitions provided, I will be able to evaluate whether the museums in the sample are living up to their democratic aspirations in their use of Instagram. More specifically, I will be able to assess in what ways they are doing so: are those museums presenting themselves as inclusive, as visitor-centred or as participatory institutions? If a museum uses Instagram to tackle societal issues and give voice to the views of social groups other than the prevailing ones, it can be derived that the museum is abiding by an inclusive behaviour. On the other hand, if it presents itself on Instagram as the provider of personalized experiences, the museum can be considered visitor-centred. Finally, a museum using Instagram to openly facilitate the exchange of ideas between other users is most certainly a participatory institution. Presumably, none of the museums in the sample sticks to a single approach. Rather, to fulfil their democratic ambitions, they jump between the three approaches according to the occasion and the goal. Yet, my aim is to find out whether there are prevailing approaches, as well as to determine which are the trends in the ways in which museums use Instagram.

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The research question will be answered through mixed methods which combine content analysis and semiotic analysis. Both methodologies, alone or together, have a well-established tradition in the study of media material. In particular, content analysis is often adopted for the investigation of how social issues are represented in the mass media, allowing to handle large quantities of data in relation to comparative hypotheses or expectations (Leeuwen and Jewitt 1-2). Conversely, semiotic analysis usually focuses on a single or limited number of pictures, breaking down the content of visual text to relate its basic components to broader discourses in order to extract its intended meaning (Strokes 124). Here, I decided to combine the two methodologies drawing on Jewitt and Van Leeuwen (13) consideration that content analysis is often a necessary but not sufficient methodology for the study of visual media as, though reliable, it is also accused of being too descriptive. Conversely, semiotic analysis, as an interpretative method, lacks the objectivity and the reliability of content analysis, but it helps to enrich our understanding of media material (Strokes 124). The content analysis has thus been reputed a fitting method to acquire quantitative data on what museums are mainly using their Instagram accounts for. The semiotic analysis, on the other hand, is supposed to provide deeper insights into the modalities used by museums to perform particular tasks. Besides providing a definition of the two methodologies, the present chapter illustrates the steps I followed during the research phase. It thus starts with the presentation of the sample of museums selected for the research. Then, it moves to the description of the criteria followed in the content analysis and the presentation of the relative codes. Finally, it concludes with an overview on the semiotic analysis process.

4.2 Museum sampling

The research will focus on the primary institutional Instagram accounts of eight museums: British Museum (London), Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam), Museo del Novecento (Milan), Kunsthal (Rotterdam), MoMA (New York), Guggenheim Museum (Bilbao), Pirelli Hangar Bicocca (Milan) and Pioneer Works (New York). The museums in the sample are located either in Europe or in the United States, which is where the theorization around the democratic museum and its use of social media has been produced. Also, besides having an Instagram institutional account, all the museums selected display on their website and in their mission statement aspirations to be inclusive,

participative and/or visitor-centred. Furthermore, the selection was made according to the principles of purposeful sampling: rather than being statistically representative, the sample is meant to be diverse in its composition, in order to offer different information-rich cases on the phenomena of interests. Three variables have been considered to have some influence on the way a museum uses its social media account: namely its dimensions, whether it has a permanent collection, and whether it is public or private. As a consequence, of the eight museums in the sample, four are world-famous big institutions (over one million visitors a year⁶), while four are small or medium less renowned museums (less than one million visitors a year). Four have a permanent collection (the biggest ones, as important collections attract by nature a higher number of visitors), while four do not. Finally, three are public museums, two are private not-for-profit associations, and three rely on a mixture of public funding and consistent private donations or sponsorships (here referred to as “*arms-length*” institutions, following Lord (28)). An overview of the characteristics of each museum is offered in the table below. In the following chapter, every museum is presented more in detail

Table 4.1. Summary table of the museums in the sample

<i>Museum</i>	<i>Mode of governance</i>	<i>Dimension (number of visitors in 2017)</i>	<i>Collection</i>
British Museum (London)	Public institution	Big museum (5 900 000 visitors ⁷)	Permanent collection
Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam)	Public institution	Big museum (2 148 000 visitors ⁸)	Permanent collection
Museo del Novecento (Milan)	Public institution	Small/medium museum (232 333 visitors ⁹)	Permanent collection
Guggenheim Museum (Bilbao)	“Arms-length” institution	Big museum (1 322 000 visitors ¹⁰)	Permanent collection
Kunsthal (Rotterdam)	“Arms-length” institution	Small/medium museum (239 645 visitors ¹¹)	No permanent collection
Pioneer Works (New York)	“Arms-length” institution	Small/medium museum (250 000 visitors ¹²)	No permanent collection
Pirelli Hangar Bicocca (Milan)	Not-for-profit private institution	Small/medium museum (260 000 visitors ¹³)	No permanent collection
MoMA (New York)	Not-for-profit private institution	Big museum (3 000 000 visitors ¹⁴)	Permanent collection

⁶ Basing on the number of visitors reported for 2017 (last data available).

⁷ The British Museum, *Review 2017-2018* 4

⁸ Rijksmuseum, *Jaarverslaagen 2017* 252

⁹ Museo del Novecento, *Infopreport 2017* 1

¹⁰ Guggenheim Bilbao, *XX Anniversary* 4

¹¹ Kunsthal Rotterdam, *Annual Report 2017*

¹² Pioneer Works, *Sciences at Pioneer Works* 3

¹³ Panzarin

¹⁴ MoMA, *Year in Review 2016-2017*

4.3 Content analysis

According to Krippendorff, one of the main theorists of this methodology, “content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts” (82). By and large, it involves quantifying audio-visual representations using clearly defined categories. Krippendorff starts from the premise that texts (may these be audio, visual or written material) do not have any objective or reader-independent quality, nor they have a single meaning. Rather, a text contains as many meanings as the possible readings of the text different analysts can offer. Thus, to be considered valid, an interpretation of a text does not need to be universally shared; still, it must be replicable (84). Also, Krippendorff presumes that text contents “speak to something other than the given texts” (85), telling something about the context, discourse or purpose of the text. Thus, rather than a technique for analysing the text *per se*, content analysis is useful for inferring something about the context of production or reception of the text. For this reason, content analysis has a well-established tradition in media research, where it is regularly used “to provide evidence to argue for the under- or over-representation of particular phenomena” (Stokes 134). In other words, content analysis is often motivated by the need of the researchers to acquire numerical data to support their argument (136).

Here, I applied content analysis to find out whether museums are actually democratic in their use of Instagram institutional accounts. In particular, my goal was to identify which are the most recurrent practices undertaken by these accounts, in the attempt to find an answer to my first (*What are the main practices undertaken by the museums in the sample in their use of Instagram?*) and second sub-question (*how, when there is any, is the relation between the museums’ democratic aspirations and their use of Instagram shaped?*). To this aim, I selected, as the domain of my content analysis, fifty posts from each of the eight Instagram accounts related to the museums presented above. Those were the fifty most recent posts published on every account on 4th April 2019, the date when I started the coding process. Every post was considered as a unit of analysis. It must be noted that an Instagram post has a two-folded nature, being constituted of a picture and a caption. Still, in the content analysis, every post was considered as a *unicum*. This decision has been taken based on Laestadius’ (8) recommendation to avoid removing an image from its caption (and *vice versa*), since the unity of visual and textual analysis is pivotal to fully make sense of Instagram data. Conversely, even if comments to a post could be considered as part of the interactive post itself, the comments will not be considered as objects of the content analysis. This is because, as I found out in a pilot study, their study implies issues of content reception which, albeit critical for museum studies, are too broad for the scope of this research. I therefore decided to focus on the use

of Instagram from the museums' perspective, investigating what are the most common practices in museums' use of Instagram.

4.3.1 Coding Process

At first, I created a preliminary set of codes partly adapted from McNely (4) (*i.e.* humanising, place making) and partly based on the scholarly literature presented in the previous chapters (*i.e.* museum object, museum visitor, repost, socio-political activism, multivocality, knowledge-telling, instructional scaffolding). This set of codes was tested in a pilot content analysis, performed on 29th March 2019, focused on the ten most recent posts of the eight accounts in the sample. Based on the results of this pilot study, the preliminary set of codes was enriched and refined. For example, the distinction between posts simply fostering interaction and posts providing proper instructional scaffolding was introduced. This resulted in the definitive set of codes presented in *Table 4.2*. As can be seen in the tables, the codes are divided into two categories (*Subject* and *Mode of communication*), which represent the noteworthy variables spotted in the posts. The variable *Subject* specifies what is represented in the post: is this a museum object, a visitor or the museum space (*etc.*)? The variable *Mode of communication*, on the other hand, defines the aim and the approach with which the museum establishes its presence on Instagram (e.g. advertising something, fostering interaction, teaching museum-related contents *etc.*). It must be noted that, even if often the *Subject* is mostly given by the picture and the *Mode of communication* is mostly given by the caption, this is certainly not a rule. As already stated, in Instagram posts picture and caption complete each other's meaning in a holistic way (for example, with the caption specifying the context of the situation described in the image) – and the content analysis was undertaken following this principle. Specifically, I considered both the subject and the mode of communication pivotal in determining the nature of the post; as a consequence, I assigned to every post codes for both these variables. I assigned one code to every post for the variable *Subject*. However, I assigned up to two codes to every post for the variable *Mode of communication*, as more modes of communication appeared to co-exist in many posts. The coding process took place between 4th April and 5th April 2019 (see *Appendix*). It was then repeated between 14th April and 15th April 2019, setting the intra-reliability rate at 98%. In conclusion, the occurrences of each code were counted, assigning a value of 0.5 to codes co-existing with another one in the variable *Communication mode*, and a value of 1.0 to every other code. The results were finally turned into percentages (see *Table 5.1* and *Table 5.2*).

Table 4.2a Codes (Subject)

<i>Subject</i>	
Behind the scenes	The post includes a picture/video of museum staff or the author preparing the exhibition; it illustrates the process and the choices that stay behind the exhibition design.
Event	The post includes the picture/video of a party, concert or DJ set taking place in the museum spaces.
Workshop	The post includes the picture/video of a workshop taking place in the museum spaces.
Museum visitor	The post includes a picture/video of a museum visitor or a small group of museum visitors (up to 5 people). The visitors are either engaging with museum objects, engaging with other visitors or navigating the museum spaces. Posts representing visitors taking part to parties, workshops or lectures are not included in this category.
Museum space	The post includes a picture/video of the museum space, without the attention being focused on any artwork or visitor in particular. Posts featuring an iconic landmark are not included in this category.
Repost	The post is a repost of a visitor's post on his/her private account. The fact that it is a repost and the original author of the post are openly stated.
Outreach programme	The posts includes a picture/video of an outreach programme organized by the museum. Audience's contributions in the museum activities are emphasized.
Place making	The post includes a picture/video of a space that works as a landmark for the museum in the collective imagination. Mostly, this space is an iconic museum hall (<i>e.g.</i> the Great Court of the British Museum), entrance or building (<i>e.g.</i> the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao's building).
Museum object	The post includes a picture/video of a museum object or a detail of it. The museum object can be a physical or a digital artwork, as well as a performance.
Others	The post has, as subject, something not mentioned in the previous categories.

Table 4.2b Codes (Mode of communication)

<i>Communication mode</i>	
Socio-political activism	Post addresses issues considered important topics of discussion in order to foster societal development (such as gender, feminism, racism, war, urban development <i>etc.</i>).
Multivocality	The post provides more interpretations of an artwork, or an interpretation of an artwork presented as a personal, non-normative one. Typically, the post reports the author of the interpretation(s).
Self-reflection	The post provides a reflection on the museum's past and present practice, for example stating the aims of an exhibition.
Fostering interaction	The post calls out for interaction with users, but this interaction is not scaffolded. For example, the post may ask "what is your favourite flower?" without providing any guidance to formulate the answer. Also, the post may prescribe the outcome of interaction, for example asking a question which has only one correct answer. A typical question in this sense is "Who is the author of the painting in this post?"
Instructional scaffolding	The post calls out for contribution of other Instagram users, providing guidance and sustenance in developing a meaningful answer through instructional scaffolding. The post does not prescribe the outcomes of users' participation.
Knowledge-telling	The post provides information regarding an artwork and a scholarly interpretation of the same presented as the normative one.
Advertising event	The main aim of the post is to advertise an event taking place in the museum spaces.
Advertising temporary exhibition	The main aim of the post is to advertise a temporary exhibition.
Advertising permanent collection	The main aim of the post is to advertise the permanent collection of a museum, typically to emphasize its richness or prestige.
Humanizing	The main aim of the post is to emotionally engage with audience at a personal level, in order to enhance commitment and trust towards the museum. This kind of post is typically characterized by an authoritarian and yet informal voice. Also, the post does not include any cultural content. For example, the post may wish a wonderful weekend.
Others	The post adopts a communication mode not mentioned in the previous categories.

In order to foster an effective interpretation of the content analysis' results, the codes were then organised in the coding trees illustrated in *Table 4.3*. These primarily distinguish between democratic codes, non-democratic codes, and unspecified others. The internal organisation of democratic codes, with its branching in inclusive, visitor-centred and participatory codes, is informed by the thesis' theoretical framework. Specifically, besides *Multivocality* and *Socio-political activism*, also *Behind the scenes* and *Self-reflection* were considered inclusive posts, as they abide by Vergo's claim for a more transparent way of doing museology. *Event*, *Workshop*, *Museum visitor*, *Museum space* and *Repost* were then classified as visitor-centred codes, as they give visibility to audience-driven museum practices rather than to a collection-driven approach. Finally, *Outreach programme*, *Fostering interaction* and *Instructional scaffolding* were considered participatory for the emphasis put on audience's contributions. On the other hand, non-democratic codes are divided by the coding trees into two sectors: first, figures the code *knowledge-telling*, indicative of a collection-driven approach typical of the nineteenth-century modernist museum; second, a broad group of other codes (*Advertising event*, *Advertising temporary exhibition*, *Advertising permanent collection*, *Humanising*, *Place making*) which, characteristic of corporate companies' use of Instagram (McNely 4), are mainly informed by promotional purposes. Finally, the third ramification – defined neither democratic nor non-democratic – consists of the codes *Others* and *Museum object*. While it is quite intuitive why *Others* was considered non-specified, the reason for which *Museum object* is in this category is less clear. Simply put, basing museum activities on museum objects can be either democratic or anti-democratic, depending on whether the artwork is used within an object-as-a prompt approach or in a collection-driven way of doing museology (Hull and Scot 137). As a result, the democratic nature of a post featuring a museum object can be determined only through the analysis of the communication mode with which the artwork is presented.

