



The role of social media messages in cultural communication: The case study of an Instagram reel

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the analysis of a reel post uploaded on the Basil & Elise (B&E) Goulandris Foundation's Instagram account on the occasion of the exhibition "Nouveau Réalisme", presented at the homonymous museum in 2023. It aims to investigate the role and function of communication messages in the digital environment of the post-COVID-19 era and especially in that of social media (SM). The article addresses various parameters related to the wider context of the message production, its role in the Foundation's communication strategy as well as the influence of the pandemic crisis and its effects on the planning of this strategy as regards the utilization of SM. Moreover, an interpretation of the communication message based on the decoding of its symbolic meaning is proposed through the use of the visual and sociological communication model of Barthes. Finally, the message's reception by the public is detected. The complexity and polysemy of communicative act, which is revealed through the analysis, indicate both the need for a combined interdisciplinary approach and the crucial importance of considering its variables (the message itself as well as its production and reception contexts) in a holistic manner.

Keywords: social media, B&E Goulandris Foundation, Roland Barthes, holistic message analysis

INTRODUCTION

With the cultural experience visibly recreated and continuously transformed through new, rapidly developing technologies, cultural institutions have no choice but to constantly modernize their communication strategy by adopting new ways and methods of communication. As the relationship between cultural institutions and their public is now being built in a hybrid world that, in addition to the physical, also includes the digital ecosystem, more and more emphasis is placed on the planning and development of diverse online communication activities.

The rise of social media (SM) and its utilization by cultural organizations tend to turn communication into a two-way process of reciprocal interaction, focusing not just on art and culture but on art and culture in relation to visitor's needs, preferences and expectations. Such communication requires an investment of time and ideas on the part of cultural administrators to create a distinct digital profile for the organization, but it guarantees the attraction of its public's attention, possibly its participation and ideally the cultivation of a reliable, stable and long-lasting relationship with it.

Allying with the purely participatory nature of consumption in the postmodern culture (Beer et al., 2010), the encouragement of the recipients' feedback to the message enables a more personalized "one-to-one" communication, establishing something like a personal dialogue in which everyone becomes simultaneously

a transmitter and a receiver. Thus, through a modern, user-friendly and interactive platform, message can be highly attractive and influential.

In this context, communication analysts tend to consider that as the degree of communication interactivity increases, so do the chances of developing behaviors such as returning to the website, buying products from it or recommending it to others (Hill et al., 2018; McMillan, 2002). Thanks to new technology and the types of communication it enables, contemporary cultural organizations have the possibility and the chance to contribute to the cultivation of the democratization of knowledge, a sense of community as well as participatory culture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the discussion on the analysis of the communication message, which has intensified during the last two decades, evident is the search for the theoretical framework that governs the relationship between form, content and transmission channel as well as the need for a holistic interdisciplinary approach through the analysis of each component of the communicative act (Esmel-Pamies, 2009; Psylla, 2004). The need to see the communicative message as a field of social and political processes (Barthes, 1979, 2019; Smith, 2006), inevitably leads us to semiotics and its various manifestations, which proves to be a valuable tool for a methodical and systematic analysis of the message, used by a large number of researchers (Koloka & Papadaki, 2023; Papadaki, 2022; Sifaki, 2015, Sifaki & Papadopoulou, 2015).

Researchers indicate the merging of the individual components of the message into a solid structure, to make it more efficient (Kelly, 2015; Littlejohn & Foss, 2012). Communication effectiveness is also seen as a strategic combination of different techniques and media, relation marketing and branding (Hill et al., 2018; Pusa & Uusitalo, 2014; Shen & Bigsby, 2013; Wasko, 2001). Overall, there is a consensus among investigators regarding the recognition of the need to develop a clear strategic plan, which will utilize the potential of social networks (Caerols-Mateo et al., 2017; Chung et al., 2014; Effing & Spill, 2016; Gu, 2012; Lazeretti et al., 2015; Padilla-Meléndez & del Águila-Obra, 2013; Roumeliotou, 2009).

In this context, the imperative to include viral marketing through SM in the strategy planning is highlighted by many authors (Brown et al., 2007; Hausmann, 2012; Miller & Lammas, 2010; Spiliopoulou et al., 2014). Similarly, others examine the possibilities of SM utilization through the creation of social networks of museum visitors (Vassilakis et al., 2017) or emphasize the goal of strengthening the social web of communities, so that the museum experience becomes part of an interactive process of connection (Behera & Gangadhar, 2022).

In this sense, noteworthy is the recognition of contextual information (comments, hashtags, etc.) in digital posts as elements that link us back to the narrative tradition of human interaction and as social component of value in culture (Budge & Burness, 2018; Burgess & Green, 2009). A key issue in many studies is also the reveal that the incorporation of SM into a consumer-oriented communication strategy in cultural organizations is related to the gradual consolidation of good practices that serve as a model in the direction of activating visitors engagement (Garibaldi, 2015; Kyprianidou-Papadaki, 2018; Papadaki, 2022; Papaioannou & Sfyridou, 2020, 2021).

The emphasis on the visitor-centered approach, which is a common denominator in all the above studies, raises the issue of recipient-centered reception studies. The latter are recognized by scholars who analyze them as an integral part of media research and decisive factor for the perception of meaning-making processes, underlining the understanding, evaluation and response differences among recipients (Austin, 2009; Corner, 2000; Finne & Grönroos, 2009).

The shocking experience of the pandemic with the problems triggered by its effects on museums was decisive for the emphasis that research places today on the message's reception. Researchers identified opportunities for the transformation of the museum role in society as well as for innovation, transparency and interactivity of communication (Corona, 2021; Crooke, 2020; Kahn, 2020), envisioning new types of museums based on a business model in which visitors will be seen more as internal rather than external stakeholders (Choi & Kim, 2021).

METHODOLOGY

The examination of the topic was based on literature review, content analysis and case study methods. The analysis moved along three main axes: the frame of message production, the interpretation of its content and the audience reception frame.

Regarding the first axis, we studied the main components of the message as determined by traditional analysis (source and channel of transmission, structure, form) and analyzed the morphological features of its visual design, while statistical and bibliographic data were used to verify the role, potential and utilization of SM, especially Instagram.

The content analysis was expanded through the examination of the historical and social environment, where the digital message was produced, both the wider (global crisis after the burst of the COVID-19 pandemic) and the local-internal one (the museum communication strategy as traced through the monitoring of its promotional campaign for a specific exhibition).

Regarding the interpretation of the message content, the methodology was based on the careful observation and the utilization of the semiotic analysis of Barthes (1979), with the aim of penetrating the semiotic and ideological codes used for the meaning-making of the message.

Specifically, in the theoretical model he introduced in the mid-1950s, Barthes (1979) started from the ideas of the French linguist De Saussure in order to demonstrate, through the use of systems of symbols, codes and meanings that encapsulate values and ideas of Western culture, the way in which society produces stereotypes and then consumes them as intrinsic or universal natural meanings.

The model, through which he aimed to activate social criticism and awareness of our prejudices, applied Barthes (1979) to examples of everyday, popular culture of French society of his time, while immersing himself in the photographic message, he detected and demarcated the individual messages it transmits: denoted-literal, connoted-symbolic, iconic and linguistic ones, which guide the reader as to the signified of the image (Barthes, 2019).

