

**The 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Economics and Social Sciences**  
**Resilience and economic intelligence through digitalization**  
**and big data analytics**  
**June 10-11, 2021**  
**Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania**

**Creative and Cultural Sectors**  
**during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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DOI: 10.2478/9788366675704-029

**Abstract**

*Year 2020 brought new challenges for the cultural-creative sectors, mostly due to the physical distance requested in order to limit the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges have important effects on managing crisis and induced propagated complex changes within these sectors. The COVID-19 pandemic has generated and amplified challenges that economic and social sectors have to deal with in order to provide proper and effective answers even in a short time. At the same time, they also offered some opportunities for further medium and long term development. The paper aims at identifying the main characteristics of this dynamic and turbulent environment including social media and communications management. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of the activities of these sectors have suffered and thus largely challenged the public, social and cultural institutions that have been forced to find new ways to reach and capitalize the technological and communication benefits of digital platforms and more complex networking functioning better within the virtual space. In addition, the paper intends to offer more alternatives asking for a reflection and dialogue in order to find better solutions for the complex issues related to people's need to access cultural and creative sectors before and after COVID-19.*

**Keywords:** digital platforms, cultural-creative sectors, COVID-19.

**JEL Classification:** H41, O30.

**1. Introduction**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, in Romania the cultural and creative sectors (CCS) were characterized by some fragile and fragmented structures at least from

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an organisational point of view. The COVID-19 pandemic has created numerous negative complex effects in many areas of society in general, as well as in CCS in particular. CCS are in the process of setting new challenges, both for the workers of these sectors and for their public with important financial implications. Isolation was implemented in all states all over the world, and thus a lot of negative effects emerged, affecting the cultural and creative sectors. The crisis caused by COVID-19 has been intense and it led to the application of many digital mediation techniques (Nobre, 2020).

Accelerating digital transformations will benefit economic, cultural and social sectors and institutions in the future. It is also estimated that, in the medium and long term, the acceleration of automation processes will lead to a decrease in the number of people working in the CCS (Ponte, 2020).

## 2. Problem Statement

In the first months after the pandemic shock, governments, public and private institutions tried to develop various measures to face the negative effects caused by the pandemic. This form of crisis management is unprecedented from a historical point of view. It offers various opportunities to examine the preferences of decision makers for a mix of proper political actions. The current crisis is particularly critical for the creative and cultural sectors due to the sudden and unexpected loss of income. Some institutions may benefit from public support, such as libraries, museums, theatres, but may have to face severe budgetary difficulties. CCS include both large multinational companies, but also small companies and independent professionals for this sector. Thus crisis creates a structural threat to the survival of companies and workers involved in cultural and creative production. In the context of the cultural and creative economy, cultural and creative sectors have a key role for society. Cultural availability contributes to people's mental health. Cultural institutions created different methods in order to offer them online.

## 3. Research Questions

In order to provide a high degree of satisfaction during the lockdown period, cultural institutions adapted to the new consumer behaviours of cultural services and digital social channels. Consistent with the goal of our paper focusing on understanding how cultural institutions manage to deal with these important issues, our research highlights the impact of social networks on cultural institutions and consumers. Consequently, *the main research questions* are:

- What are the main contact points that characterize the socialization strategy adopted by the cultural institutions?
- To what extent does the public interested in consuming cultural services interact with the institutions that produce these services?

#### 4. Brief Literature Review

The term creative economy was first used in 1998, in an official report published by the *United Kingdom's Department of Culture, Media and Sport*. The report states that creative industries are those that deal with skill, creativity and individual talent with a high potential to generate creative jobs (Higgs et al., 2008; Maulana, 2020). CCS support a smart, sustainable and inclusive development. Although there has been a growing trend of CCS in terms of value added and number of employees, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis these areas have suffered from endemic vulnerabilities. More than ever COVID-19 invites to join the efforts generated by the private sector, civil society and the governments highlighting the importance of the creative economy and CCS as part of a global recovery (UNCTAD, 2020). The term of "*creative economy*" was also used in 2000 by Peter Coy and in 2001 by John Howkins. It involves a transformation of world economy towards an economy based on the "*power of ideas*" (Coy, 2000).

In his 2001 book, "*Creative Economics: How People Make Money from Ideas*," John Howkins (2001) described the creative economy as a new way of thinking that revitalizes manufacturing, retail, art, design, and innovation, entertainment, with an emphasis on the abilities, skills and talents. Cultural economics gather industries that involve creativity and thus being closely related to intellectual property (Throsby, 2001; Onea, 2020).

