Italian flagship museums: web presence and mobile-friendliness

Luisa Mich[a], and
Roberto Peretta[b]

[a] Department of Industrial Engineering
University of Trento, Italy
luisa.mich@unitn.it

[b] Roberto Peretta
Department of Foreign Languages, Literatures and Cultures
University of Bergamo, Italy
roberto.peretta@unibg.it

Abstract

Many destinations rely on their flagship museums as tourist attractions, and Italy, which boasts gems like the Uffizi or the Vatican Museums, can count on some of the world's most outstanding art collections. The Web, however, does not appear to be fully exploited under this respect. This paper investigates the web presence of some of the most visited art museums in Italy. To this end, a framework to map the online spaces – official and semi-official websites of both the Web 1.0 and the Web 2.0 types – is applied. Quality of the museums' B2C websites is also assessed. The study includes an evaluation of the web reputation of the museums and of their websites' mobile-friendliness. The method and the main results of a large analysis are reported according to this multi-steps approach, highlighting some of the most critical issues.

Keywords: web presence, web reputation, mobile-friendly, museum, Italy

1 Introduction

Cultural tourism plays an important role in the economy of many destinations (Stabler et al. 2010). This is even more important for Italy which is often stereotypically represented as an open-air museum. Italy has 3,847 museums, 11.9% of which are art museums (ISTAT 2013). Italian museums' visitors were 103,888,764 in 2011, around 41.2% of which paying visits to art museums. On an international level, no Italian museum is top as far the number of visitors is concerned. The best in the *Bel Paese* – though not in Italy administratively speaking – are the Vatican Museums, ranking eighth in the world with 5.4 million visitors per year (www.theartnewspaper.com [August 20, 2015]). Most of the Italian museum heritage is public property (63.8%) and belong to a "polo museale", an aggregate of different museums: the Uffizi, the Pitti and the Bargello in Florence are an example (other data on the Italian museums, their regulations and the transformations their rule is undergoing can be found at the website of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo (MIBACT), www.beniculturali.it/mibac [August 20, 2015]).

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." (http://icom.museum [August 20, 2015]). The Web

provides museums with a variety of communication opportunities, from traditional, officially managed business-to-consumer (B2C) websites to social networking platforms. Planning a web presence strategy – that is: which official websites design and run; on which social networks manage official profiles – is a challenge that museums had to address since the inception of the Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005).

The concept itself is an interdisciplinary and fuzzy one, investigated under different names: communication plan, digital communication, digital strategy, online presence, etc. The importance of this sort of strategy for museums is underlined in works like (Morato 2014), Durbin (2011); other related works can be found in (Mich & Peretta 2015). This paper focuses on some of the most visited art museums in Italy to investigate their web presence. In this paper the web presence strategy is modelled including all the websites a museum is investing on to support its activities (Mich 2010), according to an information system approach (Laudon & Laudon 1999). This view includes also web reputation monitoring as an activity related to CRM (Customer relationship management) and mobile friendliness, as a challenge all web business models have to address. The goal was to identify strengths and weaknesses, to suggest how to intervene to overcome critical issues and to identify best practices a museum could adopt to improve its web presence.

2 The Study

2.1 The selected museums

This study investigates the web presence of eight of the most visited Italian art museums. The museums (Table 1) were selected among art museums with more than 100,000 visitors per year (www.statistica.beniculturali.it [August 20, 2015]), to include museums in the most visited Italian towns and with different ownership structures. Four of these museums, namely the Uffizi, the Galleria Borghese, Brera and Capodimonte, are autonomously managed (www.beniculturali.it/mibac [August 20, 2015]). Palazzo Strozzi in Florence is a private institution; the Doge's Palace in Venice belongs to a city foundation, Fondazione Musei Civici di Venezia (MUVE).

Table 1. Italian flagship museums

Museum	B2C official website	#Visitors 2013
Musei vaticani (Rome)	mv.vatican.va	5,459,000
Galleria degli Uffizi (Florence)	uffizi.firenze.it	1,875,785
Palazzo Ducale (Venice)	palazzoducale.visitmuve.it	1,307,230
Palazzo Strozzi (Florence)	palazzostrozzi.org	934,563
Castel Sant'Angelo (Rome)	castelsantangelo.beniculturali.it	965,931
Galleria Borghese (Rome)	galleriaborghese.beniculturali.it	498,477
Pinacoteca di Brera (Milan)	brera.beniculturali.it	249,579
Museo di Capodimonte (Naples)	polomusealenapoli.beniculturali.it/museo_cp/museo_cp.html	116,627

2.2 Analysis of the web presence and of the mobile friendliness

Studying the web presence of the selected museum has included four main steps, applying suitable models and tools for each of them.