In the third axis of analysis, the participation of the message recipients was analyzed through the reactions and behaviors it activated. Users' "likes", "views" and "comments" were counted, while posts of exhibition's material uploaded by visitors and reposted by the Basil & Elise (B&E) Goulandris Foundation were examined from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. For this reason, we studied the profiles of such messages' publishers and examined the number of their followers, to have a clue about how influential their messages may have been.

The Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation's Reel on Instagram: Parameters & Variables of Its Production Context

Posted on Instagram on January 26, 2023, the audio-visual promotional message for "Nouveau Réalisme" exhibition presented the first major exhibition that took place at the B&E Goulandris museum in Athens from January 11 to April 9, 2023 (IBEG, 2023). Developed in the form of a typical Instagram "diptych", the post consisted of a "reel" (a short video including stitching of still and moving photos) running on the left and a bilingual text constantly visible on the right (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn4AjgFqNnp/>).

The latter conveyed to the reader information about the exhibition (content, title, duration, organizer's identity) in Greek and English as well as hashtags for further reading (**Figure 1**: 24 photos).

The reel reproduced the sequence of 12 still and four moving pictures of exhibited artworks and two black-and-white archival photographs depicting members of Nouveau Réalisme in a relaxed and intimate yet slightly subversive atmosphere. In the audio message of the reel a narrating female voice was inviting the potential visitor to the exhibition with a background music played by double bass and drums.

The transmission source of the post is B&E Goulandris Foundation, a non-profit and self-financing organization, responsible for the operation of the homonymous museum in Athens. The latter, inaugurated at the end of 2019 and housing the Goulandris collection of Modernist artworks, is the main organizer of the exhibition promoted by the digital message under examination.

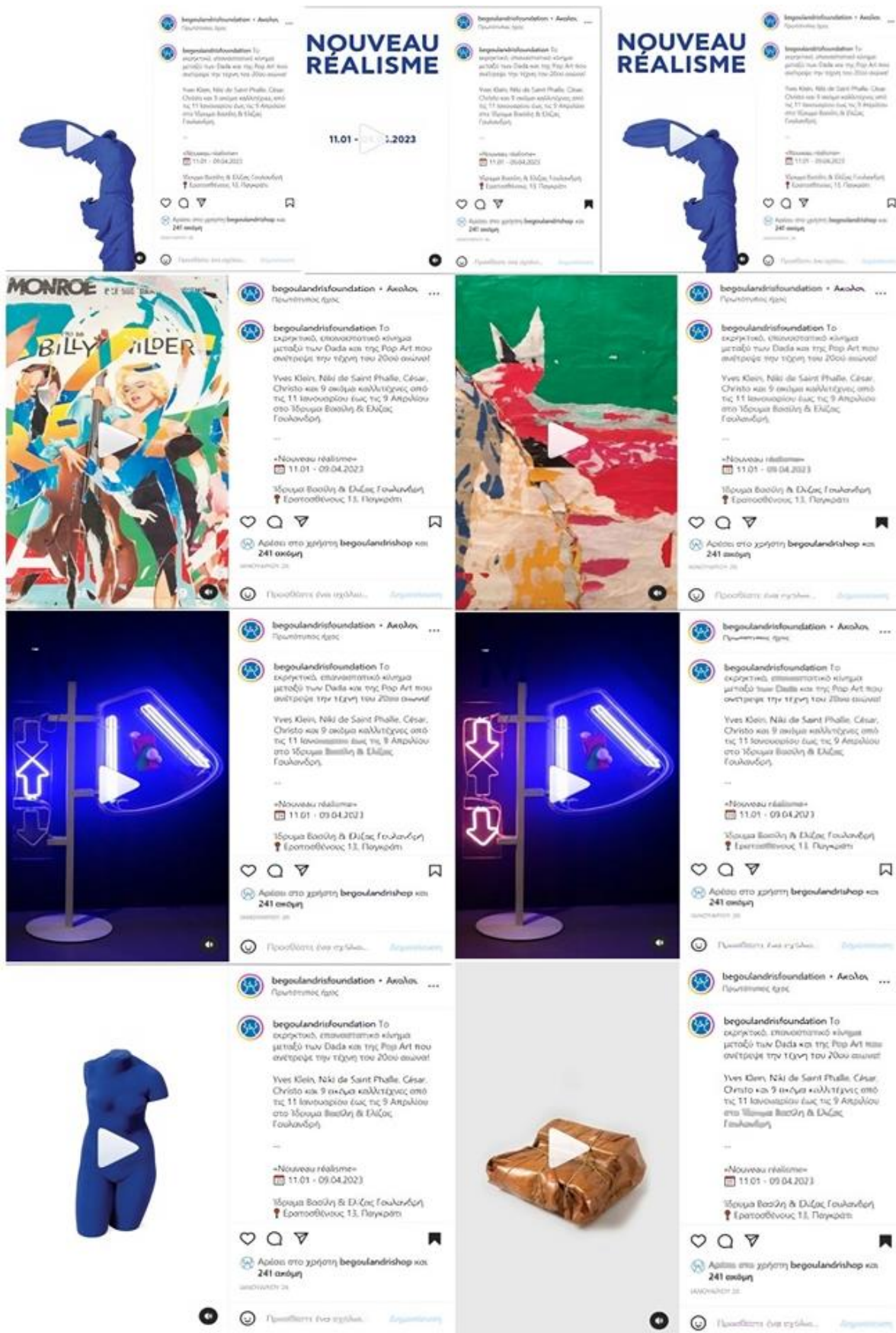


Figure 1. Screenshots from B&E Goulandris Foundation’s reel on Instagram (24 photos) (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn4AjgFqNnp/>)