Table 4.3a Coding Tree (Subject)

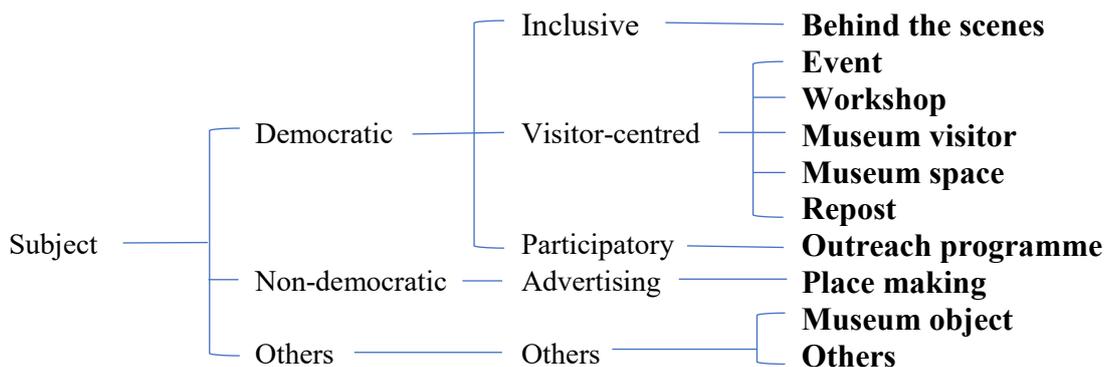
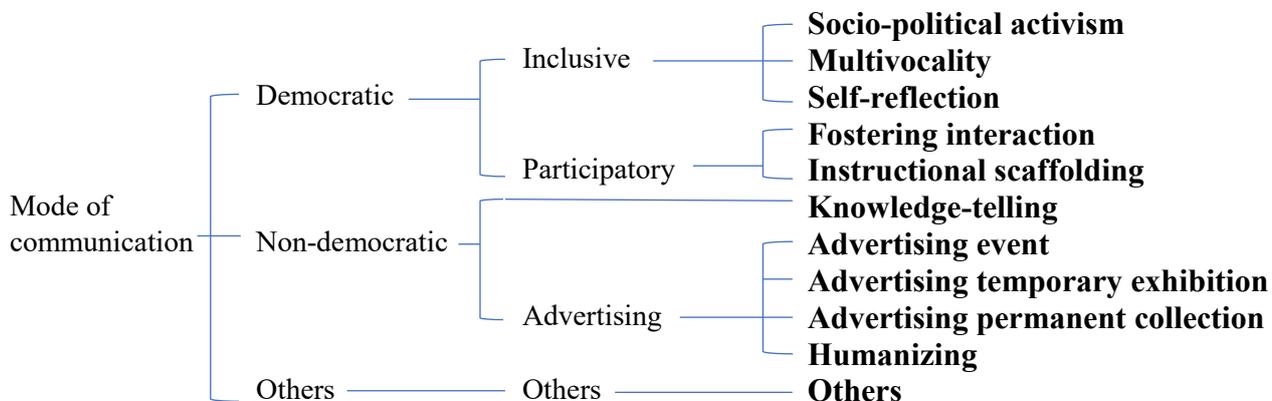


Table 4.3b Coding Tree (Mode of communication)



4.4 Visual semiotic analysis

Visual semiotic, as a research method, was first postulated by Roland Barthes, who applied the semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure to the study of images. Following Saussure’s notion of sign, Barthes saw every image as constituted of a signifier and a signified (Barthes, *Mythologies* 116) – the former providing the denotation of the image, while the latter providing its connotation. In other words, every image can be understood as a layering of meanings. The first layer is the denotative meaning of the picture, which denotes what or who is depicted in it. The second layer, on the other hand, provides its connotative meaning, referring to broader concepts which epitomize everything culturally associated with what is depicted in the picture (Leeuwen and Jetty 95). In such a way, every picture holds a cultural or social message that goes well beyond the physicality of the object represented. For example, the picture of a flag can refer to the concepts of nationality, nationalism or institution. As it appears from this example, the connotative meaning of an object is by nature open-ended and polysemous. However, two strategies help to limit the polysemy of an image. First, the preferred connotation of an image is narrowed down when considered in conjunction with the connotation of the other images in the picture. As Barthes himself put it, “the signifier of connotation is no longer to be found at the level of any one of the fragments of the sequence but at that [...] of the concatenation” (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 24). Second, images are often accompanied by written texts, and these texts specify the intended connotation of an image. In this sense, Barthes talks about a "function of authority" of the written word on the image, which "determine(s) a single certainty" over the “endless number of possibilities” of the image (Barthes, *The Fashion System* 17).

This very notion of intertextuality between the text and the picture is what made me consider Barthesian semiotic analysis a fitting method for the study of Instagram posts. After all, previous studies showed that, on Instagram, captions provide the context for the image (Laestadius 8), which is perfectly in line with the “function of authority” over the image assigned by Barthes to written text. I thus performed a visual semiotic analysis of five single posts, in order to explore ways in which a post can be inclusive, visitor-centred and participatory. The posts were selected because, drawing on the results of the content analysis, they were considered representative of the practices undertaken by museums in order to harness, to some extent, Instagram’s democratising potential. The overall aim of the semiotic analysis has been to highlight the characteristics of posts that contribute to a more democratic use of Instagram, thus providing an answer for my third sub-question (*What kinds of posts contribute to a more democratic use of Instagram on behalf of museums?*).

5. Findings: Current Practices

5.1 Introduction

This chapter aims at presenting the data acquired during the content analysis, and simultaneously providing an interpretation of the same. In such a way, I will be able to address my first sub-question. For greater clarity, each institution and related Instagram account is considered as a case study and addressed separately. The presentation of each case study follows the subsequent structure: first of all, I present the major characteristics of the institution under analysis, with a focus on its history and declared purposes. Particular attention is reserved for the way in which the institution defines its democratic aspirations. Any additional information deemed influential in the institution's use of Instagram is also included. For this section, the main sources had been the museums' official channels of communication, may these be their website, mission statement or annual review. The general goal has been to gather enough information to contextualize the museum's behaviour on Instagram, in order to trace the relationship between the museum's democratic aspirations and its use of this social medium – thus addressing my second sub-question. The second section has, as object of analysis, the museum's Instagram account.¹⁵ Here, the results of the content analysis are interpreted in the light of the information exposed in the first section, as well as through the lens of our theoretical framework. It must be noted that, for each account, I discuss only the most representative or the most interesting practices emerged with the content analysis. This is because, even though the data from each account could be discussed more in depth, I reputed more valuable to focus exclusively on phenomena of particular interests. A complete overview of the data collected is presented in *Table 5.1 and Table 5.2*.

As for the order in which the case studies are presented, this follows a specific criterion. Indeed, the chapter starts with the presentation of those institutions that, in their use of Instagram, proved reluctant to depart from the authoritarian forms of communication traditionally adopted by

¹⁵ All the Instagram accounts are indicated in the thesis as they appear on Instagram. Therefore, following a social media convention, accounts are referred to with their name preceded by a @ (e.g. @britishmuseum is the Instagram account of the British Museum).

Table 5.1. Content analysis for the Instagram posts in the sample; Category: Post's Subject

SUBJECT		@britishmuseum	@rijksmuseum	@museoguggenheim	@kunsthal	@pirelli_hangar_bicocca	@pioneerworks	@museodel900	@themuseumofmodernart	AVERAGE
<i>Democratic</i>										
Inclusive	Behind the scenes	2%	10%	6%	2%	24%	4%	8%	4%	8%
Visitor-centred	Event	0%	0%	2%	6%	4%	22%	0%	4%	5%
	Workshop	0%	4%	0%	8%	2%	10%	4%	0%	4%
	Museum visitor	0%	12%	6%	10%	6%	2%	0%	10%	6%
	Museum space	6%	0%	8%	10%	26%	10%	4%	2%	8%
	Repost	28%	10%	2%	6%	2%	4%	50%	0%	13%
Participatory	Outreach programme	0%	0%	6%	0%	0%	22%	0%	6%	4%
<i>Non-democratic</i>	Place making	2%	2%	28%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%
<i>Others</i>	Museum object	62%	62%	40%	54%	36%	24%	24%	70%	47%
	Others	0%	0%	2%	2%	0%	2%	10%	4%	3%

Table 5.2. Content analysis for the Instagram posts in the sample; Category: Post's Communication Mode

COMMUNICATION MODE		@britishmuseum	@rijksmuseum	@museoguggenheim	@kunsthal	@pirelli_hangar_bicocca	@pioneerworks	@museodel900	@themuseumofmodernart	AVERAGE
<i>Democratic</i>										
Inclusive	Socio-political activism	0%	1%	6%	0%	2%	7%	0%	8%	3%
	Multivocality	0%	1%	6%	2%	0%	5%	31%	18%	8%
	Self-reflection	0%	1%	5%	0%	3%	11%	2%	4%	3%
Participatory	Fostering interaction	22%	9%	11%	2%	0%	4%	0%	0%	6%
	Instructional scaffolding	0%	1%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	1%
<i>Non-democratic</i>	Knowledge-telling	54%	51%	15%	9%	22%	9%	7%	14%	23%
Advertising	Advertising event	2%	4%	12%	35%	34%	46%	7%	12%	19%
	Advertising temporary exhibition	10%	7%	19%	43%	34%	12%	11%	35%	21%
	Advertising permanent collection	6%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	0%	3%
	Humanising	2%	20%	19%	7%	2%	2%	29%	1%	10%
<i>Others</i>	Others	0%	2%	5%	2%	2%	4%	0%	4%	2%

museums. It then moves to the description of those museums which displayed a more innovative way of using their Instagram account, harnessing Instagram's democratising potential to a greater extent. It could thus be said that the museums in the sample are presented in scale from the least to the more democratic in their use of Instagram. The reader should however keep in mind that this is only a generalisation, as every account blends, to some extent, democratic and non-democratic practices.

5.2 British Museum

Based in London since its foundation in 1753 (Trustee Of the British Museum, *About Us*), the British Museum is the oldest public museum in the world. Also, it is one of the most renowned museums in the world, attracting 5,900,000 visitors in 2017 (The British Museum, *Review 2017-2018* 4). The institution, accessible for free, is house to an impressive collection of 8 million items, which space from contemporary artefacts to two million years old objects. The size and the value of this collection necessarily orientate the British Museum towards a strong conservational vocation: the core of its mission is to “hold in trust for the nation and the world a collection of art and antiquities from ancient and living cultures” (Trustee Of the British Museum, *About Us*). Nonetheless, in its mission statement the British Museum stresses also its commitment to promote the public use of the collection and make it freely accessible on a national and international level. Also, it defines the museum as a place where intercultural understanding can be reached through cross-cultural investigation of artefacts which “unlock” a “diversity of truths”. With this purpose, “the Museum aims to reach a broader worldwide audience by extending engagement with this audience”. Interesting is also the role attributed to the digitized collection on the museum's website, which is seen as “a natural extension of [the museum's] core purpose to be a laboratory of comparative cultural investigation” (Trustee Of the British Museum, *About Us*).

Although common to many museums' mission statements, this emphasis on public use, worldwide engagement, multivocality and intercultural understanding can be partly framed as a reaction to the critiques of elitism and exclusivity addressed to the British Museum. In the past decades, the British Museum has been the target of a heated debate regarding its right to hold, in its collection, artefacts deemed highly representative for the cultural history of other countries. As a reply, the British Museum signed in 2002 the *Declaration on the Importance and Value of Universal Museums* (ICOM). With this, the museum affirmed its commitment to serve universal rather than national purposes in the preservation of its collection. The universality of this service,

however, remains under question – as it is still a Western prerogative and *de facto* excludes many communities that do not have access to these collections (Mörsch, Sachs and Sieber 215).

Be this as it may, the British Museum goes on in pursuing the democratic mission embraced when it was established as the first public museum in the world. The institution tries new ways to manage the delicate legacy of its history, balancing the authoritarian position which derives from such a significant and ancient collection with democratic moves as free entrance, commitment to public use, broader audience engagement and aspiration to universal representativeness.

5.2.1 @britishmuseum

The British Museum manages the Instagram account @britishmuseum since April 2012. To date (03 March 2019), this successful account uploaded 1,614 posts and gained 1,300,000 followers. The content analysis highlighted how the nature of these posts is not much diverse; rather, they can all be reduced to a few types of posts. Indeed, as for the subject of the post, the predominant category is *museum object*, which represents 62% of all the instances. Visitors' *reposts* follow, occurring in 28% per cent of the posts. As for the mode of communication adopted in these posts, a *knowledge-telling* attitude is embraced in a striking 54% of all the posts – by far, the highest percentage in the museums' sample recorded for *knowledge-telling*. The second most popular communication model is *fostering interaction* (22%), once again the highest percentage in the museum sample. What do these data indicate? To begin with, the British Museum presents itself on Instagram as a quite traditionalist institution, with an object-centred rather than visitor-centred model of curation. The predominance of museum objects as subject of the posts certainly reflects the importance of the museum's collection. However, it can also be indicative of the centrality attributed to museum objects for the accomplishment of the museum's public mission. After all, museum objects are considered pivotal for the museum mission by Neil MacGregor, the influential director of the British Museum from 2002 to 2015. MacGregor holds that aesthetic contemplation of museum objects has a transformative power on the visitor. Consequently, rather than learning something, museum visitors should “become something”. This can happen only if the visitor's “communion with the object” remains unmediated by any explanations. Therefore, scholars' role is not to put themselves between the public and the object (qtd. in Henning, *Museum, Media and Cultural Theory* 110).

It could be derived that the main purpose of the British Museum in its use of Instagram is disseminating digitized museum objects on the platform, so that a broader audience can come in contact with their transformative power. The democratising effect of this practice is, however, controversial to say the least. If, in theory, McGregor's idea of a “communion with the object”

brings everyone's interpretation of an art object on the same plan, it can also turn out very elitist in practice. Bourdieu (2) taught us how appreciation of artworks draws on embodied forms of cultural capital. Accordingly, as pointed out by Henning (*Museum, Media and Cultural Theory* 110), advocating for the transformative power of unmediated aesthetic contemplation means perpetuating social inequalities. To overcome inequalities, a post presenting a digitized museum object should provide tools for interpreting the artwork. The predominant knowledge-telling attitude registered in the content analysis, however, can only do so much. Indeed, authoritatively imposing on a museum object the meaning attributed to it by the academia will hardly ever be meaningful for those traditionally excluded by it. Therefore, adopting exclusively knowledge-telling captions, this Instagram account perpetuates social inequalities – turning out very elitist despite its desire to inclusively reach a broader audience through its presence on this social medium. Reluctant to step away from its traditional role as authoritarian source of knowledge, *@britishmuseum* misses the opportunity to make the encounter with collection objects on Instagram truly meaningful for its audience. The same conclusion could be drawn in relation to posts fostering interaction. As exemplified by the 14th December 2018 post, which asks “What is the weather like where you are from?”, these posts call for users' contributions without genuinely include them in the interpretation of the art object. As a result, even though they somehow attempt to disrupt the unidirectional communication model usually adopted by museums, they fail to make this interaction meaningful.

5.3 Rijksmuseum

Founded in 1800 to house a collection of mainly Dutch art from the Middle Ages onwards, Amsterdam's Rijksmuseum has much in common with the British Museum. It is a quite famous public museum, which attracted 2,148,000 visitors in 2017 (Rijksmuseum, *Jaarverslagen* 252). It is also a national museum which, housing “a representative overview of Dutch art and history from the Middle Ages onwards”, is presented as “the museum of the Netherlands” (Rijksmuseum, *Vision and Mission*). In its mission statement the Rijksmuseum claims democratic aspirations presenting itself as an inclusive and visitor-centred institution. Indeed, it is committed to addressing “a broad-based, contemporary national and international audience”, while it considers “link[ing] people with art and history” as its primary aim (Rijksmuseum, *Vision and Mission*).