Mapping museum's official and semi-official websites. A framework defined in (Mich 2010) was implemented for each museum. The framework considers official and semi-official websites – generically named spaces – the latter being the museum's accounts on social networking or document sharing platforms. A map of the web presence represents all these spaces as nodes of a graph, and the links among the spaces as the graph's edges. The map is complemented by a matrix, where information on the spaces is collected: their URL, the number of the spaces' members (how many followers on Twitter, for example), the last update by the museum staff (their most recent post on Facebook, for example). Table 2 reports the results for the chosen Italian museums. Data gathered in the web presence matrixes highlighted that not all of them have been kept active. Weak spaces, i.e. with very few members and rarely updated, are marked with an asterisk. Facebook and Twitter are used by most of the museums, the Facebook profiles proving more lively. YouTube performs well only when official, professional material is uploaded regularly. For pictures, uncertainties are evident among Flickr, Instagram and Pinterestpost. The Facebook profile of the Vatican Museums, despite being its only social profile, is very popular. Similar results are gained by Capodimonte and Palazzo Strozzi and, to a lower extent, the Palazzo Ducale. The prevailing model in the web presence maps is a graph made of bidirectional links, that suggests a not planned strategy. One of the few exceptions is the unidirectional link from the Facebook page of the Vatican Museums to its website – which is correct if tickets can be bought in advance and visits booked from there. Opportunely, infrequently updated spaces (usually Google+) tend not to be linked from elsewhere at all.

Table 2. Online spaces in the web presence strategies of Italian flagship museums

Museum	f	🐦	▶	g+	••	📷	P	⚑	t
Musei vaticani	x								
Galleria degli Uffizi	x	x	x						
Palazzo Ducale	x	x	x	x					
Palazzo Strozzi	x	x	x	*	x	x		x	
Castel Sant'Angelo	*								
Galleria Borghese	*	*		*		x			
Pinacoteca di Brera	x	x	x				*		
Museo di Capodimonte	x	*		*	x		*		*

Evaluating the quality of the B2C website. The quality evaluation was based on a the 7Loci meta-model, that allows to define evaluation models according to the goals and the requirements of all the stakeholders (Mich et al. 2003). For each of the museums, both a table listing the strengths and weaknesses under the seven Loci of the meta-model was produced, and a standard table was applied (Mich 2010) assigning to the first six loci (identity, content, services, identification, management, usability; feasibility requires a server side access) a score from 0 to 3 (Table 3). State museums score worse than private or religious ones as far as services and identification are concerned. Content is acceptable nearly everywhere, and online purchase of tickets is a frequently available function (only Capodimonte still lacks it); identity and usability are often insufficient, particularly as far as the graphic layout and languages are concerned. Brera provides only an Italian edition, and the Vatican

Museums' official website in Italian, www.museivaticani.va, keeps a splash homepage, where only a choice among languages is offered. Identity problems are there for museums that belong to a "polo museale" – the case of the Uffizi, hardly identifiable among Florence public museums – and when, as for the Castel Sant'Angelo, it is difficult to distinguish the official website from its private namesake http:// castelsantangelo.com/.

Table 3. Quality of the official websites of Italian flagship museums: average scores

Museum	Identity	Content	Services	Identification	Management	Usability
Musei vaticani	2.00	3.00	3.00	2.25	2.00	2.50
Galleria degli Uffizi	1.75	2.75	2.50	1.50	2.75	2.00
Palazzo Ducale	1.75	3.00	2.00	2.00	2.25	2.75
Palazzo Strozzi	1.75	2.75	3.00	2.25	2.75	2.00
Castel Sant'Angelo	1.25	2.25	2.25	1.25	2.25	2.00
Galleria Borghese	1.75	2.50	2.50	1.00	2.25	2.50
Pinacoteca di Brera	2.50	2.50	2.25	1.75	2.75	2.00
Capodimonte	1.00	2.25	0.50	1.25	1.75	1.50

Testing the official websites' mobile-friendliness. As websites are increasingly visited through tablets and smartphones (http://marketingland.com [August 21, 2015]), smartinsights.com [August 21, 2015]) the Italian flagship museums websites' mobile-friendliness was also tested. As customary, the test was performed on the home page. Table 4 reports the values obtained from the mobile-friendly Google webmasters' tool (August 2015).

Table 4. Mobile-friendliness of the official websites of Italian flagship museums

Museum	Mobile Friendly	Text too small to read	Links too close together	Mobile viewport not set	Content wider than screen
Musei vaticani		x	x	x	
Galleria degli Uffizi		x	x	x	x
Palazzo Ducale	x				
Palazzo Strozzi	x				
Castel Sant'Angelo		x	x	x	
Galleria Borghese		x	x	x	
Pinacoteca di Brera		x	x	x	
Museo di Capodimonte		x	x	x	x

Though no State museum, among the considered ones, appears to have a mobile-friendly official website, a new responsive official website began being made available for Capodimonte in Italian under a different domain name: www.museocapodimonte.beniculturali.it.

Analyzing the web reputation of the Italian flagship museums. To perform this task some free tools were chosen: Socialmention (www.socialmention.com), Blacktweet (backtweets.com), and Icerocket (www.icerocket.com). The museums' names were searched between May and August 2015, both in Italian and in English.

The main target was gathering information on how visitors have perceived the museums, and which weaknesses, if any, they've come across, with the ultimate goal to provide the museums' staff members with advice on how to improve both the museums' digital presence and their analogue performances. Most mentions, being simply piece of news or pictures, express a neutral sentiment. Positive comments usually praise the collections' quality or the town's appeal. Critics frequently point at long queues, crowded or closed rooms, lack of lockers, insufficient promotion – i.e. factors that digital communication can help managing, if not correcting. These results confirm those obtained by a study run in 2014 (Sociometrica, 2014).

Conclusion

According to the study, the web presence of eight of the most visited Italian art museums can be improved in many ways. The adopted approach allows to identify, analyse and monitor online spaces of different nature and on a regular basis. Table 1 to 4 summarise the most relevant results. More details are given in (Mich & Peretta, 2015).

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