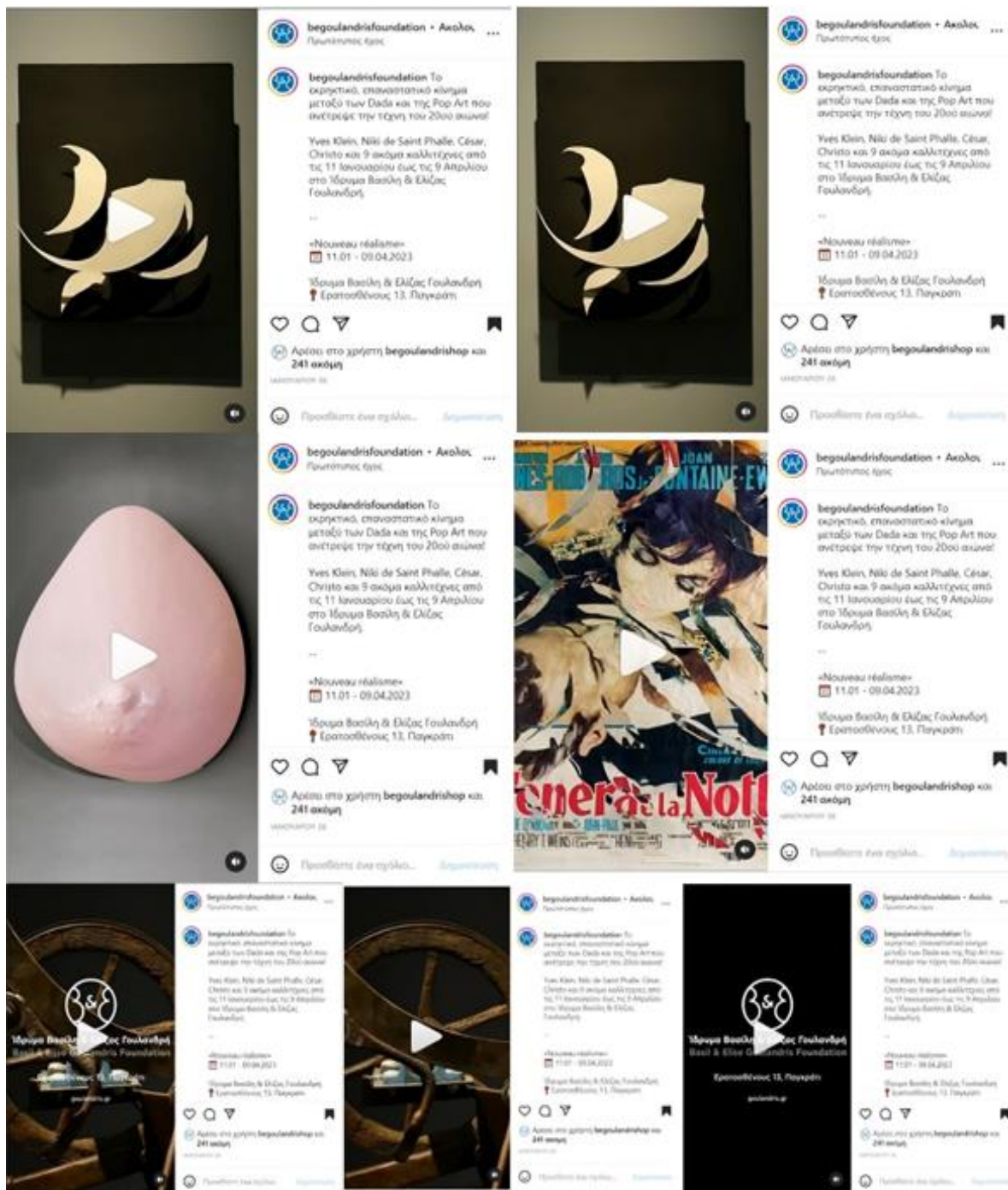


Figure 1 (continued). Screenshots from B&E Goulandris Foundation’s reel on Instagram (24 photos) (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn4AjqFqNnp/>)

Although the same message-reel is also posted on Facebook, YouTube and the museum’s website, its slightly modified form on Instagram (**Figures 2**) is of particular interest. In this variant, unlike the other media, where the message is presented, on the square “cover” of the reel it is not Yves Klein’s sculpture *Victory of Samothrace*—trademark of the exhibition—that appears, but the central theme from Mimmo Rotella’s poster *Mythical Marilyn* (1963).

In this *décollage*, based on the Italian poster of the movie *Some prefer it hot* (1959), the artist-creator, who follows the ready-made logic, approaches the object through a fresh and playful manner. He actually deconstructs and reconstructs the old poster creating a neo-realist-pop version, the center of which still occupies *Marilyn*, while directly behind her, to the viewer’s left, the dismembered figure of Jack Lemmon performing jazz double bassist Jerry, dressed as a woman, can be seen (**Figure 3**: Two photos).

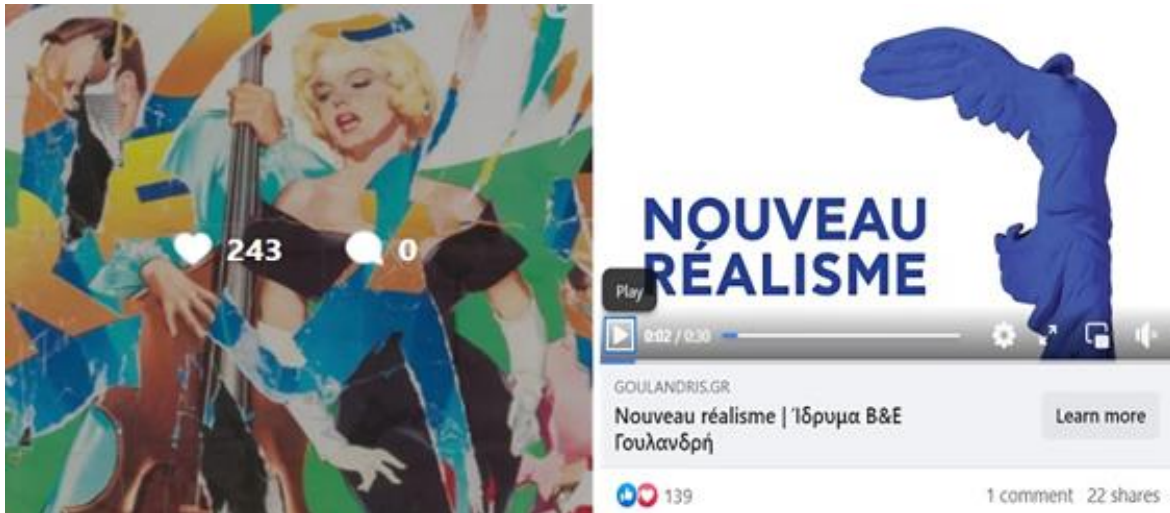


Figure 2. Reel covers on Instagram (left, <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn4AjjFqNnp/>) & Facebook (right, <https://fb.watch/qe0ysbu5Wn/>)



Figure 3. Reel cover on Instagram on *Rotella décollage* (1963) (left) & original poster of film *Some like it hot* (1959) (right) (Jones, 2020)

The appearance of the message on this platform is interesting for another reason, too. Although the B&E Goulandris Foundation’s Instagram account, created in the fall of 2016, has about half as many followers as Facebook, the public participation on the same exhibition-related posts on the former appears clearly larger (<https://fb.watch/qe0ysbu5Wn/>), a fact indicative of the particular dynamics of this specific, modern and representative of our time platform.

At the same time, the emphasis on the medium of photography as an imaged experience that people share—thanks to which they engage in a process of mediation and meaning-making of material culture while achieving their social networking—is fully aligned with the visual nature of museum itself (Budge & Burness, 2018). In addition, this very communication channel is a barometer for the museum’s impact on “the digital natives”, the new, constantly “networked” audience (Richardson, 2015), as it speaks in its “language” and gives it opportunities for creative participation, requested especially by young people aged 16-24 in Greece (ELSTAT, 2021).

Likewise, globally, there is a growing preference for Instagram, through which even audiences over the age of 18-34 now like to communicate (Dixon, 2023; Miller & Lammas, 2010; Ruby, 2022), while its cultural impact during the last decade is proving enormous (Manavis, 2021). The new features this social networking platform has taken on in 2020, during the pandemic, such as the introduction of the application of reels—the “fastest growing content format” (Ghaffary, 2022)—argue in favor of its rapidly growing influence, which explains the comparatively high audience participation in the posts.

The Instagram message of B&E Goulandris Foundation is addressed both to a portion of its art-loving audience, i.e., its own online followers worldwide (over 20,000 people) and, more generally, to SM users (9 out of 10 online users), which means 60% of the world's population (DataReportal, 2023). Proceeding to its form's analysis, the reel is built in a double structure (visual-acoustic) using various codes (visual-color/graphic, linguistic, and auditory). The form of the reel affects its content, as does its transmission channel, which is integrated into message in a symbiotic relationship (Esmel-Pamies, 2009; Psylla, 2007).