Yet, sometimes these inclusive aspirations clash with the Rijksmuseum's role of gatekeeper of the Dutch artistic canon. To provide an example, in the mission statement is claimed that, through a visit at the Rijksmuseum, art and history assume a new meaning in the eyes of the audience (Rijksmuseum, *Vision and Mission*). This statement seems to suggest that the

Rijksmuseum intentionally imposes specific narratives over the reading of the Dutch heritage; in other words, rather than negotiating the meaning of the collection with its visitors, the Rijksmuseum arrogates a claim of universality over the representation of “the Dutch” that excludes the possibility of multivocality. Furthermore, it seems to conceive the selection of the meanings attributed to cultural objects as a business for museum professionals, rather than fostering visitors’ personal meaning-making. The Rijksmuseum, in this respect, proves a traditional and authoritative institution rather than a participative one. This being said, it would be unfair to dismiss the museum’s democratic aspirations as in-name-only. More likely, as the British Museum, the Rijksmuseum is currently negotiating its social role, trying to find a balance between the latest tendencies in museology and its ancient tradition of prestigious national museum.

5.3.1 @rijksmuseum

The correlated Instagram account @rijksmuseum, active since April 2014, can count on 1,198 posts published and 381,000 followers. By and large, the account presents the Rijksmuseum as a rather traditionalist institution: object-centred and intent in delivering cultural contents authoritatively. Indeed, 62% of the posts appeared to display a *museum object*, while a *knowledge-telling* mode was registered in 51% of the posts.

Yet, the content analysis highlighted further trends which, however less statistically represented, indicates a partial convergence towards characteristics praised in the theorisation of the democratic museum. These trends are signalled by the codes *Museum visitor* (12%) and *Behind the scenes* (10%). *Museum visitors* are indeed the second most common subject of the posts. As these posts display visitors engaging with museum objects, it visually represents the before-mentioned purpose of the Rijksmuseum to “link people with art and history” (Rijksmuseum, *Vision and Mission*). In a broader sense, in these posts the image of the Rijksmuseum is shaped as a visitor-centred institution. Particularly interesting are the posts belonging to the *Behind the scenes* category. Here the work of museum professionals, which is usually performed behind closed doors, is opened up and displayed to the broader public. On the one hand, these posts testify the Rijksmuseum’s everyday work to achieve its mission; on the other hand, they represent an answer to Vergo’s call for a more self-reflective and transparent way of doing museology. By showing the work involved in exhibition design, the Rijksmuseum admits that museum practice is not a completely objective issue. An exhibition is the product of deliberate choices. Once the audience acknowledges that, the museum’s work is exposed to the public’s inquiry. As dangerous as it may be for the Rijksmuseum, this also makes it a more inclusive institution. It is true that only 10% of the posts are dedicated to this self-reflective practice, but this should not make us assume that the

Rijksmuseum dismisses it as unimportant. In fact, the *@rijksmuseum* Instagram account displays, among its stories highlights¹⁶, one specifically named *Behind scenes*, which is regularly updated with highlights about the current work of museum professionals. The existence of a dedicated Instagram story and the visibility reserved to it prove that the Rijksmuseum is deliberately investing resources in this self-reflexive practice. Thus, if it is true that *@rijksmuseum* is not on average a particularly democratic account, it is also true that it proved open to tinkering with more inclusive and visitor-centred strategies. Perhaps, in the long term, these lesser-used democratizing strategies could reveal decisive in restructuring the Rijksmuseum's image on Instagram.

5.4 Guggenheim Museum

The Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, satellite institution of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, was opened in Bilbao in 1997 (Plaza and Haarich 1456). Traditionally a commercial port, Bilbao and its region were hit by an economic crisis during the 1980s. To overcome the crisis, authorities turned to publicly founded initiatives that would trigger urban regeneration: the opening of an art museum was one of these initiatives (1459). For a fortunate coincidence, at that time the Solomon R. Guggenheim was determined to open a satellite museum in a European city (1461). When the Basque authorities offered the equivalent of 20,9 million US\$ for the right to exhibit the Guggenheim collection for twenty years, a favourable partnership between Bilbao and the foundation was established: the works for the new Guggenheim museum started. The project was assigned to the “starchitect” Frank Gehry, who came up with an innovative building characterized by curved titanium slabs. Today, Gehry's building is widely praised as an architectural masterpiece, being described as “an icon for the current century, built utopia, titanium dream” (1460). Soon enough, this iconic building became the symbol of the city of Bilbao, as well as the most quoted example of how flagship buildings can be used for marketing purposes in urban renewal. The creation of the Guggenheim Bilbao achieved indeed the desired effect, transforming Bilbao into a service-oriented tourist destination and spurring urban economic regeneration (1458). The afflux of cultural tourists generated employment and benefitted Bilbao's economy (1458), while the museum had a positive impact also on civic pride (1459). Due to the museum's impressive impact, the expression “Bilbao effect” (or “Guggenheim effect”) was adopted worldwide to indicate urban economic regeneration fostered by culture-based investments (1459).

¹⁶ Instagram Stories Highlights are a collection of audio-visual contents that can be put permanently in evidence at the top of your Instagram account.

Nonetheless, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao also raised criticism. The project mainly was criticized because of its otherness to the region's peculiar culture (1457). Arguably, this is a concerning issue for a museum consistently founded by the local government. Even though it belongs to a private foundation, the Guggenheim Bilbao is supposed to yield some sort of return to the region. To speak the truth, the museum proved well-aware of the fact and also attentive to critiques: in many points of its *Vision* and *Mission Statement*, the museum's commitment to representing and serving the Basque region is openly stated. For instance, it is said that the Guggenheim Bilbao "seeks to serve as a symbol of the vitality of the Basque Country and to promote ethical conduct through art" (Guggenheim Bilbao, *Mission, Vision, Value*). More in general, the museum aims at fulfilling its democratic mission by being inclusive and visitor-centred. Indeed, besides claiming to address a wide and diverse audience, it anticipates that, by 2020, "the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao will be recognized as a European leader in innovation and in the creation of a visitor-centred museum experience" (Guggenheim Bilbao, *Mission, Vision, Value*).

5.4.1 @museoguggenheim

On October 2014, the Guggenheim Bilbao established its presence on Instagram with the account @museoguggenheim. The account, so far, gained 458,000 followers and published 2,043 posts. As suggested by the content analysis, the Guggenheim Museum tends to conceive its Instagram account mostly as a marketing tool. This assumption is based on the fact that *Advertising temporary exhibition* (19%) and *Humanising* (19%) are the two prevailing communication modes. In other words, what museum professionals want to achieve, through their Instagram account, is to attract physical visitors and create engagement among a wide community of users. Presumably, the situation is a result of the museum's business model. As the Guggenheim maintains in its *Values*, "the low dependence on government grants requires high efficiency in generating income not only [...] from the support and backing provided by society", but also "from maintaining a high number of customers, this term being understood in its broadest sense" (Guggenheim Bilbao, *Mission, Vision, Value*). It can be derived that *humanising* posts, with their informal and engaging attitude, are intended to generate support and backing from society – or, at least, from a broader community of Instagram users. Posts *advertising a temporary exhibition*, on the other hand, are supposed to attract paying visitors to the physical space of the museum. Focusing on temporary exhibitions is after all a better strategy than focusing on the permanent collection, because it presents the museum as an institution with something novel to present at each subsequent visit. In such a way, the Guggenheim aims at cultivating life-long visitors and consequently "maintaining a high number of customers" (Guggenheim Bilbao).

The idea that the Guggenheim uses Instagram mainly as a marketing tool seems to be confirmed by the analysis of the posts' subjects. If it's true that the majority of the posts is focused on – as it is common for museum accounts – *museum objects* (40%), an impressive 28% features Gehry's building as *placemaking* item. The fact is ultimately intuitive: the Guggenheim titanium structure holds an iconic status which makes it the flagship-building of Bilbao. With its curved slabs, the Guggenheim Museum is a tool for city branding, which attracts visitors from all over the world and enhances civic pride among the Basque population. Thus, by flooding Instagram with pictures of its building, the institution can efficiently increase the number of visits and at the same time gain the support of the local population. In sum, the content analysis of its posts seems to suggest that *@museoguggenheim*, on Instagram, mainly pursues a broader engagement with the local and international community.. With this, it may fulfil its aspiration to address a wider audience. Its aspiration to inclusively address a diverse audience and devise an outstandingly visitor-centred museum experience, however, is not reflected in its use of Instagram.

5.5 Kunsthal

On the Kunsthal website, it is proudly stated that “the Kunsthal is not a museum, nor does it wish to be” (Kunsthal, *What We Do*). With this, the institution is referring to the fact that it is not provided with a permanent collection: it is thus not concerned with conservation issues. In fact, the idea of the Kunsthal appeared in the 1980s, when Joop Linthorst, Councillor for Finance and Art in Rotterdam, came up with the project of developing an exhibition space specifically made for temporary blockbuster exhibitions. Through the years, the Kunsthal managed to become a leading cultural institution in the Netherlands, whose programme wants to be of “national scope and international allure” (Kunsthal, *What We Do*). Hosting over twenty exhibitions a year, the Kunsthal attracted 239,645 visitors in 2017 (Kunsthal Rotterdam). The high turnover of exhibitions is supposed to attract a diverse public. The programme is deliberately “rich in contrast”, so as to generate “a greater and new audience” (Kunsthal, *What We Do*). Making art accessible to a wider audience is in fact the central mission of the Kunsthal. Moreover, this innovative cultural institution wants to offer opportunities to actively involve visitors, and to be a “magic box with room for new ideas and different ways of presenting art” (Kunsthal, *What We Do*). Looking at the Kunsthal's mission statement through the lens of our theoretical framework, it is clear that the institution wants to present itself as inclusive and participatory. Also, it demonstrates a certain sensitivity towards the instances of Vergo's new museology, seeking “different ways of presenting

art” (Kunsthall, *What We Do*) and even refusing to recognise itself in the traditional definition of museum.

5.5.1 @kunsthall

The institution started to manage the account @kunsthall in March 2013. To this day, it published 1,048 posts and acquired 42,600 followers. Considering the subject of these posts, it appears that @kunsthall is not dissimilar from the Instagram accounts of those traditional museums from which the Kunsthall claims to be different. The predominant category is, once again, *museum object*, registered in 54% of the sample. The communication modes employed by the Kunsthall did not result particularly democratic either. The predominant categories in this case are *Advertising temporary exhibition* (43%) and *Advertising event* (35%). As for the most represented category, the fact that temporary exhibitions are the main focus of the Instagram account is not surprising, considering that the Kunsthall conceives temporary exhibitions as its core activity and the mean to fulfil its inclusive aspirations. Instagram, in this perspective, affords to bring a wider audience in contact with the initiatives of the institution. However, rather than actively involving virtual visitors on Instagram, the platform is conceived mainly as a marketing tool that could attract physical visitors in the exhibition spaces. Proof of this is that few resources are spent on *fostering interaction* (2%). Also, the communication of cultural contents on Instagram was registered only in 9% of the posts. On one hand, this means that presenting itself as an authoritative source of knowledge is not a top priority of the institution. On the other hands, this also means that the Kunsthall hardly considers Instagram as a space for discussion. As a matter of fact, efforts to establish a *multivocal* discussion environment were registered in only 2% of the posts.

Further considerations can be made on the category *Advertising event*, another prominent communication mode. A primary aim of these posts is, of course, to attract a higher number of participants in order to make the event successful. Yet, they also contribute to shaping the image of the Kunsthall as a lively and vibrant location, a place devoted to workshops, concerts and DJ sessions. In other words, what the Kunsthall has to offer is visitor-centred experiences: rather than a stuffy atmosphere and never-changing settings, here unique and involving experiences are offered to participants for a limited period of time. With the predominance of these posts, the Kunsthall demonstrates to have fully embraced, and probably with more awareness than other institutions, the mantra of the experience economy. Looking at its Instagram account the Kunsthall appears, at a first superficial glance, a visitor-centred museum. Yet, it does not undertake visitor-centred activities right on Instagram. Similarly, this institution still has further to go, if it wants to fully harness Instagram's potential for fulfilling its inclusive and participatory aspirations.

5.6 Pirelli Hangar Bicocca

Located in a peripheral area of Milan, Pirelli Hangar Bicocca is a non-for-profit privately owned foundation. The institution was established, and it is still funded, by Pirelli – an Italy-based corporate company primarily focused on the production of tyres. Pirelli Hangar Bicocca is a quite recent institution: it was opened in 2004, when Pirelli decided to convert an industrial plant into an exhibition space for contemporary art (Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, *History Of the Building*). From the beginning, the mission of Pirelli Hangar Bicocca has been the creation and the promotion of contemporary art. Rather than pursuing this purpose with the acquisition of a permanent collection, the foundation presents every year solo shows of Italian and international artists. A programme of parallel events is organised to explore the shows in depth. Also, every show is site-specific, “conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex” (Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, *About Us*). The hangar, which with its 15,000 square meters is one of the largest contiguous exhibition spaces in Europe, is indeed described by the foundation as “a dynamic space for experimentation and discovery” (Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, *About Us*).

It is important to note that, despite its private ownership, the foundation is very committed to its social mission. Branding itself with the slogan “Art to the People”, Pirelli Hangar Bicocca’s aim is to make contemporary art, usually a quite exclusive genre, open and accessible to everyone. To this purpose, admission to the exhibition spaces is totally free. Moreover, it tends to rig up temporary exhibitions that constitute immersive experiences and can thus be appreciated without brainy explanations. Nonetheless, museum staff – not by coincidence referred to as “facilitators” – is always on hand “to help the public connect with the art” (Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, *About Us*). Also, events, parties, workshops and outreach programmes are organised in the expositive spaces as well as in the foundation areas for public services and educational activities. The foundation’s model, praised by museum professionals worldwide, turned out to be appreciated also by the visitors and the neighbourhood community. The Pirelli Hangar Bicocca registered 260,000 visits during 2017, many visitors being children and university students from the educational facilities located in the area (Panzarin). Presumably, the success can be attributed to the innovative character of the institution, which strives to leave behind an authoritative and collection-centred model of curation for an inclusive, visitor-driven way of doing museology.

5.6.1 @pirelli_hangarbicocca

The foundation stepped on Instagram in March 2013, when it published its first post with the account @pirelli_hangarbicocca. Today, the account displays 1,136 posts and 74,000 followers.

The content analysis indicated that the innovative character of the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca does not translate into an innovative use of Instagram. For the most part, the account is in fact quite similar to many other museum accounts, the main activities being showcasing museum objects, authoritatively disseminating knowledge and promoting museum activities. The predominant subject of the posts is indeed a *museum object* (36%). As for the communication modes, first comes *Advertising temporary exhibition* (34%) and *Advertising event* (34%) and then *Knowledge-telling* (22%).

Recognised this, it is still worth to focus on categories of posts which, despite not predominant, are particularly interesting to explore the philosophy of *@pirelli_hangarbicocca*. In particular, I will address here the categories of posts having as subject the *museum space* (26%) and *behind the scenes* activities (24%) – which represent the highest percentages in the sample for these categories. Considering the characteristics of the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, it could be assumed that *museum space* posts perform two main activities. First, they give prominence to the size of its expositive spaces – something that ensures a primacy to the institution and thus a reason to be proud of. Second, offering an overview of how installations interact with the museum space, they stress how the artworks are intrinsically site-specific, really “conceived to work in close relation to the architecture of the complex” (Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, *About Us*). In such a way, those posts add a unique value to the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, which is presented not as a mere expositive space but almost as an integral part of the artworks exposed there. As for the *Behind the scenes* posts, they mostly offer insights into the work of artists preparing art installations. The focus is on the process of making art that occurs in the hangar – a process which, once again, is tightly related to the museum space. The two categories of posts thus serve the same aim, presenting the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca as an innovative institution that physically enables the production and the advancement of art. Taken together, *museum space* and *behind the scenes* posts make up to half of the posts published on the Instagram account. It can thus be said that, besides promotion, the main purpose of the Instagram account is to promote the image of the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca as the “dynamic space for experimentation and discovery” the institution claims to be (Pirelli Hangar Bicocca, *About Us*).