Digital platforms are a way to organize human activities, as well as social, political and economic activities (Tan et al., 2015). Digital platforms have significantly contributed to the improvement of several industries, such as transport (*Uber* case), software development (*iOS*, *Google*) and hospitality (*Airbnb*). The prominence of this phenomenon and the dependence on ITC capabilities have led to an amplified interest for research on digital platforms among researchers in the field of Information Systems (IS) (Kwark et al., 2017). Previous empirical studies have examined platforms from different angles, such as the growth of ecosystems (Jha et al. 2016; Bratianu, 2020), the impact of platforms on societies (Chan and Ghose, 2014), platform governance (Boudreau, 2010) and the adoption of the platform strategies (Hagiu and Wright, 2015). Digital platforms contribute to the decrease of transaction costs, including search, trading and monitoring costs (Eisenmann et al., 2006). Platforms help to better coordinate and organize technology developers of complementary products through appropriate institutional structures (Tiwana et al., 2010).

#### 5. Research Methods

In order to estimate the evolution of the activity of cultural institutions there might be used several indicators, such as: *number of artists, number of shows, number of art galleries, number of exhibits, number of appreciations and number of posts on the social platform*. It is difficult to measure cultural activities as these are part of the intangible assets. In line with the purpose of the paper, the authors considered that it is necessary to follow the evolution of the main social media that

might help consumers of cultural products to easily get access to different relevant information. In this perspective, the authors decided to use a set of contact points for which the following indicators were used: *number of appreciations on the official Facebook accounts; the number of comments, number of posts; number of appreciations and number of distributions*. The period of time covers the second quarter of 2019 and the year 2020. Secondary data, in the form of comments on the posts of cultural institutions, were collected from the social networking site Facebook, to assess the overall satisfaction of users of cultural services. The analysis of these data was performed on three museums (*National Museum of Natural History “Grigore Antipa”, National Museum of Art of Romania, National Museum “Dimitrie Gusti” Village*) and three theaters (*Masca Theater, Bulandra Theater and Nottara Theater*).

## **6. Main Findings**

### ***6.1 How the COVID-19 Pandemic affected CCS along with the Whole Society***

As highlighted before, CCS are very important parts of the economic, social, cultural and ecological systems. They are impacting positively a lot of channels like education, urban regeneration, health.

CCS are among the hardest hit by the pandemic, with large cities containing the largest part of jobs at risk. The dynamics of the impact vary across sub-categories, with *venue-based activities* and *the related supply chains* mostly affected. In addition to short-term support for artists and firms, coming both from the public and private sector, governmental policies may influence the social and economic impacts of culture in their efforts and broader recovery packages to help local economies. *The venue-based sectors* – festivals, cinema, performing artists are among the hardest hit by social distancing measures, along with restaurants and all the hospitality industry. The unanticipated drop in their income is putting their economic sustainability at risk and has resulted in reduced wage earnings and redundancy notices sent to employees. All these actions affected the business chain of suppliers, from creative and non-creative sectors alike. In contrast, some CCS, such as online content social platforms, have profited from the increased demand for cultural content streaming during lockdown, but the benefits from this extra demand have largely accrued to the largest firms in the industry. The effects of this crisis on distribution channels and the dropping of investments will affect the cultural services in the period to come. On the short term, the drop of people’s purchasing power along with the anticipated lower levels of international & domestic tourism and the decrease of public and private funding for culture, could amplify this negative trend. While recovery strategies and responsive public support are still expected, the crisis of CCS will have a negative economic impact on cities and on the whole regions in terms of jobs and revenues, citizen prosperity. CCS include small companies, non-profit organizations or creative professionals, often operating on the edge of financial sustainability. CCS and the whole society

depend on this dynamic cultural environment in order to provide creative goods and services. Employment and income support measures are not always accessible or adapted to the new and non-standard forms of employment (freelance, intermittent, hybrid) that tend to be more precarious. Digitalisation and emerging technologies, such as augmented realities (AR), are expected to generate new forms of cultural experience and business models. When the first lockdown occurred in the first half of 2020, many public and private cultural providers made their content switch on-line without any cost for the consumer in order to maintain their audiences. The demand for online cultural content increased. While the supply of free and digitally moulded cultural content might be considered by some not sustainable over time, it has opened the door for many future innovations. We consider that, in order to capitalise on them, there is a need to address the digital skills shortages within the CCS and improve digital access beyond large metropolitan areas. Digital access does not replace a live cultural experience or all the jobs that go with it. Seeing the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity might sound surprising, but the accelerated digitalization that both education and CCS have experienced can only bring positive outcomes. Not so long ago, artists believed that *YouTube* might ruin their way of working, but it brought a lot of advantages, from an audience visibility point of view, but also from an economic perspective. The period of lockdowns throughout all 2020 and the social distancing measures highlighted the importance of arts and culture for people's mental health and well-being by preventing and treating different illnesses, contributing to solutions for health and national social or private welfare systems.