The basic techniques adopted for the effective transmission of the message are not only the interaction with the audience but also the invocation of both the emotion—through the attractive form of the multimedia reel—and the cognitive skills of the viewer. The latter is implemented through the utilization of arguments in favor of the great importance of the exhibition (as the exaggerated statement that this particular movement “overturned 20th century art”).

Additional value is produced by the use of a climax structure, according to which the names of exhibition's famous artists are presented reinforcingly at the end of the message as “the most important arguments” aiming at attracting and persuading the public. A similar impact has the adoption of stylistic features such as the use of a persuasive “powerful” language, which means a language without hesitations, vacillations or polite forms. Such a language, that is composed by the authoritative scientific staff of the museum, seems to impart a sense of credibility to the source of the message, thus increasing the persuasiveness of the message to the audience (Caerols-Mateo et al., 2017; Shen & Bigsby, 2013).

The effectiveness of the message is, moreover, highly influenced by its graphic design as thanks to this visual language the various individual elements are organized in an optimal way both functionally and aesthetically. Thus, visual editing arouses message recipient's interest while adding simultaneously value to the presented “product” (Kelly, 2015, p. 392). More detailed, the viewer's eye is immediately attracted from the outset to a dominant image of highly symbolic power conveyed by the exhibition poster. The latter is gradually formed through moving images: Initially appears the photo of *Klein's Victory of Samothrace*, a copy of the Hellenistic sculpture covered in Klein's transcendental blue, projected in a white background, eccentrically to the right and three-quarters to the viewers, so that it is best revealed in all its glory. Niki's right wing is stretching into space upwards and to the left, thus occupying a total of 2/3 of the image.

The top is left open to be covered in the very next second by the exhibition title written in large capital letters and color echoing Klein's. About a second later the photograph vanishes, giving way to similarly blue painted dates of the exhibition's duration. Each change is dictated and orchestrated by the rhythmical sound of a contrabass that facilitates the message's objective: The combination of a strong visual message and the tightly related linguistic and acoustic ones, magnetize our attention in the first three seconds, totally capturing our interest (**Figure 4**: three photos).

The commanding female voice that follows, briefly describes the communicated action emphasizing its anticipated “benefits”, i.e., the acquaintance with “the movement that overturned the art of the 20th century”, while the viewer is bombarded by a fusillade of images that activate understanding and promise a wide-ranging exhibition covering various tastes and preferences. The overall composition of individual elements is merged into a single comprehensive set of verbal and non-verbal components, which multiplies the power of communication (Littlejohn & Foss, 2012) and arouses the consumer's desire, leading him/her to the action of “buying the product” that is being promoted (Hill et al., 2008, p. 172).

The same strategic purpose is served by the repeated appearance of reel's images in other posts of the same campaign displayed on the Foundation's Instagram account. This technique aims to increase the recognition of patterns connected to cultural values in the self-contained universe of the cultural organization, within which the mutual promotion of its “products” is systematically attempted (Wasco, 2001). Indeed, as all factors of the communication act are interdependent (Psylla, 2004; Sifaki, 2015), the message's role becomes



Figure 4. Reel's sequence during the first seconds (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cn4AjgFqNnp/>)

important within the wider context of a museum's mixed-combination marketing and the exhibition's promotion campaign. The latter includes communication actions in the physical and online environment such as public relations, discussions and the use of advertising media.

Provided that the synergy and complementarity of different means of communication guarantee the creation of more value than the total value of each of them separately (Amit & Zott, 2001; Padilla-Meléndez & del Águila-Obra, 2013), this network of actions ensures the completeness and effectiveness of the museum communication strategy for a holistic promotion of the exhibition: in the museum, the city and the digital ecosystem.

Specifically on Instagram, to focus now on the medium under examination, the promotion campaign for the exhibition was launched 15 days before its opening. It included regularly posted announcements of educational, advertising or entertaining content (29 posts and 70 "stories"). In the organization's effort to build a "relational communication" with the audience, which entails the creation of common meanings and a strong relationship with the public (Finne & Grönroos, 2009), the message, published 15 days after its inauguration, had a distinct role within its communication strategy: it was its official overview, the "gift" of a short condensed look into it, lasting 30 seconds, which reminded its presence and indirectly invited those in the public who had not yet visited it to do so.

Semiotic Analysis of the Message From the Perspective of Roland Barthes

Using the semiotic methodological approach and recognizing its great contribution to the interpretation of visual culture (Sifaki, 2015), we will attempt to analyze the message as a complex system of signs with a dual structure of form and content based on Barthes (1986) perspective. Such a system, that presupposes the interaction with the audience as well as the processes of encoding and decoding symbols as commonly accepted beliefs, which can be perceived on the basis of an archetypal ritual dimension (Carey, 2009), is inescapably related to the concept of myth. Myth, according to Barthes (1979), distorts the reality without hiding it, while thanks to its function, the dominant bourgeois ideology is perceived as naturally legitimized.

More specifically, through semiotic analysis and in the extension of Saussure's terminology, we understand the communicative message and the relationship between signifier and signified as signification, which, according to Barthes (1979), is analyzed on two levels, that of "denotation" and that of its associated "connotations". The signifier-perceptual message is the "literal", while the signified-cultural message, resulting after processing, constitutes the symbolic-ideological one (Barthes, 2019).

We will start by analyzing the iconic and then the linguistic code of the message as two heterogeneous though converging structures. Although the photograph, the "perfect analog" of an object, is naturally non-coded, not requiring thus a mediator, the sheer "style" of reproduction, the "handling" or processing it receives (selection, framing, composition-visual editing) follows professional, aesthetic and ideological rules. In this sense it includes a connotated in addition to the denotated message, while their coexistence seems to constitute the necessary "institutional framework of all mass communications" (Barthes, 2019, p. 11-14).

Especially in this particular reel, where presented photographs depict artworks, there are developing very strong cultural connotations, which introduce values and meanings into the reading of the image. In any case, the connotated messages—arbitrary and rational at the same time—are drawn up through social and cultural

stereotypes and go along with the knowledge and culture of the message's reader, while it seems that their function is to exert a reassuring force on him/her, through which society actually reassures itself (Barthes, 2019).

Indeed, the iconic code of images has, according to Barthes (1979, 2019), a "naive-literal" and a "structural-symbolic" description, the former of which serves as the background-foundation of the latter. The denoted images of our message, in their buck-naked form, would be "radically objective" and "innocent" images (Barthes, 2019): A painted statuette, a female breast made of resin, pressed jewelry, a baby carriage wrapped in polythene and rope, etc. However, being artworks and given the function of art as a tool of persuasion (Sifaki, 2015), these images are brimming with symbolism and ideological messages, the polysemy of which is modified according to the era and the recipient.

Therefore, while the "de-intellectualized" literal message of the images cannot be separated from their cultural meaning, the reel that results after the visual interventions of the transmitter-communicator (color selections, cutting-enlargement techniques, enhancing methods of faces-symbols, zoom in material textures, cinematography of sculptures, use of black-and-white photographs for rendering the nostalgic hint of bohemian atmosphere), conveys a set of connoted messages.