Moreover, either intentionally or as a side effect, they present the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca as a provider of unique experiences for its visitors. Emphasis on space (103) and on processes constructed over time (99) are indeed features mentioned by Pine and Gilmore while theorising the advancement of the experience economy. The importance of the physical context in the museum experience is largely discussed also by Falk and Dierking (28). Thus, focusing on the physical context of the museum in its Instagram posts, the institution proves its commitment to offer unique museum experiences, and also a certain sensitivity towards the visitor-centred museum as described

by Falk and Dierking. However, in the creation of a visitor-centred museum experience, *@pirelli_hangarbicocca* could be blamed to overstress the importance of the physical context over the personal and socio-cultural context. It perfectly exemplifies Falk and Dierking's complaint that, "though well-intentioned, too often museums operate with an incomplete model of the museum experience, a focus on the interaction of just one or some subset of two contexts", disregarding "real visitors as opposed to some idealized and averaged visitor" (31). In fact, despite presenting itself as visitor-centred, *@pirelli_hangarbicocca* does not address the museum experience through a needs-based lens, completely avoiding on Instagram user-centred strategies such as *fostering interaction* and *multivocality*. This results in a not very inclusive, nor participatory, way of using this social medium. In conclusion, if the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca's aspiration on Instagram is to deliver "Art to the People", it could be said that the institution is succeeding in this only to a limited extent.

5.7 Pioneer Works

Between all the cultural institutions in the sample, Pioneer Works (Brooklyn) is the one that mostly conceptualises its role as a place for co-creation and public discourse. In fact, Pioneer Works is far more than a simple expositive space. In the intents of its founder, the artist Dustin Yellin, this artist-run cultural centre open in 2012 should have been "a place in which artists, scientists, and thinkers from various backgrounds converge" to form a utopian "museum of process" (Pioneer Works, *About*). Besides a central hall that welcomes visitors for a rotating programme of exhibitions, science talks, music performances and workshops, Pioneer Works is provided with many different spaces that enable the co-creation of cultural contents. These spaces count "a media lab for content creation and dissemination, a darkroom, residency studios, galleries, gardens, a ceramics studio, a press, and a bookshop" (Pioneer Works, *About*). Also – surprisingly enough for an art museum – Pioneer Works houses a "science studios, a technology lab with 3-D printing, [... and] a virtual environment lab for VR and AR production" (Pioneer Works, *About*).

To understand the purpose of this unusual conjugation of art and science labs, it is necessary to frame it in the mission of Pioneer Works. Providing tools and spaces to create and connect, the institution wants to encourage "radical thinking across disciplines" that could find solutions to the "unprecedented social, intellectual, and spiritual challenges" humanity is currently facing (Pioneer Works, *About*). To this aim, art and science are used dynamically, "as both a lens and catalyst" for innovative answers (Pioneer Works, *About*). Above all, Pioneer Works wants to work as a platform, free and open to all, for the exchange of ideas. The final utopic purpose is to build "community through the arts and sciences", to eventually create "an open and inspired world"

(Pioneer Works, *About*). Pioneer Works is then a space where artists, with a diverse background, live together to co-create artworks able to address pressing social issues. Also, it is a place where visitors can come in contact, free of charge, with trailblazing artworks right where they were created. On top of that, Pioneer Works carries out a number of outreach programmes, involving both artists and communities. Through these, the cultural centre manages to establish a participative environment. Considering that in 2017 more than 250,000 people paid a visit to this peripheral cultural centre, it is safe to assume that Pioneer Works' format won over the audience (Pioneer Works, *Sciences at Pioneer Works* 3). Likewise, its avail for societal development must have persuaded also the political spheres, if the cultural centre is now funded by a mixture of private donation and public subsidies.

5.7.1 @pioneerworks

Publishing its first post in March 2013, this cultural centre established its presence on Instagram with the account @pioneerworks. To date, @pioneerworks published 2,171 posts reaching over 67,000 followers. The content analysis highlighted how, besides presenting itself as an expository space, Pioneer Works wants to truly shape its image on Instagram as the “museum of process” it claims to be in its mission statement (Pioneer Works, *About*). In other terms, Pioneer Works is certainly a place where the audience meets art objects. However, more than that, it is a place where things happen. Indeed, while 24% of the posts showcases *museum objects* as its subject, 22% of them is focused on *outreach programmes* and 22% on *events* taking place in the museum space. As a result, scrolling down @pioneerworks' feed, Instagram users get the idea of a participative, engaging institution where the audience has a primary role in determining nature and outputs of museum activities. The analysis of the predominant communication modes yields similar results.

Once again, Pioneer Works appears interested in giving visibility to visitor-centred activities organised by the institution. 46% of the posts is indeed devoted to *advertising events*, may these be outreach programmes, workshops or parties. Of course, these posts also perform a promotional function – the same function attributed to the posts *advertising temporary exhibitions*, which represent the second most common communication mode (12%). The analysis of the communication mode stressed an additional interesting fact: *self-reflection*, present in 11% of the posts, is the third prevailing category. In absolute terms, 11% is certainly not an outstanding figure. Yet, 11% is a significant figure if compared to the percentage of posts containing some form of *self-reflection* registered in the accounts of the other museums in the sample. By and large, cultural

institutions appeared reluctant to ponder their way of doing museology publicly, under the eyes of Instagram audiences. Pioneer Works seems different in this respect. It seems willing to openly question its structure, its function and its modes of working. Furthermore, it seems to consider Instagram as a good platform to do so. In conclusion, through its Instagram account Pioneer Works appears as a centre of aggregation always in becoming – may this aggregation involve artists, museum professionals, visitors and/or community members. What could be noticed is that, while the institution’s participative and social nature is extensively depicted by the account, its commitment to socio-political activism does not seem to find room on Instagram. In other words, this museum – which aspires to work as a platform for the exchange of ideas regarding pressing social issues – seems to underestimate Instagram’s potential as participatory and inclusive space of debate.

5.8 Museo del Novecento

The Museo del Novecento, a medium-sized museum located in the centred of Milan, is a public institution created through a consistent investment of the city government. Opened in 2010, the museum was established with the purpose of giving a more suiting expositive space to the collection of twentieth-century artworks inherited by the city over time, thanks to donations of Milanese private art collectors. The collection is today composed of four hundred works, mostly by Italian artists. As many of these works relate to artistic movements of which Milan has been the cradle, the collection is highly representative for the city. Indeed, it symbolizes, at the same time, the “feverish cultural dynamism” of Milan and the generosity of Milanese people (Museo del Novecento, *The Museum*).¹⁷ Indicating exhibition over conservation as its core activity, the institution reaffirms its commitment to public service (Museo del Novecento, *The Museum*). In particular, its public service consists of the “investigation and promotion of 20th century Italian cultural and artistic heritage” in order to foster an inclusive “dialogue with contemporary art” among “an ever wider audience” (Museo del Novecento, *The Museum*).

5.8.1 @museodel900

Present on Instagram since August 2012 with the account @museodel900, the Museo del Novecento uploaded so far 2,165 posts and gathered 101,000 followers. The content analysis highlighted how, despite the pivotal role covered by the collection for its foundation, the Museo del

¹⁷ The effects of this local notoriety in terms of visits are, nonetheless, mediocre: the Museo del Novecento attracted 232,333 visitors in 2017 (Museo del Novecento 1).

Novecento does not present itself on Instagram as an object-centred institution. Instead, it shapes its image as experience-centred and visitor-centred. Indeed, while only 24% of the posts features a *museum object*, the predominant subject category is *Repost*, which was registered 50% in of the instances. The significance of the *Repost* category can be understood drawing on the work of Budge. Four years before the launch of Instagram, Budge considered that, in the adoption of social media, museums established a one-way communication pattern in which information would flow exclusively from the institution to the audience. At the same time, she detected a desire, on behalf of the audience, to participate and share the meaning-making experiences encountered during museum visits. The scholar thus attempted to disrupt this one-way communication paradigm, “pushing for museums to cultivate knowledge-sharing networks, in which cultural participants share images, information, and experiences throughout communities” (Budge 69).

Seven years after the launch of Instagram, Budge conducted a study on Instagram posts published by museum visitors regarding their museum visit. She concluded that these Instagram posts are published by visitors in order to share their museum experience and are an integral part to their meaning-making process; also, they speak volumes about the ways in which visitors engage with the museum’s collection, space and staff (Budge 72). Later on, she pointed out that “engagement with museum objects on Instagram is informed by agency and authority on the part of the user” (Budge and Burness 138). Therefore, considering the way in which visitors’ engagement is represented through the sharing of Instagram posts equals to acknowledging their authority in shaping the museum experience. In other words, it equals to accepting that the meaning-making process occurring in museums relies much more on the visitor than on museum professionals; that modalities and outputs of the museum experience elude, for the most part, the institution’s control. Ultimately, it means conceiving the museum experience as visitor-centred.

In the light of Budge’s work, the way in which the Museo del Novecento uses its Instagram account appears very innovative. In fact, it seems that the Museo del Novecento is finally fulfilling, on Instagram, Budge’s call for museums “to cultivate knowledge-sharing networks in which cultural participants share images, information, and experiences throughout communities” (Budge 69). As half of the images published are *reposts* of visitors’ posts, the account can be conceived as a hub for gathering representations of different museum experiences. In doing so, it suggests that there is no normative way to experience the museum and its objects. Rather, the Museo del Novecento’s experience is a multivocal one. The content analysis provided further proof of the institution’s multivocal nature: the predominant communication mode is, as a matter of fact, *multivocality* (31%). Therefore, it is safe to assume that *@museodel900*, through reposts and

multivocality, found an innovative way for harnessing Instagram's democratising potential which is, at once, inclusive and visitor-centred.

5.9 MoMA

One of the world's most renowned museums, the MoMA could be considered *the* place for modern and contemporary art. With its collection of more than 200,000 paintings, sculptures, drawings, prints, photographs, media and much more (MoMA, *History*), this non-profit private institution in the middle of Manhattan attracts around 3,000,000 visitors a year (MoMA, *Year in Review 2017-2018*). Given these numbers, it seems that the MoMA accomplished the purpose of its founder director Alfred H. Barr, Jr., who intended to provide New York with "the greatest museum of modern art in the world" (MoMA, *History*). When the MoMA was established in the late 1920s, this was a quite ground-breaking statement. At that time, museums devoted exclusively to modern art were virtually unheard of. The creation of the MoMA was then meant to challenge the conservative policies of traditional museums.

A process of reevaluation of the museum's role in society is thus embedded in the museum tradition. Accordingly, the museum "encourages openness and a willingness to evolve and change", periodically reevaluating itself and "responding to new ideas and initiatives with insight, imagination, and intelligence" (MoMA, *Mission Statement*). The MoMA proves, with this, very aware of the issues raised by Vergo's new museology, accepting the challenges of reevaluation despite its prestige as established institution. In the attempt to balance these opposing instances, the institution "seeks to create a dialogue between the established and the experimental, [...] in an environment that is responsive to the issues of modern and contemporary art" (MoMA, *Mission Statement*). As for the museum's role in society, the MoMA certainly has democratic ambitions. These are primarily framed into its aspiration to be an inclusive space for public debate. Indeed, the museum claims to be committed to foster discussion and dialogue by "sharing the most thought-provoking modern and contemporary art" in a way accessible to a diverse public (MoMA, *About Us*). Also, it claims to especially celebrate "creativity, openness, tolerance, and generosity" (MoMA, *About Us*), while helping people to understand and enjoy the visual arts of our time (MoMA, *History*). Furthermore, the MoMA openly claims to have inclusive aspirations, programmatically pursuing them both online and on-site (MoMA, *About Us*). In sum, from its prestigious stance, the MoMA appears very attentive to the most progressive instances of museology, aspiring to continuously reframe its role in society under the banners of inclusivity and socio-political activism.

5.9.1 @themuseumofmodernart

@themuseumofmodernart, primary Instagram account of the MoMA, was created in December 2011 and published so far 3,573 posts. Followed by 4,500,000 users, in 2016 the account was awarded the Webby Award for Culture and Lifestyle¹⁸ (The Webby Awards). It thus appears that, in line with what is affirmed on its website, the MoMA puts significant effort into its online activities, presumably spending a considerable amount of resources on them. The content analysis highlighted what these online activities on Instagram consist of: primarily, Instagram is used for promotional purposes; secondarily, to provide prompts for a multivocal discussion regarding both art and social issues. The predominant communication mode is indeed *advertising temporary exhibitions* (35%). Adding to this the 12% of posts *advertising an event*, it can be derived that the Museum of Modern Art adopts Instagram principally as a marketing tool.

However, the museum also puts some effort into creating, online, the “inclusive place for debate” regarding pressing social issues the MoMA wishes to be. *Multivocality*, second predominant communication mode, was indeed found in 18% of the posts. As it has been previously argued, establishing a tolerant, multivocal environment is the key to an inclusive place of debate, where conflicting views are accepted and no interpretation is imposed authoritatively. A *knowledge-telling* attitude was indeed traced only in 14% of the posts, proving that the museum is not primarily concerned with providing established interpretations of its artworks. Rather, the museum is concerned with making those artworks relevant for Instagram users and with fostering personal meaning-making. Two strategies serve this purpose: first of all, through posts providing *instructional scaffolding* (4%) Instagram users are invited to personally make sense of the collection and to develop and contribute further insights into its interpretation. Second, through posts in which some sort of *social-political activism* (8%) is carried out, the MoMA offers prompts for discussion that could spur societal development. In other terms, through this account Instagram users are exposed to valuable and inclusive insights into matters of public interests, making Instagram another instrument to share “the most thought-provoking modern and contemporary art” (MoMA, *About Us*).

Before concluding, I would like to point out that posts featuring multivocality, instructional scaffolding and socio-political activism have, as subject, a *museum object* (70%). In other words, every post contributing to a more inclusive and participatory use of Instagram is somehow object-focused. Being object-focused was one of the characteristics of @britishmuseum and @rijksmuseum, two accounts defined not particularly democratic in their use of Instagram.

¹⁸ It must be noticed that the period for which the MoMA’s Instagram account was awarded the Webby Award is not the same taken into consideration by the content analysis.

Therefore, it must be concluded that drawing on the museum's collection is not non-democratic *per se*. If anything, the democratic character of a post is determined by what the artwork is used for. Basically, a knowledge-telling communication mode as the *@britishmuseum* and *@rijksmuseum*'s one, which aims at spreading knowledge regarding artworks as an end in itself, it is not meaningful for the society's democratic life. On the contrary, if a post starts from specific qualities of the artwork to foster personal meaning-making and social debate, an object-based online museology can significantly contribute to societal development in a democratic sense. This is what, at least in part of its posts, *@themuseumofmodernart* is doing. The MoMA can therefore be deemed to have found a way to harness Instagram's potential to its fullest. It is true that only a minor part of this Instagram activity is devoted to these democratising practices. Yet, with its account, the museum paved the way to a more democratic way of using Instagram, opening new perspectives on the future use of this social medium for museum practice.