The latter are articulated in an irresistible rhetoric, an aesthetic signified, whose signifier—the "constitution" of the denoted iconic "speech"—simply naturalizes it according to Barthes (1979, 2019) and thus, paradoxically, the literal message becomes the background of the symbolic one. The naturalness with which the artworks are presented, replete with ideas and values as marbled in time mythologized symbols of art, is drawn from the omnipotent cultural-ideological code of the given society or, as Bourdieu would put it, the "habitus" and the cultural capital of the message's readers (Smith, 2006, p. 214-219).

Linguistic code seems to function in a similar way. This code appears here reinforced in three ways: as a bilingual written text on the right side of the diptych, as words embedded in the video and as an audio-sound message (a variation of the written text) in Greek:

"Nouveau Réalisme". The B&E Goulandris Foundation presents a tribute to Neo-Realism, the explosive artistic movement between Dada and Pop Art that overturned 20th century art! Yves Klein, Niki de Saint Phalle, César, Christo and 9 other artists from January 11th to April 9th. B&E Goulandris Foundation, Eratosthenous 13, Pagrati.

A contralto female voice accompanied by music seduces us through the narrative, while a short text conveys to the local audience the linguistic message that "anchors" the meaning of the images, suppressing the polysemy and freedom of their signifieds (Barthes, 2019). The exhibition morphs into a metonymy of the "explosive" artistic movement and its famous artists, and the same does the B&E Goulandris museum itself, as a brand name and both a natural site and a website.

Equally, the emphasis on the repetition of the museum's brand name through the linguistic, audio and visual code is not at all accidental. Indeed, it is both introduced at the beginning of the reel's audio message and repeated at its end (a total of 10 out of 60 words). Similarly, its logo—magnified—appears and remains visible for four seconds in the center of the last moving image of the reel, while being permanently on view also on the right side of the diptych.

The above practice, related to the strategy of establishing a recognizable brand image (Koloka & Papadaki, 2023), is of great importance for the relatively newly established museum and allies with its desired identity as an authoritative and reliable destination for art lovers. The building of a strong brand name, valuable in the difficult for the non-expert visitor fields of modern and contemporary art, makes it easier for the museum to achieve its goals. To this end, through the exhibition "Nouveau Réalisme", the very promotion of a world-renowned artistic movement and its famous works-symbols, proves decisive as their "brand" strategically reinforces that of the museum (Hill et al., 2018; Pusa & Uusitalo, 2014).

Finally, as the visual pattern of the reel's cover is also "transferred" to the audio code, a pleasant aesthetic "alliteration" is created through its acoustic analogue. The deconstructed image of a jazz musician, playing the contrabass with the usual technique of the genre, i.e., with the fingers ("pizzicato") instead of a bow (Cavalli, 2016), becomes an "echo" pattern with the simple, evocative and subtly stimulating double bass melody of the audio message.

The latter is reproduced in a monotonous, staccato tempo, a kind of harmonic base or background in front of which alternate visual—rather than audio—improvisations of artworks, which at the time of their production were, by analogy with jazz music, characterized by freedom of form as well as singularity-diversity and unpredictability.

The Reception of the Message by the Public

The analysis of the message requires, as we have already seen, several parameters and aspects to be considered, which presupposes a complementarity of methods (Psylla, 2004; Sifaki, 2015; Sifaki & Papadopoulou, 2015). Although we have examined some of them, others play a crucial role, too. An integral part of the interdisciplinary analysis of visual communication is considered to be the study of its reception despite the problems it encompasses (e.g., limited ability to generalize results), as the message's recipient is more and more placed at its center (Austin, 2009; Choi & Kim, 2021; Corner, 2000; Finne & Grönroos, 2009; Koloka & Papadaki, 2023).

Reading the visual code of the message is anymore considered as a complex and multi-layered process involving both personal and collective interpretations that often conflict with each other (Corner, 2000). Similarly, communication as a social process is understood through its context and each recipient can perceive the signs of the messages in a different way, extracting in practice a different meaning. Thus, message meaning becomes a variable rather than a constant. Consequently, there is a vivid need for a message analysis that considers the different reactions that the same content can cause to different audiences, and which proves to be sensitive to meanings that are likely to be perceived by them (Austin, 2009; Finne & Grönroos, 2009; Koloka & Papadaki, 2023).

Following a first general approach to the reception of the investigated message by the public, we observe that it received 247 "likes". Considering the particular dynamics of videos in the promotion of cultural heritage (Caerols-Mateo et al., 2017), the measurement seems to confirm the influential power of the reel on users, since only 11 of the 29 messages of the campaign exceeded its "popularity", while such comparisons should consider the tendency of users to neglect to "react" to videos, in comparison to photos, because of the time they spend watching them (Morrison, 2015).

The response to the exhibition's message was moreover monitored through the stories related to it, reposted by the B&E Goulandris Foundation on Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/18000004642604391/>). Thus, with a simple or extended "mediation", the museum attempts to weave further webs of ties generating "personalized recommendations" of users about the specific exhibition to new audiences and specifically to their "social neighborhood", since according to Vassilakis et al. (2017, p. 9) "social network user responds significantly better to advertisements that originate from friends of the social network to who the user has high tie strength".

Such posts include photos, videos, articles, reposts or even images with personal comments written on them by visitors (**Figure 5**: 12 photos). According to Budge and Burness (2018), the latter can express an "agency" and "authority" in that people decide to insert their thoughts into textual form and thereby engage with museum objects exerting power on their public Instagram audiences (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CoJ-fwRKw-M/>)

The producers of these posts, when they are not the B&E Goulandris Foundation itself, are mainly artists, journalists, marketing professionals, editors, influencers and bloggers, whose Instagram followers range from a few hundred to over 10,000 people. Their creators also include galleries, art institutions and simple art lovers who posted or reposted exhibition material, interacting both with the museum and their "friends"-followers and contributing, thus, in an extensive creation of open circles of interaction and continuous expansion of participation.

Indeed, about 150 followers reacted approvingly, for instance, to the Foundation Cesar's post for the exhibition (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CnSa7piloiU/>) and about 400 more to that of Almine Rech gallery (<https://www.instagram.com/p/CoKanK6sWnp/>). Similarly, more than 450 people responded positively to the children's website "thisisus" whose post urged parents to visit the exhibition, bringing very young children with them, to educate thus "their eyes on aesthetics" (<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cngrul1LXrt/>).

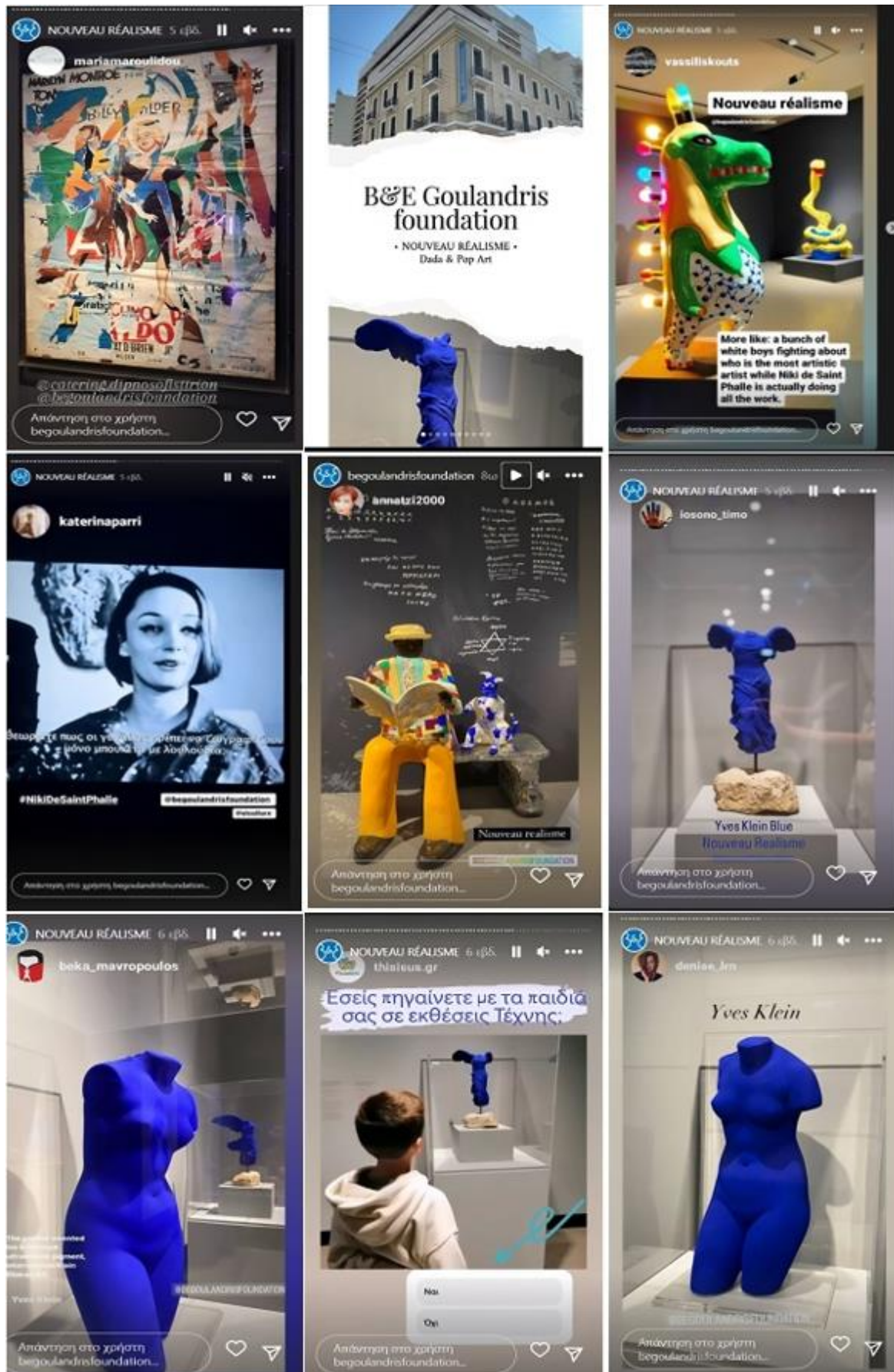


Figure 5. Foundation's "stories" on Instagram on users' feedback to communication campaign for exhibition "Nouveau Réalisme" (12 photos) (<https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/1800004642604391/>)

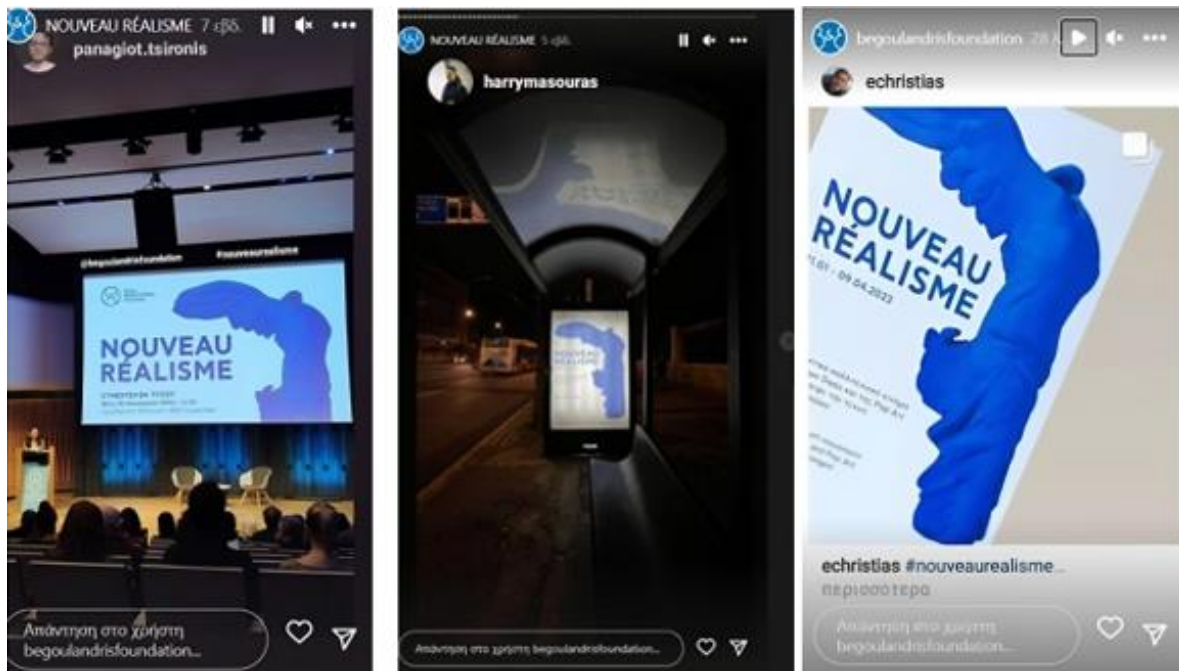


Figure 5 (continued). Foundation's "stories" on Instagram on users' feedback to communication campaign for exhibition "Nouveau Réalisme" (12 photos) (<https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/18000004642604391/>)

Returning to the main Instagram post, we notice that both the examined message and the rest of the campaign basically did not garner any comments, except for an occasional one-word reward or emoji. On the contrary, in the case of other users' stories, a freer interaction with the exhibition communication messages is observed, usually expressed through the "artistic" look of a more personal perspective. More rarely there is a creative comment that solicits feedback from its publisher's followers. After all, it seems that netizens are using this particular platform in search of new ways of communication, in order not only to satisfy their interest in art and culture but also to weave their views and narratives into them and hence better understand the world and themselves (Corona, 2021, p. 21-23).

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PANDEMIC CRISIS & THE UTILIZATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE PLANNING OF MUSEUM COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

With the outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 nearly 90% of museums closed their doors to the public, reducing their income by 80% compared to 2019 and facing serious sustainability problems as a result. Thus, they turned to the fuller use of Information and Communication Technologies and developed multifaceted digital initiatives, in an effort to keep public participation alive (Papaioannou & Sfyridou, 2021; UNESCO, 2020).

Since then, the evolution of the digital usage process, which was already strongly upward, started accelerating at a frenzied pace and the online presence of museums increased by 80% (Behera & Gangadhar, 2022). The public responded warmly to this tendency, and as a result, online followers in museums such as the Louvre or the Vatican more than doubled or even increased fifteenfold between 2018-2020, just before and after the pandemic (Corona, 2021).