5.10 Conclusions

Drawing upon the results of the content analysis, it has been possible to define what are the main practices undertaken by museums in their use of Instagram. On these premises, it could be said that on average museums are not particularly democratic in their use of Instagram. Promotional purposes are one of the main concerns for many museums. This may either mean attracting a higher number of visitors to the physical space of the museum, or enhancing the museum's image in the eyes of Instagram users. Another predominant practice is the diffusion of digitized museum objects on the platform. Neither democratic nor anti-democratic *per se*, this practice becomes very elitist when – as it usually happens – is accompanied by an authoritarian knowledge-telling attitude which leaves no room for audience interpretative practices. In such a way, rather than a tool for restructuring museum practice in a democratising sense, Instagram becomes a platform to perpetuate the museum's traditional emphasis on education and power. It is true that some museums, and especially those not provided with a permanent collection, try to distance themselves from this object-centred knowledge-telling strategy. However, they mainly do so by shaping their image on Instagram as providers of personalised experiences. Arguably an effect of the widespread adoption of the experience economy mantra throughout entertainment and cultural industries, this strategy makes museums appear visitor-centred. Still, this strategy is often embraced uncritically, with the illusion that an experience-centred museum is an all-round democratic museum. What gets lost is the importance, for a democratic museum, of allowing its audience to negotiate meanings and build confidence. Instagram offers tools to do so; yet, its potential is rarely exploited.

This said, it is worth to focus on those cases in which Instagram's democratising potential is indeed harnessed, in order to raise awareness regarding virtuous examples and indicate a way towards a more democratic use of Instagram on behalf of museums. First of all, I want to mention those Instagram practices that contribute to making museums more inclusive. This is primarily achieved by using Instagram as a platform for socio-political activism – thus voicing the perspectives of those groups traditionally excluded by museums. Moreover, this is achieved when museums foster on Instagram a multivocal interpretation of digitized museum objects, and when Instagram is used to open up to the audience “behind the scenes” museum practices and share a reflection on curatorial choices. Secondly, I want to stress the importance of reposts to harness Instagram's potential for promoting a visitor-centred conception of museum visiting. Visually representing the museum experience through the eyes of a visitor, reposts are a tools offered by Instagram to reconceptualise museum visiting as highly dependent on the visitor. Finally, it is worth to mention those practices that, exploiting Instagram's potential to work as a platform for the exchange of ideas, foster a participatory way of doing museology. This happens in two ways: first, fostering interaction with and between users; second, guiding users, through instructional scaffolding, to develop and contribute personal interpretations regarding art-related issues.

In the following chapter, empirical examples of how these strategies are put into practice are provided.

6. Findings: Democratising Practices

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present different kinds of posts that could contribute to a more democratic use of Instagram on behalf of museums (finally addressing my third sub-question). I will do so through a semiotic analysis of five posts, selected among the content analysis sample. These five posts were selected because considered good empirical examples of current museum practices which, if implemented, could restructure Instagram's use in a democratising sense. I thus intend to show how a democratic post practically looks like. My hope, with this, is to provide museum professionals with some tools, and ideas, to harness Instagram's democratising potential to a greater extent. I will do so exploring the different ways in which a post can be democratic, that is by being participatory, inclusive or visitor-centred. Therefore, I will first present two posts that foster a participatory online experience. The first example is a *@museoguggenheim* post which harnesses Instagram's interactive potential. The second example is a post published by *@themuseumofmodernart*, where specific features of digitized museum objects are used to provide instructional scaffolding and promote the user's personal meaning-making. As this post contains also a reflection on the MoMA's social role throughout its history, it was considered a case of online self-reflecting practice as well. The post thus serves as example not only of participatory post, but also of inclusive post. A further example of inclusive posts is then provided. In this case, it is a *@themuseumofmodernart* post which, giving voice to a traditionally under-represented social group, carries on, on Instagram, a form of socio-political activism. I will then move to the presentation of a *@museodel900* repost which adopt a multivocal communication mode. For its combination of multivocality and reposting, this post was considered both inclusive and visitor-centred. Finally, I will conclude the chapter with another visitor-centred post: namely, a *@pirelli_hangarbicocca* post where, in the representation of a museum event, the special dimension is strongly emphasised.

Table 2. Selection of post for the semiotic analysis

Participatory posts	Fostering interaction	<i>@museoguggenheim post, 20 March 2019</i>
	Instructional scaffolding	<i>@themuseumofmodernart post, 21 March 2019 a</i>
Inclusive posts	Self-reflection	
	Socio-political activism	<i>@themuseumofmodernart, 7 March 2019</i>
	Multivocality	<i>@museodel900 post, 16 March 2019</i>
Visitor-centred posts	Repost	
	Museum space	<i>@pirelli_hangarbicocca post, 14 February 2019 b</i>

6.2 A participatory post: fostering interaction (@museoguggenheim post, 20 March 2019)

This post, featured in *Figure 6.1*, has been selected as a good example of a post which uses specific features of a museum object to foster interaction with Instagram users. The visual part of the post is a detail of a painting: a portrait of a smiling woman on a dark background. The happy expression of the woman conveys a positive feeling, which is bolstered by the hashtags *#happy*, *#happyday* and *#love*. The hashtag *#DiadelaFelicidad* specifies that it is a post published in occasion of the International Day of Happiness, celebrated worldwide every 20 March. All this emphasis on happy feelings can be considered as a humanising move: through it, Instagram users are engaged emotionally, thus establishing the proper environment for interaction. Indeed, once engaged the users, the caption openly invites them to contribute their own comments to the post. Specifically, the caption starts off “The artist who created the series *Sonrisas* (Smiles) (1994), which is part of the collection of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, is ...”. It then continues providing three possible answers to complete the sentence, each presenting the name of an artist: “a. Alex Katz; b. Gerhard Richter; c. Robert Motherwell”. Consequently, users are prompted to indicate the correct answer in the comments – thus engaging in a bi-directional conversation with the museum. Under these terms, @museoguggenheim is certainly harnessing Instagram’s potential for interaction, fostering participation on behalf of the users. However, it must be noticed that only one of the answers provided is correct. Not every contribution is praised. Most importantly, the post does not induce users to develop personal interpretations of the artwork proposed and share them with the Instagram community. In other words, the post prescribes the outcomes of participation. This is contrary to the definition of a well-scaffolded participatory activity where, following our theoretical framework, museum professionals act less as teachers and more as facilitators who sustain visitors in their meaning-making process and in their exchange of ideas. It can thus be concluded that, with this post, @museoguggenheim proves perfectly able to fit in the informal and engaging environment of this social medium by adopting a humanising attitude, thus posing the basis for a bi-directional exchange between the museum and Instagram users. However, when it comes to the modalities of this exchange, the museum does not prove confident enough to truly harness Instagram’s potential as a platform for the exchange of ideas. Unsure of how to place its traditional role in the social medium environment, with this post the museum allows only a form of participation in which its authority as recognized source of knowledge is reestablished. In doing so, it certainly allows a form of participatory experience, but it also misses the opportunity to make participation truly meaningful for both Instagram users and the museum.



museoguggenheim



1,050 likes

museoguggenheim El artista creador de la serie Sonrisas (1994), que forma parte de la Colección del Museo Guggenheim Bilbao, es _____

- a. Alex Katz
- b. Gerhard Richter
- c. Robert Motherwell

#DíadelaFelicidad #happy #happyday #love

[View all 32 comments](#)

March 20 · See Translation

*Figure 6.1.. Fostering interaction
(@museoguggenheim post, 20 March 2019)*

6.3 A participatory and inclusive post: instructional scaffolding and self-reflection (@themuseumofmoderart post, 21 March 2019 a)

This MoMA's post (*Figure 6.2a; Figure 6.2b*) has been considered an interesting object of inquiry because it provides an example of how digitized museum objects can be used on Instagram as a base for instructional scaffolding. As instructional scaffolding fosters personal meaning-making and prompts public discussion, it has to be reputed the best form of participatory experience a museum account can provide. Furthermore, the post embeds a tendency towards reevaluation and reflection on museum practices that, replying to Vergo's call for a more transparent way of doing museology, makes museum practice more inclusive.

As for the post's participatory character, its visual part consists of two pictures. The first one (*Figure 4*) is a shot taken in an exhibition gallery. In the foreground, two partially disassembled armchairs hang on the wall. Another disassembled chair, placed in an imaginary scenario with a massive ape, is visible on the contiguous wall. The second picture (*Figure 5*) features a single chair, proposed from two different angles. The sophisticated features of this chair characterized it as an old-style design object. Its refinement clashes with the anonymous look of the disassembled chairs, subtly inciting Instagram users to draw a comparison. The incitement to draw a comparison is made explicit in the caption, where the first armchair is defined "overstuffed", as opposed to the second armchair, "created to give the sitter maximum support while avoiding heavy construction and cumbersome upholstery". Through these descriptions, the post gives Instagram users the means to interpret the two armchairs. In other words, the descriptions scaffold the users' meaning-making process, providing guidance to develop a personal interpretation of these museum objects. Subsequently, through the open question "Which chair supports your design values?", users are prompted to finalize and contribute their personal interpretation.

It must be noticed that this question limits users' interpretative activity on a very specific issue. Yet, it allows more than one possible answer. Put another way, as in every well-scaffolded participatory activity, this question perfectly balances constraints and possibilities – sustaining users' participation without prescribing its outcomes. Thereby, the museum account's role becomes that of facilitator that makes participation meaningful for Instagram users and stimulate discussion on matters of public interest. Drawing on specific features of museum objects (here accentuated through the juxtaposition of two very different pieces), the post manages to consistently harness Instagram's participatory potential as platform for the exchange of ideas. As for the post's inclusive character, it must be said that the post also provides some form of self-reflection on museum practice. Indeed, by proposing period photographs and transcribing in the caption historical



themuseumofmodernart



7,077 likes

themuseumofmodernart "Cathedra gargantua, genus americanus. Weight when fully matured, 60 pounds. Habitat, the American Home. Devours little children, pencils, small change, fountain pens, bracelets, clips, earrings, scissors, hairpins, and other small flora and fauna of the domestic jungle. Is far from extinct."

This label from MoMA's 1941 "Organic Design in Home Furnishings" exhibition points to the overstuffed armchair as an example of the "horrible" design curators prepared to crusade against.

...

In contrast, the high-back armchair (1940) designed by Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, and Marli Ehrman was among the winning designs of the Museum's Organic Design in Home Furnishings competition that year. The chair was created to give the sitter maximum support, while avoiding heavy construction and cumbersome upholstery.

...

Which chair supports your design values? Judge for yourself in [#ValueofGoodDesign](#). Now on view: mo.ma/gooddesign

...

[Credits: Installation view of the exhibition, "Organic Design in Home Furnishings." September 24, 1941–November 9, 1941. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photo: Samuel H. Gottscho; Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, and Marli Ehrman, "High-Back Armchair." 1940. Molded wood shell, foam rubber, upholstery, and wood legs. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase Fund]

[View all 26 comments](#)

March 21

Figure 6.2a. Instructional scaffolding; Self-reflection (@themuseumofmodernart post, 21 March 2019 a. First picture)

MoMA themuseumofmodernart



2/2

themuseumofmodernart "Cathedra gargantua, genus americanus. Weight when fully matured, 60 pounds. Habitat, the American Home. Devours little children, pencils, small change, fountain pens, bracelets, clips, earrings, scissors, hairpins, and other small flora and fauna of the domestic jungle. Is far from extinct." This label from MoMA's 1941 "Organic Design in Home Furnishings" exhibition points to the overstuffed armchair as an example of the "horrible" design curators prepared to crusade against.

...

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...

Which chair supports your design values? Judge for yourself in [#ValueofGoodDesign](#). Now on view: mo.ma/gooddesign

...

[Credits: Installation view of the exhibition, "Organic Design in Home Furnishings." September 24, 1941–November 9, 1941. Photographic Archive. The Museum of Modern Art Archives, New York. Photo: Samuel H. Gottscho; Charles Eames, Eero Saarinen, and Marli Ehrman, "High-Back Armchair." 1940. Molded wood shell, foam rubber, upholstery, and wood legs. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Purchase Fund]

View all 26 comments

March 21

Figure 6.2b. Instructional scaffolding; Self-reflection (@themuseumofmodernart post, 21 March 2019 a. Second picture)

exhibition plaques, the post indirectly invites users to assess the MoMA's curatorial work throughout its history.

First of all, the setting of the exhibition and the use of black and white photography in the visuals suggest that the pictures were taken in the past. This is confirmed by the caption, which designates the images as shots from the 1941 MoMA exhibition "Organic Design in Home Furnishing". Second, specifying that "curators prepared to crusade against" this the first armchairs' "horrible" features, the caption also reports the purposes of the curators in designing the exhibition. With this, it makes very clear that exhibition design is not an objective business at all. Rather, museum professionals tend to impose specific narratives on the reading of museum objects. The idea that curators can be quite impartial in imposing these narratives is accentuated by the sharp irony in the curators' reported words – which, for example, describe the first armchair's design as devouring "small flora and fauna of the domestic jungle". Presenting the museum's interpretation of collection objects as biased is more inclusive than what could appear at first glance. Indeed, recognising its impartiality, the museum admits that the interpretation it once provided is not *the* only interpretation. More interpretations are instead possible. By asking Instagram users "Which chair supports your design values?", *@themuseumofmodernart* proves open to embed these (maybe conflicting) interpretations in the discussion. Hence, the post induces to contemplate the influence the MoMA had in the last century, acknowledging the willingness of the museum to push certain boundaries and do social work. The museum's work is consequently made object of inquiry and assessment, in an effort to be more transparent regarding the social messages it promoted throughout its history.

In sum, with one single post, *@themuseumofmodernart* proposes a discussion on two different aspects: first, on a design issue which, as much as art-related, is still grounded on broad-based common-knowledge and has immediate implications in society; second, on the museum's historical role in society. Ultimately, both aspects display a certain commitment to improving the democratic life of the Instagram community by creating a sphere for public debate which is, at once, participative and inclusive.

6.4 An inclusive post: socio-political activism (*@themuseumofmodernart*, 7 March 2019)

This MoMA's post (*Figure 6.3*) exemplifies a way in which museums, by carrying out socio-political activism on Instagram and giving voice to under-represented social groups, can shape their image as more inclusive places. The visual of the post consists of a short video in which a woman stands in front of a painting in the museum space. The caption specifies that the woman in the video is the artist Carolee Schneemann (passed away the day before the publication of this post) , while



*Figure 6.3. socio-political activism
(@themuseumofmodernart, 7 March 2019)*

the artwork is one of her "kinetic paintings". So far, the scene appears quite conventional, picturing something everyone would expect to find in a museum. The conventionality of the scene is however disrupted when the artist, reaching over the painting, turns it upside down. While the painting spins on its support on the wall, the artist stares at it, as to contemplate the effect of her act. Subsequently, she looks back at the camera. The whole scene is now connoted as something ground-breaking, as it breaks the "Look and do not touch" convention of art museums where paintings are supposed to hang stable on the walls. The focus on the disruptive character of the act is restated by the caption, which says: "Today, we celebrate the life of a woman who turned the art world upside down".

Then, bringing into focus the artistic developments caused by her work, it adds "#CaroleeSchneemann leaves behind a legacy of ground-breaking innovations in performance, film, and installations. Join us in remembering a true radical". With this, the whole post qualifies as a celebration of the artist's radical actions that yielded consistent advancements in the art world. Yet, the scope of Schneemann's actions is brought even further. Transcending the limits of the art world, the advancement she caused is framed, in all respects, as general societal development. Indeed, the caption reports the following Schneemann's quote: "... I had no precedent in being valued. Everything that came from a woman's experience was considered trivial. I wasn't sure if my work would shift that paradigm or not, but I had to try". With this, through her own voice, her work as a woman artist is framed in the wider context of women's rights activism. Her attempt to push boundaries in the art world is seen as a claim for greater representation and dignification of the female figure in society. Apparently, this claim is supported by the MoMA which, by giving visibility to Schneemann's advocacy and successes on its Instagram account, amplifies the reach of her work. The museum's online space is thus employed to voice the claims of a traditionally under-represented social group. Championing for the advancement of women's rights, the institution takes action to foster a societal development – thus shaping its Instagram account as an inclusive space of debate where important social issues can be tackled.

6.5 An inclusive and visitor-centred post: Repost with a multivocal communication mode (@museodel900 post, 16 March 2019)

This post (*Figure 6.4*), published on 16 March 2019 by @museodel900, was selected for the semiotic analysis as an example of how museum accounts can employ reposts in order to represent a museum visit through the eyes of the visitor. Reposts are indeed a way in which museums can put the visitor experience at the centre of their online activity. In particular, this repost exemplifies the meaning-making process undertaken by a visitor within the museum walls. By proposing it on Instagram, the museum legitimates the visitor's interpretation of the art object. Also, through the

museodel900



2,807 likes

museodel900 "Fra i Manzoni preferisco quello vero: Piero". Così, in pieni anni Zero, cantavano i Baustelle. Anche noi, oggi, ci sentiamo un po' romantici... E passeremo questo sabato a (ri)scoprire l'arte del Secolo Breve!

Ps. Come ogni sabato, anche stasera ti aspettiamo all'ombra di Piazza del Duomo fino alle 22.30! :)

-

ph/ig @supertrampmatteo

INFO link in bio.

-

#MuseodelNovecento #Milano #Italy #ModernArt #ArtMuseum #art #architecture #history #instagood #gallery #artist #painting #design #contemporaryart #exhibition #arte #sculpture #artwork #culture #nature #masterpieces #capolavori #sculpture

View all 14 comments

March 16 • See translation

*Figure 6.4. Repost
(@museodel900 post, 16 March 2019)*

adoption of a multivocal communication mode, the post induces other Instagram users to similarly develop personal interpretations of the artwork.

This repost, in particular, is focused on Piero Manzoni's artwork "Merde d'Artiste". The pic is shot from the side, with a rather high angle. In such a way, the attention is focused on a detail of this exemplar of "Merde d'Artiste", namely a dent on the tin can. Drawing on the already mentioned work of Budge (72), the peculiar angle and focus of the photography can be considered to represent the gaze of the visitor that posted the picture originally. It proposes his peculiar way of approaching the artwork, focusing on certain details and leaving out others; basically, it reproduces his way of making sense of the museum object. Therefore, by reposting such a picture, @museodel900 gives visibility to a meaning-making experience that, rather than common and standardized, is peculiar and individualized. Also, it accepts this meaning-making experience as valuable. @museodel900 indeed renounces to authoritatively provide *the* interpretation of the artwork. Rather than adopting in the caption a knowledge-telling attitude, the museum uses the caption to add another voice to the interpretation of Manzoni's work. The caption indeed quotes a line from a song of the Italian band Baustelle where the artist is praised: " 'Between all the Manzoni, I prefer the true one: Piero'. This is what, right in the middle of the 2000s, the Baustelle were singing'.¹⁹ The reference to the 2000s and to a popular band brings Manzoni's conceptual artwork into a semantic domain closer to Instagram users. In this way, it sparks the dialogue between this 1961 museum object and contemporaneity; at the same time, it makes it available for resignification on behalf of the users.

The fact that artworks are open for resignification is remarked also in the second part of the caption, which continues: "Today, we are feeling a little romantic too... And we will spend this Saturday (re)discovering the art of the Short Century". In this case, the *we* is referred to the humanized institution, defined romantic with a humanising move. The institution does not authoritatively impose an official interpretation of the art object, which is in fact not provided in the post. Rather, through the word *(re)discovering*, the museum's interpretative work is compared to the meaning-making process of the Baustelle and of the author of the repost's pic – establishing in such a way a truly multivocal environment that can prompt personal meaning-making.

In sum, through this repost the museum recognises the visitors' authority in creating their own museum experience and developing personal meaning-making. By representing the particular perspective of an actual visitor, this post adopts a visitor-centred view on the museum experience.

¹⁹ All the translations are mine.

6.6 A visitor-centred post: presenting the museum as an experience-centred institution (museum space) (@pirelli_hangarbicocca post, 14 February 2019 b)

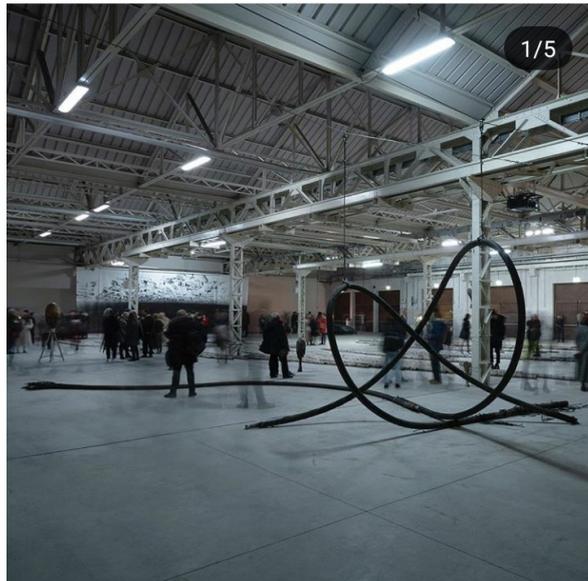
The post in *Figure 6.5*, here presented as example of visitor-centred post, was published on Instagram by @pirelli_hangarbicocca on 14 February 2019. By undertaking a semiotic analysis of this post, I intend to highlight what characteristics a post should have in order to shape the museum's image as a visitor-centred institution devoted to the creation of personalised museum experiences. Namely, this is primarily achieved by focusing the attention, in the visual representation of a museum visit, on the visitor's figure. Additionally, this can be reached by emphasizing in the visual representation the dimensions of space and time – two elements that, according to scholarly literature, play an important role in determining the visitor's museum experience.

In this case, the post's image shows a wide section of the expositive space. The space is highly characterised, with almost half of the image occupied by the distinguishing industrial ceiling of the hangar. In the space, different artworks can be seen, without the attention being focused on any of them. The caption of the post contextualizes the image: it is a pic from the opening of the solo show of Giorgio Andreotta Calò "Città di Milano". Towards the end, the hashtags #ArtToThePeople, #Milan and #ContemporaryArt offer insights into the intended meaning of the post. The viewer now knows that the image represents a moment from the opening of a contemporary art exhibition about (and in) Milan. Most importantly, the viewer knows that this opening brought contemporary art in contact with "the people" – a generalized entity, the average visitor in which everyone could identify. Indeed, wandering between the artworks, a relatively high number of visitors move in the museum space. The silhouettes of the picture should then be identified with "the people". In fact, neither those are further characterized; on the contrary, they are distanced from the eye of the viewer so that their individuality decreases while they become a prototype of visitor (see Jewitt and Van Leeuwen 96). Some of these visitors' silhouettes are even fading away, as the picture was apparently shot with a long exposure time. The Instagram user, most likely familiar with photographic conventions, realizes that the disappearing indicates that the visitor, once in that spot, moved somewhere. The fading bodies thus introduce the concept of visitors freely moving in the highly characterized museum space. In other words, it suggests the idea of a visitor in charge of its museum experience.

In sum, this picture connotes a museum visit as the intersection between the active visitor, the museum space and passing time. This can be interpreted through the lens of two texts, both equally important for the theorisation of the visitor-centred museum: Pine and Gilmore's *Welcome to the experience economy* and Falk and Dierking's *The Museum Experience*. The equivalent



pirelli_hangarbiccoca
Pirelli HangarBicocca



506 likes

pirelli_hangarbiccoca Shots from yesterday night opening of #CITTÀDIMILANO, the solo show by #GiorgioAndreottaCalò. Thanks for coming at #PirelliHangarBicocca, the exhibition will be on view until 21 July 2019! #ArtToThePeople #Milan #ContemporaryArt

Ph: Lorenzo Palmieri

View all 5 comments

February 14

Figure 6.5. *Experience-centred*
(@pirelli_hangarbiccoca post, 14 February 2019 b)

emphasis on exhibition space and the visitor can indeed be considered the visual representation of Pine and Gilmore's description of experience as the intersection between the staged event and the individual's state of mind (99). Also, the visual representation of passing time in the post should be read as a reference to the authors' specification that, with the emergence of the experience economy, guests started to value what providers of experiences reveal over a duration of time (99). Therefore, by stressing a specific element in the visual representation of a museum visit, this post shapes the image of the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca as an institution devoted to the creation of individualized experiences. The post can however be read also as a visual representation of Falk and Dierking's contextual model of learning (26). In this case, the visitor images would be a reference to the personal context, while the exhibition space would refer to the personal context. What goes underrepresented is the socio-cultural context – that is a reading of the museum experience through a needs-based lens. In other words, with this post the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca tries to shape its image as visitor-centred, but it does so drawing on an averaged concept of visitor. As a result, it does not take into account the real necessities of people visiting a museum.

In conclusion, what can be said is that this post successfully pictures the image of this museum as visitor centred institution, by focusing the attention on the visitor role and presenting a museum visit as a valuable experience. In such a way, the post distances the image of the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca from that of traditional authoritarian museums. While this raises the appeal of the institution in the eyes of Instagram users, it also represents a more democratic mode of communication – more in line with the horizontal communication modes usually adopted on Instagram. However, drawing on an averaged rather than real concept of visitors, the post does not fully harness Instagram's potential for an individualized communication with the account followers. It must be noticed that this post should be considered less genuinely visitor-centred than the previous *@museodelnovecento* repost. Indeed, as opposed to the previous repost, which starts from an empirical case of visitor meaning-making, this post works with an abstract and standardized model of visitors,. Also, even though it surely represents the institution as visitor-centred, this post does not specifically harness Instagram's potential for a one-to-one mode of communication. On the contrary, the previous repost draws on an individualized contribution, thus harnessing Instagram's democratising potential to a greater extent.

6.7 Conclusions

The chapter employed semiotic analysis to highlight what features a post should have in order to harness Instagram's democratising potential. It thus described what kinds of post a museum account can adopt if it wants to embrace a more democratic use of Instagram. As it has been highlighted, this can be reached through visitor-centred, participatory or inclusive posts. First of all, regarding Instagram's participatory potential, two practices emerged. The first practice was exemplified by the *@museoguggenheim* post in which users-institution interaction was fostered. Arguably, fostering interaction is a necessary step to harness Instagram's potential for a more democratic bi-directional communication mode between institutions and the community they serve. However, it is not sufficient to make museums' Instagram accounts truly participatory spaces. To be truly participatory, museums must be open to abandon their traditional role as teachers and propose on Instagram participatory activities whose outputs are not prescribed. This can be reached by providing, through a post, instructional scaffolding. The post published by *@themuseumofmodernart* on 21 March 2019 provided an example of instructional scaffolding. It showed how, drawing on particular features of digitized museum objects, museums can foster personal meaning-making and promote the exchange of ideas on Instagram. Clearly, to do so museum accounts must renounce to their traditional role as teachers to adopt instead that of facilitators, while proposing participatory activities which allows more possible outputs. Second, three kinds of post have been described as inclusive. The first kind (epitomized by the same *@themuseumofmodernart* post) is a post that harnesses Instagram's potential as a space for self-reflection on the museum activity. Replying to Vergo's claim for a more transparent way of doing museology, self-reflecting posts on Instagram become inclusive when they acknowledge that museums impose specific narratives over the reading of museum objects – and consequently foster and admit the value of alternative interpretation. Indeed, by doing so, they move a first step in establishing a multivocal environment for an inclusive debate. Another inclusive practice consists of harnessing Instagram's potential as a platform for socio-political activism. As highlighted by the semiotic analysis of the post published by *@themuseumofmodernart* on 7 March 2018, Instagram posts can be used to voice the perspectives of under-represented societal groups. In such a way, posts can spur societal development. Consequently, the museum account's potential as a space of inclusive debate regarding social issues is fulfilled. Arguably, this inclusivity of this debate can be enhanced by adopting a multivocal communication mode, described in the analysis of the *@museodel900* repost. Finally, as for visitor-centred posts, two current practices emerged as significant. The first significant (and much diffused) practice consists of creating an online image of the museum in which the institution is depicted as provider of personalized experiences. As the

@pirelli_hangarbicocca post illustrated, this is primarily achieved by giving predominance, in the visual representation of a museum visit, to the visitor, the physical space of the museum, and the notion of passing time – in other words, to those elements that connote a museum visit as a valuable experience for the individual visitor. It must be noticed that this kind of post effectively spreads the idea that the museum is an institution chiefly devoted to the service of its visitor, rather than to the preservation of its collection. In doing so, it distances the image of the museum from its traditional authoritative aura and brings it closer to the people. Under this aspect, this kind of post fully exploits the horizontal and informal communication mode typical of Instagram in order to connect the museum with its audience. Yet, it also draws on an abstract and averaged notion of the visitor, leaving out the real experience visitors have in the museum. For this reason, reposts, (*i.e.* the second visitor-centred practise) should be considered somehow more visitor-centred than the previous one. As shown by the *@museodel900* post, reposts represent museum visits through the eyes of an actual visitor. The experience represented is not averaged, but peculiar and individualized: it thus constitutes a genuine change of perspective from the institution's view to the visitor's view on museum visiting. Reposts can therefore be considered an important tool in the hand of museums to valorise visitors' meaning-making. Also, they are also an excellent way to harness Instagram's potential for a one-to-one communication mode.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

7.1 Introduction

Prompted by the lack of factual data bemoaned in scholarly theorisation, the thesis carried out an empirical study on how museums use Instagram. In particular, the thesis focused on the extent to which museums are harnessing Instagram's democratising potential in order to fulfil their democratic aspirations. In this chapter, I will sum up the main findings of the study, providing a recapitulatory answer to each of the three sub-questions which, in the previous chapters, were discussed more in detail. Subsequently, drawing on the results of the sub-questions, I will address my research question.

7.2 Sub-question 1. What are the main practices undertaken by the museums in the sample in their use of Instagram?

Through the content analysis of a purposeful sample of eight museums' primary Instagram accounts, the research provided hard evidence on how the museums in the sample use Instagram (*Table 5.1* and *Table 5.2*). Despite a certain variability in the strategies undertaken by each institution, a number of practices emerged as common for museum accounts.