In particular, feedback platforms of social networking service, which as early as 2010 ceased to be intended for the simple dissemination of information (Caerols-Mateo et al., 2017), experienced unprecedented growth due to the pandemic and were easily integrated into the user experience, thus transforming the way of communication in museums, in an ambiance of encouraging dialogue and interaction. As Crooke (2020) observes, "it took a pandemic" for museums to realize the enormous potential of digital participation (p. 308).

In fact, due to their open and constantly evolving nature, SM reflect people's social nature as online spaces of "new socialites", hubs of constantly renewed relationships and places of intersection between collective

memory and personal identity construction (Hudson, 2015). Thanks to these applications of Web 2.0 technology, museums have the opportunity to preserve—transferring it to the digital ecosystem—one of the most valuable aspects of the museum experience, the one related to the social context of the physical visit and the interaction that enhances learning (Behera & Gangadhar, 2022).

As the interactivity of communication progressively becomes of utmost importance for cultural managers, such platforms—showcases of museum “products”, which allow the creation of strong bonds and interaction between many users while reflecting the social character of the experience of art, become for the “smart” museums of the 21st century a major source of communication marketing (Caerols-Mateo et al., 2017; Choi & Kim, 2021; Corona, 2021; Hill et al., 2018; Kahn, 2020; Roumeliotou, 2009; Scoffield & Liu, 2014; Vassilakis et al., 2017).

Indeed, providing continuously and uninterruptedly unlimited access possibilities (24/7/365) for everyone, regardless of age and ability, this popular medium becomes the “ubiquitous” vehicle of the museum’s ideas, which enriches the museum experience and offers possibilities for interaction with visitors, whose participation is necessary for the consumption of museum cultural goods. At the same time, through SM, the museum attempts to convert the “potential” consumers of its services and products into actual consumers and the latter into loyal friends and supporters (Kachniewska, 2006; Papadaki, 2022; Spiliopoulou et al., 2014).

On the other hand, in this extended online museum forms, it becomes possible for this long-standing institution to update and redefine its contact with modern life. The intangible space of SM online communities is functioning namely as an agora, where people are gathering together and where “instant public exchange of multi-media information among self-selected parties” takes place (Gu, 2012, p. 14). Thus, it becomes the ideal place to effectively support “word-of-mouth” (WOM), also known as viral or “buzz” marketing (Brown et al., 2007; Hausmann, 2012; Lazzeretti et al., 2015; Miller & Lammas, 2010; Papadaki, 2022).

Actually, this “revolution” in marketing communication (Miller & Lammas, 2010), made possible by SM technology, is based precisely on the creation of networks and interactive channels, through which visitors can have their own voice co-creating with museum a participatory culture. This participatory culture implies a clear shift in power relations between media industries and their customers (Burgess & Green, 2009), who are encouraged to provide persuasive promotional information in a hypermedia environment in which they become mediators (Hausmann, 2012).

The independence of customers-communicators from the market, the speed of information diffusion to tech-savvy recipients interested in the specific content—thanks to the ability of such platforms to categorize the audience by various variables—but also the personal relationship of “online friendship” between senders and receivers that guarantees the reliability of information, contribute to its easy and massive dissemination in the form of a pyramid, avalanche, virus or epidemic phenomenon (Hausmann, 2012; Miller & Lammas, 2010; Spiliopoulou et al., 2014).

Thanks to viral marketing, the public’s loyalty is strengthened as well as its trust to cultural organizations such as museums that provide mainly intangible services, while any doubt or uncertainty visitors may feel is mitigated (Hausmann, 2012; Pusa & Uusitalo, 2014). Finally, as the evaluation of information in an online environment presupposes the development of strong social ties, “homophily” (similarities in age, gender, lifestyle, interests or experiences) and credibility (Brown et al., 2007), cultural managers realize all and more clearly how imperative it becomes to build real communities with an emphasis on accessibility, dialogue and reciprocity, aiming at developing cultural and emotional relationships between members (Miller & Lammas, 2010).

Thus, despite various limitations on SM use, e.g., demands for an organization’s continuous attention, professional expertise, willingness of curators to reconsider their role as exclusive authoritative interpreters of collections (Effing & Spill, 2016; Hausmann, 2012; Kyprianidou & Papadaki, 2018; Lazzeretti et al., 2015), that may explain its low diffusion in museums compared to other cultural organizations (Papaioannou & Sfyridou, 2020), in the last decade and especially since the pandemic, museum cultural administrators are more and more experimenting with SM, mainly Instagram and YouTube (Papaioannou & Sfyridou, 2021).

The Basil & Elise Goulandris Foundation's Case

In the last five years, the B&E Goulandris Foundations' cultural managers appear systematically trying to build a digital profile compatible with an identity of increased prestige and validity in the art world. More specifically, they have been using Instagram since 2016, emphatically multiplying its posts after 2019 (80 posts in 2021 and 120 in 2022), which certainly coincides with both the general trend observed in museum management after the pandemic outbreak and the establishment, at that time, of the museum B&E Goulandris in Athens.

As indicated by monitoring the history of posts on this particular platform, from 2020 onwards various methods of normalizing the use of the medium are being employed, aimed at stabilizing and developing the visitor-museum relationship. Such methods include the regular posting of informative and educational content, frequent publication of "in the making" stories and visitor-related photos or quality videos.

Specifically, during the museum communication campaign for "Nouveau Réalisme", a total of 29 posts were presented within 16 weeks (from December 28, 2022, to April 11, 2023), in a ratio of about one-two posts per week. More specifically, in the period between December 28, 2022, and February 23, 2023 (nine weeks) there were two new posts per week, except for two weeks when only one post per week appeared, while in the last period, between March 4 and April 11 (seven weeks), posts essentially dropped to one per week, except for two weeks when they reached four and two per week, respectively.

In terms of their content, the posts were mostly informative-promotional in nature (18), while 11 of them had an educational content. Each of the latter was dedicated to an artist of the exhibition and accompanied by one-four photographs of artworks (usually the same as on the reel under examination) as well as one-two black-and-white photographs of the artist, mostly at work. Two of them appeared on the occasion of the anniversary of the artist's birth. For reasons of communicative homogeneity, the last image in each photo series was the exhibition poster with informational details printed both there and in the permanently displayed "window" on the right.

Another feature of this group of posts was the common presence of an introductory text that appeared at the top right side of each diptych, either through a statement made by the artist (excerpt from an interview or letter) or through some comment or criticism referred to his/her oeuvre or the exhibited work(s). All posts were bilingual and concerned works created by nine out of 13 artists of the exhibition.

As regards the Facebook platform, the same posts were presented on the same dates, increased however in number by 13, the majority of which (eight) referred to online articles promoting the exhibition or its artists. Through this mediation an attempt is detected to interconnect with other communication channels, those of the electronic press that hosted the relevant articles, whose Facebook accounts display approximately 180,000 to 745,000 thousand followers each.

In one such post there was an indecisive effort to interweave the museum with current events such as the *MeToo* movement, through a correlation pointed out by the co-curator of the exhibition Maria Koutsomalli-Moreau, on the occasion of the artist Niki de Saint Phalle. The post received, however, only 43 likes, 13 shares and no comments.