Specifically, it appeared that museums consistently use Instagram as platform for the dissemination of digitized artworks and – to a lesser degree – visitors' reposts. Another quite common practice is the disclosure, to Instagram users, of “behind the scenes” activities usually reserved to museum professionals. Giving online visibility to the physical dimension of the museum is, paradoxically, a widespread concern too. Primarily emphasised through shots of the museum's expositive space and of its landmarks, the importance of the brick-and-mortar museum is stressed, on Instagram, also through posts featuring visitors that interact with the collection or take part in museum activities (*i.e.* events, workshops, outreach programmes).

For the most part, these practices come together with promotional activities. Indeed, many posts advertise events, many advertise temporary exhibitions, and many adopt humanising moves that enhance trust and commitment toward the institution. This said, educational activities informed by a traditional knowledge-telling communication mode are quite common too. On the other hand,

educational activities informed by a multivocal conception of art interpretation are less represented. Finally, Instagram is sporadically used as a platform for socio-political activism and self-reflection regarding past and present museum practices, as well as to carry out instructional scaffolding drawing on specific features of digitized museum objects.

7.3 Sub-question 2. How, when there is any, is the relation between each museum's democratic aspirations and its use of Instagram shaped?

Thanks to the content analysis, it emerged that each museum in the sample carries out different practices and pursues different purposes in its use of Instagram. Confronting these practices with the museum's characteristics and aspirations, it has been possible to outline the relation existing between the two.

It thus appeared that the British Museum and the Rijksmuseum, diffusing digitized museum objects accompanied by knowledge-telling captions, use Instagram as a platform to carry out traditional museum activities while reaching an audience wider than the physical museum's visitors. With this, the two institutions pursue their aspiration to extend engagement with their public and reach a worldwide audience for their educational activity.

The desire to reach a wider audience on Instagram can be found also on the account of the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao. Here, however, the possibilities for wider engagement offered by these social media is not used to propose museum educational activities to a wider public. Instead, the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao mainly uses Instagram for promotional purposes. By adopting crowdsourcing moves, the museum attempt to fulfil its aspiration to generate backing from society (Guggenheim Bilbao, *Mission, Vision, Value*).

Enhancing the museum's image appeared a top priority also for the Kunsthall, the Pirelli Hangar Bicocca and Pioneer Works. These three institutions, not provided with a permanent collection, express in their mission statement the desire to distance themselves from traditional museums through the adoption of innovative visitor-centred and/or participatory on-site practices. Consistently using their account to feature shots of visitors in the expositive space, museum events and museum workshops, the three manage to appear – in the eyes of Instagram users – as participatory and visitor-centred institutions specialised in the provision of personalized experiences.

A more innovative way to employ Instagram for visitor-centred practices was found by the Museo del Novecento. By gathering *reposts* of pics taken by visitors in the expositive space, the account of this institution is mainly conceived as a hub for collecting different representations of the museum experience. Moreover, its posts often provide a multivocal interpretation of the museum's collection. In sum, through reposts and multivocality this account suggests that there is no

normative way to experience art objects. Everyone is invited to provide his or her personal interpretation. Presumably, this is how the museum fulfils, on Instagram, its aspiration to foster an inclusive "dialogue with contemporary art" among "an ever wider audience" (Museo del Novecento, *The Museum*).

As for the MoMA, this is the institution in the sample that is tinkering with experimental democratising practices to the greatest extent. This experimentalism can be deemed representative of the museum's declared willingness to "create a dialogue between the established and the experimental" and to respond "to new ideas and initiatives with insight, imagination, and intelligence" (MoMA, *Mission Statement*). Considering then that these innovative practices consist of using Instagram posts as a platform for *socio-political activism* and *instructional scaffolding*, it could be assumed that the MoMA is seeking innovative ways to achieve on Instagram two of its primary missions: first, to establish an inclusive space for public debate regarding matters crucial to societal development; second, to share "the most thought-provoking modern and contemporary art" in a way accessible to a diverse public (MoMA, *About Us*).

7.4 Sub-question 3. What kinds of posts contribute to a more democratic use of Instagram on behalf of museums?

After identifying them through the content analysis, the thesis performed a semiotic analysis on five posts reputed representative of democratizing museum practices on Instagram. With this, I hopefully shed some light on the characteristics a post can have in order to contribute to a more democratic use of this social medium on behalf of museums. From my analysis, it appears that museums can adopt different strategies depending on whether they want to create visitor-centred, participatory, or inclusive posts.

A first kind of visitor-centred post is created by giving predominance, in the visual representation of the museum visit, to the visitor, the physical space of the museum, and the notion of passing time. A second kind of visitor-centred post is represented by the much-used reposts, which acknowledge museum experience as highly dependent on the visitor.

As for Instagram's participatory potential, this is harnessed, to a rudimentary extent, by posts fostering interaction between the institution and Instagram users. However, it is fulfilled only by those posts that, through instructional scaffolding, prompt meaningful contributions on behalf of the users.

Finally, two kinds of posts emerged as significant to contribute to a more inclusive use of Instagram: namely, posts informed by self-reflecting practices on the museum's activity and interests, and posts carrying out socio-political activism.

7.5 Research Question: To what extent and in what ways are art museums with declared democratic aspirations making use of the democratizing potential of Instagram institutional accounts?

The research proved that Instagram's potential for a democratisation of museum practice still has to bear fruit. So far, museums stepped foot on Instagram animated by two main intents, none of which is particularly democratic in the way it is pursued: first, with promotional purposes; second, to achieve educational objectives. On average, public institutions like the British Museum and the Rijksmuseum appeared most concerned with educational objectives. On the contrary, recently founded, non-public museums as the Pirelli Hangar Biccoca and Pioneer Works seem to consider promotional activities as a top priority – presumably, as a consequence of both their business model which limits public support and the desire to build up their status of established institutions. This said, both public and private museums demonstrated a similar behaviour on Instagram, matching (in different degrees) promotional activities with educational ones.

As for the promotional purposes, these can be found every time a post advertises a museum event or a temporary exhibition, as well as when the museum tries to enhance its appeal through humanising moves and images of iconic museum buildings. On one hand, pursuing promotional purposes on Instagram can be considered an inclusive practice to the extent that, by informing users regarding the museum's activity, the museum makes it accessible to an audience broader than traditional museum visitors. Yet, on the other hand, achieving a broader engagement through promotional moves must evolve into participation, if it wants to maintain its democratising charge. As pointed out by Iversen and Smith (127), pursuing engagement as an end in itself will reduce its democratising potential to corporate-like practices that consider social media users only as potential customers. Basing on my research, more often than not, this seems to be the case for the accounts in the sample.

As for the educational objectives that animate museums' activity on Instagram, these are largely pursued by pairing, in a single Instagram post, the image of a museum object with a knowledge-telling caption which provides a scholarly interpretation of the same. While pursuing educational objectives starting from the specific qualities of a museum object is not non-democratic *per se*, the knowledge-telling attitude usually adopted to do so certainly is. Indeed, a knowledge-telling caption is informed by a traditional object-centred model of curation which aims at making the artwork relevant in the framework of art history, and sees the user as a mere recipient of

information. With this, it perfectly exemplifies the slant of the nineteenth-century modernist museum which, with its collection-driven approach, was more interested in achieving high educational levels than fostering audience's interpretative practices, negotiating meanings and building confidence. To be truly democratic, museums on Instagram should employ digitized artworks within an object-as-a-prompt model of curation, where the museum object is made relevant for the audience. Characteristic of the post-modern democratic museum, this object-as-a-prompt model can foster personal meaning-making in ways that are motivating and satisfying, thus promoting public debate and contributing to the community's democratic life. On Instagram, however, this is rarely done.

Some virtuous exceptions were nevertheless registered in the content analysis, showing that museums are starting to experiment with non-conventional practices that allow them to fulfil Instagram's democratising potential to a greater extent. First of all, many museums (*e.g.* the MoMA and Pioneer Works) occasionally use artworks as a prompt for socio-political activism. By giving voice, through digitized artworks, to the perspectives of under-represented societal groups, these museums harness Instagram's potential as an inclusive space of debate regarding pressing social issues. Moreover, the inclusivity of Instagram as democratic space of debate is sometimes nurtured even further by presenting a multivocal interpretation of museum objects. Multivocality is indeed the necessary condition for inclusivity, and social media like Instagram are multivocal by nature. Recognising equal value to conflicting and non-scholarly views in relation to art, museum accounts are, every now and then, conforming to the multivocal nature of Instagram. In doing so, they are also laying the foundations for a tolerant and respectful debate regarding both art and social needs.

Second, the traditional unidirectional communication mode is sporadically abandoned by museum accounts in favour of an audience-driven approach which fosters a bi-directional exchange between Instagram users and the museum. Drawing on my research, an audience-driven approach on Instagram can take three main forms. The first form has been illustrated by the semiotic analysis of the *@museoguggenheim*'s post on the series *Sonrisas*. It consists of prompting the user's response to a post within a framework which allows only one correct answer endorsed by the museum's authority. In other words, without leaving their traditional authoritarian stance, museums often take advantage of Instagram's interactive potential to engage with users in a one-to-one exchange. Yet, simply interacting with users does not necessarily mean harnessing Instagram's participatory potential to its fullest. Instagram's participatory potential is fulfilled only in the rare cases in which museums promote, among Instagram users, personal meaning-making and content-sharing. In practice, this happens through instructional scaffolding, and represents the second form of audience-driven approach observed in the study. As *@themuseumofmodernart*'s post perfectly

exemplified, when providing instructional scaffolding, the museum account acts less as a teacher and more as a facilitator. Finally, the third way in which museum accounts can adopt an audience-driven approach is with reposts. With reposts (a practice undertaken by every museum in the sample but the MoMA), the role of the museum on Instagram becomes that of mediator between the users' personal digital narratives. In such a way, focusing on the visitor's experience rather than on the collection objects, museums can get rid of their traditional authoritative mode of communication to fully embrace the democratic nature of social media.

7.6 Conclusions

The thesis demonstrated that, on Instagram, the high promises of social media as powerful tools to achieve museums' democratic aspirations are not yet fulfilled. Apparently, the adoption of Instagram on behalf of museums did not cause the shift in power relations between the established authority and the public advocated by Meecham (33). The results thus contradicted those authors who, like Meecham (33), Giaccardi (1) and Fairclough (xvi), overstate the transformative power of social media for museum practices. On the other hand, Marastine *et al.* (82) and Parry's (23) proved correct, when saying that museums online are creating barriers to social participation by placing themselves as defenders of cultural canons. The thesis highlighted that museums, rather than harnessing Instagram's affordance for revolutionising museology in a democratising sense, tend to reproduce on Instagram the power relations existing in the brick-and-mortar institution and to perpetuate the same authoritarian practices. It must thus be concluded that currently, while scholarly literature puts much emphasis on the democratising potential of social media for museum practice, Instagram's potential for a more democratic museology is harnessed only to a very partial extent.

More specifically, scholarly literature identified social media's democratising potential in their affordance to put emphasis on the museum experience, to promote multivocality, to expand engagement and participation, and to diffuse digitized museum objects as prompts for personal stories and communal narratives (cfr. Paragraph 2.3.2). According to this study, none of these practices is a top priority for museums on Instagram. Yet, some of them are sporadically adopted by museum accounts. Namely, giving visibility to the museum experience by letting the visitor contribute something personal through reposts proved to be a quite common practice. Promoting multivocality appeared relatively common too. Also, museums are concerned with expanding engagement, may this be through humanising posts or through promotional moves. However, the research did not find any proof that museum accounts aim at extending engagement to an audience broader than traditional visitors. What is more, engagement on Instagram hardly ever evolves into

participation, reducing engagement to a corporate-like practice rather than a democratic one. In other words, museums did not appear ready to exploit the possibilities offered by Instagram for socially distributed curation. For this reason, museums neither appear ready to use museum objects on Instagram as prompts to build personal stories and communal narratives – preferring instead to re-establish their role as traditional source of knowledge.

Under this light, it is clear that the few democratising practices undertaken on Instagram mainly push in the direction of a more visitor-centred museology (*e.g.* through reposts) or in the direction of greater inclusivity in the museum discourse (*e.g.* through multivocality). Interestingly enough, the promotion of participatory activities (*e.g.* through instructional scaffolding) is less represented. Considering that social media, with their ability to connect people around content, are powerful tools especially for the aims of the participatory museum, the rarity of participatory activities certainly represents a missed opportunity. Implementing existing participatory practices and finding new ways to promote meaningful users' contribution should thus be considered the most pressing issue by institutions willing to harness Instagram's democratising potential to its fullest.

My hope is that the present research provided some hints to devise meaningful participatory activities on this social medium. More in general, I hope that my thesis sensitized social media managers regarding Wellington and Oliver's (588) recommendation to avoid an acritical digital imperative – and instead to assess, before colonising the platform, whether Instagram supports the institution's specific needs. Also, I hope that the thesis provided institutions with a framework to assess their presence on this social medium and to devise strategies to effectively pursue their democratic aims. And yet, the thesis is not meant to be of use only for museum professionals. Scholars will confidently be addressed by the results too. Raising awareness regarding current museum practices on Instagram, I hope to have contributed to filling the gap existing in the empirical research regarding museums' use of social media. It is about time that the academia stops confusing social media's democratising potential with their actual employment. If scholarly theorisation wants to remain true and profitable, it is imperative it starts to follow Russo (155) and Silberman and Purser (26) in recognising that social media activities are democratising only if they are designed with this purpose. The availability of more factual data regarding museums' use of Instagram will hopefully foster this transition.

Arguably, further research would benefit both scholarly theorisation and the effectiveness of museums' online activity. In particular, considering that a limitation of this study is that it bases its research on a small sample of museum accounts, a more extensive study involving more museum accounts could increase the findings' reliability. Another limitation of this study is that it does not

match the museums' activity on Instagram with the outputs it produces in terms of audience's response. Therefore, it would be extremely profitable to complement the present thesis with studies on how users react to each strategy adopted by museum accounts, as well as on their motivations for following museums on Instagram. With its wide-reach, one-to-one communication mode, Instagram can certainly do much to help museums spread wellbeing among different societal portions. The challenge for the very next years is to deepen our understanding of how this can be done in the most effective way – and, of course, to act accordingly. Because – it is clear by now – only a well-advised use of this popular social medium will help museums to fulfil their public mission in democratic societies.

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8. Appendix: Content Analysis Coding Sheet

8.1 Content analysis of the sample of posts for @britishmuseum

Post	Subject	Communication mode 1	Communication mode 2
03/04/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising permanent collection
31/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising permanent collection
29/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising permanent collection
25/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Humanising
22/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
20/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Socio-political activism
14/03/2019	Museum object	Fostering interaction	Socio-political activism
11/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Socio-political activism
08/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Socio-political activism
07/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
06/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
02/03/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
28/02/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
26/02/2019	Repost	Fostering interaction	Advertising permanent collection
24/02/2019	Museum space	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
22/02/2019	Museum space	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
21/02/2019	Museum space	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
17/02/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
14/02/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
12/02/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
09/02/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
07/02/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
05/02/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
30/01/2019	Museum object	Fostering interaction	Advertising temporary exhibition
27/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
25/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
20/01/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
18/01/2018	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
15/01/2019	Place making	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
10/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
09/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
08/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
06/01/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
05/01/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
04/01/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
27/12/2018	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
25/12/2018	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Humanising
22/12/2018	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction

16/12/2018	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
15/12/2018	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
14/12/2018	Museum object	Fostering interaction	Knowledge-telling
13/12/2018	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising permanent collection
12/12/2018	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
11/12/2018	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising permanent collection
10/12/2018	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
07/12/2018	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
05/12/2018	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Knowledge-telling
02/12/2018	Repost	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction
01/12/2018	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
30/11/2018	Repost	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction

8.2 Content analysis of the sample of posts for @rijksmuseum

Post	Subject	Communication mode 1	Communication mode 2
3/4/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
2/4/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Knowledge-telling
1/4/2019	Behind the scenes	Humanising	Others
31/3/2019	Repost	Humanising	Humanising
30/3/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Fostering interaction
29/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
28/3/2019	museum visitor	Advertising event	Multivocality
27/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
26/3/2019	Museum visitor	Humanising	Humanising
25/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
24/3/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Advertising temporary exhibition
23/3/2019	Repost	Humanising	Humanising
22/3/2019	Museum object	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction
21/3/2019	Museum object	Advertising permanent collection	Others
20/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
19/3/2019	Museum visitor	advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
18/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
17/3/2019	Workshop	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
16/3/2019	Repost	Humanising	Humanising
15/3/2019	Museum object	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction
14/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
13/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
12/3/2019	Museum visitor	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising permanent collection
11/3/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Knowledge-telling
10/3/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Knowledge-telling
9/3/2019	Repost	Humanising	Fostering interaction
8/3/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Socio-political activism
7/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
6/3/2019	Museum visitor	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
5/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
4/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
3/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
2/3/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
1/3/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
28/2/2019	Place making	Knowledge-telling	Instructional scaffolding
27/2/2019	Museum visitor	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
26/2/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
25/2/2019	Behind the scenes	Humanising	Humanising
24/2/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
23/2/2019	Behind the scenes	Advertising temporary exhibition	Fostering interaction
22/2/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Advertising event
21/2/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising permanent collection
20/2/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling

19/2/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Fostering interaction
18/2/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
17/2/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Humanising
16/2/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
15/2/2019	Workshop	Advertising event	Advertising temporary exhibition
14/2/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Humanising
13/2/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling

8.3 Content analysis of the sample of posts for @museoguggenheim

Post	Subject	Communication mode 1	Communication mode 2
04/04/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Humanising
03/04/2019 b	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
03/04/2019 a	Place making	Others	Others
02/04/2019 b	Place making	Humanising	Humanising
02/04/2019 a	Museum object	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction
01/04/2019 b	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
01/04/2019 a	Place making	Humanising	Humanising
30/03/2019	Place making	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
29/03/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Humanising
28/03/2019 a	Museum object	Instructional scaffolding	Instructional scaffolding
27/03/2019 b	Place making	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising event
27/03/2019 a	Museum visitor	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
26/03/2019 a	Place making	Humanising	Humanising
25/03/2019 a	Place making	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
24/03/2019 a	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
23/03/2019 a	Museum object	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction
22/03/2019 b	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/03/2019 a	Place making	Advertising event	Advertising temporary exhibition
21/03/2019 c	Museum space	Humanising	Humanising
21/03/2019 b	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
21/03/2019 a	Behind the scenes	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
20/03/2019 c	Place making	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
20/03/2019 b	Place making	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
20/03/2019 a	Museum object	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction
19/03/2019 a	Place making	Humanising	Humanising
18/03/2019 a	Others	Humanising	Others
15/03/2019 c	Place making	Humanising	Humanising
15/03/2019 d	Place making	Humanising	Humanising
15/03/2019 c	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
15/03/2019 b	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
15/03/2019 a	Outreach programme	Advertising event	Advertising event
14/03/2019 c	Museum visitor	Advertising event	Advertising event
14/03/2019 b	Outreach programme	Advertising event	Advertising event
14/03/2019 a	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
12/03/2019 b	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
12/03/2019 a	Museum object	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction
10/03/2019 b	Museum object	Fostering interaction	socio-political activism
10/03/2019 a	Museum visitor	Knowledge-telling	Socio-political activism
09/03/2019 d	Museum space	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
09/03/2019 c	Museum space	Multivocality	Multivocality
09/03/2019 b	Event	Others	Others
09/03/2019 a	Museum object	Multivocality	Multivocality
08/03/2019 c	Museum object	Multivocality	Fostering interaction

08/03/2019 b	Behind the scenes	Self-reflection	Self-reflection
08/03/2019 a	Behind the scenes	Self-reflection	Self-reflection
07/03/2019 c	Museum space	Self-reflection	Self-reflection
07/03/2019 b	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Socio-political activism
07/03/2019 a	Place making	Fostering interaction	Socio-political activism
06/03/2019 b	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Socio-political activism
06/03/2019 a	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling

8.4 Content analysis of the sample of posts for @kunsthall

Post	Subject	Communication mode 1	Communication mode 2
04/04/2019	Museum visitor	Humanising	Humanising
02/04/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
01/04/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
29/03/2019 b	Museum space	Advertising event	Advertising event
29/03/2019 a	Others	Advertising event	Advertising event
27/03/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
26/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
24/03/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Advertising temporary exhibition
23/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Knowledge-telling
18/03/2019	Museum space	Advertising event	Advertising event
17/03/2019	Workshop	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising event
15/03/2019	Museum space	Advertising exhibition	Advertising exhibition
13/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
08/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
07/03/2019	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
04/03/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
02/03/2019	Repost	Advertising event	Advertising event
28/02/2019	Museum visitor	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
26/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
25/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
24/02/2019	Museum space	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/02/2019	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
19/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
15/02/2019	Workshop	Advertising event	Fostering interaction
14/02/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Advertising temporary exhibition
13/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
08/02/2019 b	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
08/02/2019 a	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
07 /02/2019 b	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
07/02/2019 a	Workshop	Advertising event	Advertising temporary exhibition
04/02/2019	Museum visitor	Advertising event	Advertising temporary exhibition
02/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
31/01/2019	Repost	Advertising event	Advertising event
30/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
28/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
25/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
21/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
20/01/2019	Museum visitor	Advertising temporary exhibition	Fostering interaction
18/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
17/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
16/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Humanising
12/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
11/01/2019 b	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition

11/01 /2019 a	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
09/01/2018	Behind the scenes	Others	Others
05/01/2019	Museum visitor	Advertising temporary exhibition	Multivocality
04/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
03/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
02/01/2019	Workshop	Advertising event	Advertising event
31/12/2018	Place making	Humanising	Humanising

8.5 Content analysis of the sample of posts for @pioneerworks

Post	Subject	Communication mode 1	Communication mode 2
04/04/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
03/04/2019	Event	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
02/04/2019	Museum space	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
29/03/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
27/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Knowledge-telling
26/03/2019	Workshop	Multivocality	Advertising event
25/03/2019	Museum visitor	Self-reflection	Socio-political activism
23/03/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
22/03/2019	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Socio-political activism
21/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Knowledge-telling
20/03/2019	Museum space	Advertising event	Socio-political activism
19/03/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
15/03/2019	Outreach programme	Advertising event	Socio-political activism
14/03/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
11/03/2019 b	Workshop	Advertising event	Advertising event
11/03/2019 a	Workshop	Advertising event	Advertising event
05/03/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
02/03/2019	Workshop	Advertising event	Multivocality
27/02/2019	Museum space	Advertising event	Advertising temporary exhibition
26/02/2019	Outreach programme	Self-reflection	Self-reflection
24/02/2019	Event	Advertising event	Socio-political activism
22/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Socio-political activism
19/02/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
17/02/2019	Outreach programme	Advertising event	Advertising event
15/02/2019	Behind the scenes	Self-reflection	Self-reflection
14/02/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
12/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Knowledge-telling
11/02/2019	Workshop	Advertising event	Advertising event
06/02/2019	Outreach programme	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction
05/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
04/02/2019	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
01/02/2019	Outreach programme	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
31/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
29/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
27/01/2019	Other	Advertising event	Advertising event
24/01/2019	Repost	Advertising event	Advertising event
23/01/2019 b	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising event
23/01/2019 a	Outreach programme	Self-reflection	Self-reflection
21/01/2019	Event	Multivocality	Multivocality
16/01/2019	Behind the scenes	Self-reflection	Self-reflection
14/01/2019	Event	Advertising event	Socio-political activism
11/01/2019	Outreach programme	Fostering interaction	Fostering interaction
10/01/2019	Outreach programme	Others	Others

09/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
08/01/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
02/01/2019	Museum space	Humanising	Humanising
31/12/2018	Outreach programme	Self-reflection	Self-reflection
30/12/2018	Outreach programme	Advertising event	Advertising event
28/12/2018	Museum space	Others	Others
26/12/2018	Outreach programme	Advertising event	Advertising event

8.6 Content analysis of the sample of posts for @pirelli_hangarbicocca

Post	Subject	Communication mode 1	Communication mode 2
02/04/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
01/04/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
31/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
30/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
29/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
29/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Advertising event	Advertising event
28/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
27/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
27/03/2019	Museum space	Advertising event	Advertising event
26/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
25/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Advertising event	Knowledge-telling
20/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
19/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Self-reflection
18/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
14/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Advertising event	Advertising event
13/03/2019	Museum visitor	Advertising temporary exhibition	Others
11/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
08/03/2019	Museum object	Socio-political activism	Socio-political activism
07/03/2019 b	Museum visitor	Advertising temporary exhibition	Others
07/03/2019 a	Repost	Self-reflection	Fostering interaction
06/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Self-reflection	Advertising temporary exhibition
05/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
26/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
24/02/2019	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/02/2019 f	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/02/2019 e	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/02/2019 d	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/02/2019 c	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/02/2019 b	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/02/2019 b	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/02/2019 a	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising temporary exhibition
21/02/2019 b	Museum space	knowledge-telling	Advertising event
21/02/2019 a	Behind the scenes	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
19/02/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
15/02/2019	Museum visitor	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
14/02/2019 b	Event	Advertising event	Advertising temporary exhibition
14/02/2019 a	Workshop	Advertising event	Advertising temporary exhibition
13/02/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
12/02/2019 b	Museum space	Advertising event	Advertising event
12/02/2019 a	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
11/02/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
08/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
07/02/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event

06/02/2019	Event	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
05/02/2019 b	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
05/02/2019 a	Museum space	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
04/02/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Humanising
01/02/2019	Museum space	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
31/01/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising event
30/01/2019	Museum space	Advertising event	Advertising temporary exhibition

8.7 Content analysis of the sample of posts for @museodel900

Post	Subject	Communication mode 1	Communication mode 2
04/04/2019 b	Workshop	Advertising event	Advertising event
04/04/2019 a	Behind the scenes	Humanising	Advertising permanent collection
03/04/2019	Repost	Multivocality	Multivocality
02/04/2019	Others	Multivocality	Multivocality
01/04/2019 b	Workshop	Advertising temporary exhibition	Multivocality
01/04/2019 a	Museum object	Humanising	Advertising permanent collection
31/03/2019	Repost	Humanising	Advertising permanent collection
30/03/2019	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
29/03/2019	Repost	Humanising	Advertising permanent collection
28/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Multivocality
27/03/2019	Repost	Multivocality	Multivocality
26/03/2019	Others	Multivocality	Multivocality
25/03/2019	Museum object	Humanising	Advertising permanent collection
24/03/2019	Repost	Humanising	Advertising permanent collection
23/03/2019	Repost	Humanising	Humanising
22/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
21/03/2019	Museum space	Self-reflection	Advertising permanent collection
20/03/2019	Repost	Multivocality	Multivocality
19/03/2019 a	Behind the scenes	Advertising temporary exhibition	Multivocality
19/03/2019 a	Others	Multivocality	Multivocality
18/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising permanent collection	Humanising
17/03/2019 b	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
17/03/2019 a	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Humanising
16/03/2019	Repost	Multivocality	Humanising
15/03/2019	Repost	Humanising	Humanising
14/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Knowledge-telling	Multivocality
13/03/2019	Repost	Multivocality	Multivocality
12/03/2019	Others	Multivocality	Multivocality
11/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising permanent collection	Humanising
10/03/2019	Repost	Humanising	Humanising
09/03/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Humanising
08/03/2019	Repost	Humanising	Humanising
07/03/2019	Museum space	Advertising temporary exhibition	Self-reflection
06/03/2019	Repost	Multivocality	Multivocality
05/03/2019	Others	Multivocality	Multivocality
04/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising permanent collection	Humanising
03/03/2019	Repost	Advertising permanent collection	Humanising
02/03/2019	Repost	Advertising permanent collection	Humanising
01/03/2019	Repost	Advertising permanent collection	Advertising event
28/02/2019	Repost	Multivocality	Knowledge-telling
27/02/2019	Repost	Multivocality	Multivocality
26/02/2019	Repost	Knowledge-telling	Humanising
25/02/2019	Repost	Humanising	Humanising

24/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Humanising
23/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising event
22/02/2019	Repost	Humanising	Humanising
21/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising event
20/02/2019	Repost	Multivocality	Multivocality
19/02/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising event
18/02/2019	Repost	Advertising temporary exhibition	Humanising

8.8 Content analysis of the sample of posts for @themuseumofmodernart

Post	Subject	Communication mode 1	Communication mode 2
04/04/2019	Museum object	Multivocality	Multivocality
03/04/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
02/04/2019	Museum visitor	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
02/04/2019	Others	Others	Others
01/04/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
01/04/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
29/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Socio-political activism
28/03/2019 c	Outreach programme	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
28/03/2019 b	Museum object	Multivocality	Instructional scaffolding
28/03/2019 a	Museum object	Multivocality	Knowledge-telling
27/03/2019 b	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Socio-political activism
27/03/2019 a	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
26/03/2019 b	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
26/03/2019 a	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
25/03/2019	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/03/2019 b	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
22/03/2019 a	Outreach programme	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
21/03/2019 c	Museum visitor	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
21/03/2019 b	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
21/03/2019 a	Museum space	Self-reflection	Instructional scaffolding
20/03/2019	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
19/03/2019 b	Museum object	Humanising	Socio-political activism
19/03/2019 a	Museum object	Multivocality	Knowledge-telling
18/03/2019 b	Museum visitor	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
19/03/2019 a	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
17/03/2019	Museum object	Self-reflection	Advertising temporary exhibition
16/03/2019 b	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
16/03/2019 a	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
14/03/2019 c	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Socio-political activism
14/03/2019 b	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
15/03/2019 a	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
14/03/2019 b	Museum object	Instructional scaffolding	Instructional scaffolding
14/03/2019 a	Event	Advertising event	Advertising event
12/03/2019	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Socio-political activism
12/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
11/03/2019 b	Museum object	Multivocality	Socio-political activism
11/03/2019 a	Museum object	Self-reflection	Self-reflection
08/03/2019 b	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
08/03/2019 a	Museum visitor	Multivocality	Socio-political activism
07/03/2019	Behind the scenes	Multivocality	Socio-political activism
06/03/2019 b	Museum object	Advertising temporary exhibition	Knowledge-telling
07/03/2019 a	Outreach programme	Advertising temporary exhibition	Advertising temporary exhibition
06/03/2019	Museum object	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition

05/03/2019	Museum visitor	Multivocality	Advertising temporary exhibition
04/03/2019	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
01/03/2019 c	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
01/03/2019 b	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Advertising temporary exhibition
01/03/2019 a	Museum object	Knowledge-telling	Knowledge-telling
28/02/2019 b	Museum object	Advertising event	Advertising event
28/02/2019 a	Others	Others	Others