Trying to analyze the way in which the B&E Goulandris Foundation utilizes Instagram platform, it is important to underline that although the popularity of such accounts depends on the reputation of the museum itself, the number of followers is also "proportional to the frequency and quality of content posting" (Papaioannou & Sfyridou, 2020). Hence, the communication practice of the museum betrays a high intensity activity in relation to similar strategies of the most known museums in Europe (Papaioannou & Sfyridou, 2020), a fact indicative of the importance the B&E Goulandris Foundation lays both on this communication channel and on the museum's first major international exhibition. However, even in this case, one-way communication prevails, as the museum's communication practice is mainly organized through informative, advertising or educational posts.

More specifically, the campaign analysis shows that the organization follows some good international practices such as posting quality videos (the presented reel), uploading posts with visitors-related material (8 posts), using of visualizations, hashtags, links and a bilingual verbal code, since it addresses both the international and the Greek audience. However, apart from the strategies that indicate the use of marketing

for the promotion of the organization image in a kind of “virtual visit card” (Lazzeretti et al., 2015, p. 273), what seems to be virtually absent or really weak is strategic planning aimed at the creation of a true online community of collaboration and active public engagement, through strengthening relationships with both visitors and a variety of other stakeholders (Chung et al., 2014; Lazzeretti et al., 2015; Papaioannou & Sfyridou, 2020).

What could be further suggested is partly indicated by the rather hesitant and uniformly expressed response from the recipients of the message: The encouragement of their online participation. Thus, active audience participation could be ensured through posts that display a more personal voice, informal tone and fun style—without betraying the organization’s principles and values—regular prompts for comments or practices that involve the audience in activities such as online games and contests or even web content personalization capabilities.

Similarly, practices for communicating with museum curators are suggested, as well as sharing and creating stories and user-generated content. Furthermore, questions could be posed by the museum’s SM administrators to the digital audience regarding everyday life, current events and their relation to the exhibited art. Such questions as well as posts that allow for differentiated or nuanced personal expression are very likely to act as an incentive to engage and “wake up” a “lazy generation that is content to push a button to approve something” (Morozov as cited in Roumeliotou, 2009, p. 9).

In addition, the prospect of connecting with other online communities and digital culture agents, which was little if any at all attempted through the Instagram platform in our case study, should be further and more fully enhanced, in order to employ more customized and “focused” instead of mass marketing strategies. After all, there are obvious benefits arising from the synergy and complementarity of interaction between different groups or communities, since belonging to a large number of them—rather than “merely relying on broadcasts to an online group with a large number of members”—facilitates such strategies (Miller & Lammas, 2010, p. 5).

Finally, given that the museum’s posts on Instagram are also repeated on Facebook, the need to further diversify the museum’s online presence on each social networking platform (Lazzeretti et al., 2015) emerges, as well as the need to connect specific museum goals with specific audience groups such as the new tech-savvy generation, whose feedback could infuse the organization with the power of a fresh and fertile perspective.

To conclude, such measures are expected to increase the effectiveness of SM use in the museum, as thanks to them online communities will be developed, a sense of belonging will be cultivated, WOM reputation networks will be established, a participatory experience will be achieved and physical visit will be motivated, all of which lay the foundation for of long-term relational communication. At the same time, the visibility of the museum on the World Wide Web will be increased and a more aware and expanded audience will be forged, which guarantees museum’s sustainability and competitiveness in the cultural market (Garibaldi, 2015; Finne & Grönroos, 2009; Kyprianidou & Papadaki, 2018; Lazzeretti et al., 2015; Padilla-Meléndez & del Águila-Obra, 2013; Papadaki, 2022; Papaioannou & Sfyridou, 2020; Spiliopoulou et al., 2014).

Limitations & Future Research

In this article, the concepts and issues that dominate the academic discourse around the holistic message analysis were fully utilized and applied to a communication activity of the B&E Goulandris Foundation. With the aim of analyzing the communication message as comprehensively as possible, the selected message was treated as a social product, whose both immediate and broader context were examined. Moreover, a first summary study of its reception was attempted focusing on quantitative and qualitative data deriving from the museum’s Instagram account.

Complementing the present model with a qualitative research based on audience survey through interviews with message recipients in order to examine their expectations and needs is an open challenge for better understanding its differential reception by different groups of visitors. Similarly, helpful would be an interview with museums’ cultural administrators in order to investigate their point of view regarding the museum’s communication strategy implementations.

Another limitation of the presented work is that the specific case study concerns a communication message from a museum. There could be other studies investigating reels of performing arts organizations

to get a more complete picture. Also, other SM, such as Facebook, or the overall digital presence of the organization could be studied. Additionally, other methodological tools could be used, such as content analysis for more messages.

Overall, as becomes clear from the related work, the research in the field of SM use in museums should not only be further expanded, especially in the field of European museums, but also focus more on new types of SM that recently—and especially since the pandemic—have become very popular, one of which is Instagram. This article aims to help fill this gap.

CONCLUSIONS

This article analyzed a contemporary communication action in the digital environment of the post-COVID-19 era, specifically a message of the B&E Goulandris Foundation on the Instagram platform. The message was first examined in terms of its—differentiated in relation to other SM—multimedia form and its mainly informative-promotional content. Moreover, light was shed upon the structure and techniques adopted by the message to increase its effectiveness. In the same context, special dynamics of the Instagram platform and its aligning with both the postmodern way of life and art itself were analyzed, while with the message being integrated into the organization's communication strategy and serving as an integral part of it, its distinct dual role was ascertained. Thus, its function was demonstrated both as a tool for promoting and disseminating museum activities and as a means of building a recognizable brand image of the organization.

Additionally, through the methodological approach of Barthes' (1979) semiotic analysis, an attempt was made to highlight the connotated ideological messages of the visual, linguistic and auditory code of the message, which homogenize it into a coherent whole. Thus, it was established that the construction of the message is based both on a visual code loaded with evaluative concepts and symbols and on a short, simple, but at the same time explicit and unambiguous language code that unequivocally clarifies it. Moreover, the discreet function of the auditory code was also established, as well as the correlation between the musical motif heard in the background and the corresponding visual pattern seen on the reel cover, which "rhyme" in a pleasant verse.

Furthermore, we focused on the audience's reception of both the message and the broader communicative action it serves, the quantitative analysis of its decoding by the viewers who reservedly endorsed it, and the qualitatively significant interventions of Instagram users who energetically re-posted or re-edited photos of museum objects interacting with others. Finally, we examined the influence of the pandemic crisis on the planning of the SM communication strategy of cultural organizations, especially the intensification of its use by the B&E Goulandris Foundation.

Focusing on our case study, ways of exploiting its potential in the case of "Nouveau Réalisme" exhibition on Instagram were critically analyzed. In particular, it was clearly recognized that a solid, robust and consistent policy of utilizing SM was implemented by the administrators of the B&E Goulandris Foundation as well as the adoption of positive practices, aimed at enriching the cultural experience of its existing and potential audience.

Notwithstanding, an indispensable need was also identified to explore new techniques and methods—some of which are proposed here—to encourage this audience and awaken its consciousness, so that it participates in a public debate around cultural heritage.

Summarizing, through the present study, the importance of a combined, multifaceted and holistic analysis of the communication message is underlined. Such an analysis should capitalize on the benefits of semiotic analysis to explore the cultural-ideological significance of visual communication, but also complement these benefits by examining both the specific and the broader context of message production (internal environment, external socio-economic and cultural data) as well as its reception by the public. After all, the examination of the latter fits harmoniously into the context of an organic connection between the cultural wealth and the everyday life of both the audiences and the museum.

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