## ***6.2 How Social Networks Can Help CCS to Overcome the COVID-19 Pandemic***

All in all, an increased use of online social networks is one of the most far-reaching and enduring consequences of COVID-19. Beside from traditional media trusts, as the main vectors of social communication in critical situations, individuals have emerged and had a huge impact and visibility on public opinion, similar to that of specialized communication media. They have been supported by their host social networks with unrestricted reach to all the connections based on social platform. The nature of social interactions in the 21st century, have been transformed into a digital, globalized and interconnected context, being concentrated in digital media. This transformation has been major enough to consider that in the past few years the impact of social networks has resulted in a media metamorphosis, triggering a change not only in the communication-information ecosystem, but also in the roles of the consumers and producers of information, news and general knowledge. The worldwide triggering of COVID-19, and the exposure of the whole population to a virus without a specific medical treatment and with high risk levels of infection, have underlined the advantages of digital media as the preferred communication channel about every important aspect. Beside the big press corporations, as the drivers of the social

communication thread in situations of crisis, other social agents have appeared. New agents supported by social networks, are contributing to the re-direction of the management of communication in a worldwide pandemic. Collaboration and an interconnected global dialogue of different citizens on digital platforms have provided an increasing importance to these *digital Agoras*. We shifted to a more informal style, where even politicians need the approval of *Millennials* or *Gen Z* participants in their online questionnaire. During the COVID-19 crisis, citizens can have a relevant impact to world perspective on global issues, as good as the traditional media corporations.

### 6.3 Digital Innovation in Museums during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Compared to other public cultural institutions, museums have brought a complex diversity of activities to adapt to the conditions imposed by the pandemic. Due to the wide area of coverage of cultural fields (from history, oenology, to literature or fine arts), the approach and results were different. Museums' strategies are similar when it comes to the virtual environment, as many of them have developed platforms to promote exponents and events on social media (mainly *Facebook*). The interest of digital consumers can be expressed by appreciations, as illustrated in Table 1, and sometimes by individual reporting to each post (approaches, comments and distribution). All these represent a new unit of measurement of the activity of cultural institutions and suggest some characteristics of the public profile, which unlike the specialized one that participates in events in physical spaces, it is non-professional, driven by curiosity and digital components.

**Table 1. Number of likes on the Facebook pages of some museums in Bucharest**

Museum name	Number of likes on Facebook
Grigore Antipa National Museum of Natural History	47 171
Muzeul National de Arta al Romaniei	24 933
Muzeul National al Satului "Dimitrie Gusti"	35 653

Source: Authors 'processing based on museums' Facebook pages.

The following tables present a comparison of the number of posts, appreciations, comments and distribution in April, May and June of 2019 and 2020, for three museums in Bucharest, in the period before the pandemic and during the lockdown period. *Antipa National Museum of Natural History* is one of the most imposing museums in Romania and Eastern Europe, with over 2 million exhibits. It studies biodiversity through collection-based research. Table 2 shows a comparison of the Facebook activity of *Antipa Museum* in 2020 and 2019.

**Table 2. Number of posts, likes, comments, share on the Facebook page of “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History**

	No. posts	No. likes	No. comments	No. share
June 2020	37	4780	121	1228
June 2019	55	7859	187	2306
May 2020	49	5568	160	1878
May 2019	36	2744	74	696
April 2020	37	4527	70	1113
April 2019	27	4527	70	1113
Total 2020	123	14875	351	4219
Total 2019	118	15130	331	4115

Source: Authors 'processing based on “Antipa” National Museum of Natural History Facebook page.

Prior to the lockdown period, the “Grigore Antipa” National Museum of Natural History was quite active on this social network. According to table 2, the number of posts, appraisals, comments and distributions, from April, May and June of 2020 is slightly higher compared to 2019. The National Museum of Art of Romania, founded in 1948, includes collections of Romanian, European and Oriental art. In addition it carries out educational programs & projects dedicated to schools, adults and families. Table 3 shows a comparison of its activity on Facebook in 2020 and 2019.

**Table 3. Number of posts, likes, comments, share on the Facebook page of National Museum of Art of Romania**

	No. posts	No. likes	No. comments	No. share
June 2020	32	4512	81	1117
June 2019	9	1098	5	51
May 2020	42	6738	147	2459
May 2019	23	623	6	138
April 2020	40	7528	194	2459
April 2019	15	601	14	164
Total 2020	114	1877	422	5813
Total 2019	47	2322	25	373

Source: Authors 'processing based on National Museum of Art of Romania Facebook page.

According to Table 3, there may be a significant increase in the number of posts, appreciations, comments and distributions in the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 due to the fact that museum representatives have to be closer to people during the lockdown period, by increasing the number of posts.

“Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum, founded in 1936, is an open-air museum, located on the shores of Herastrau Lake. It presents the life of the village from different parts of the country. Table 4 shows a comparison of the Facebook activity of “Dimitrie Gusti” National Village Museum, in 2020 and 2019.

**Table 4. Number of posts, likes, comments, shared on the Facebook page of "Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum**

	No. posts	No. likes	No. comments	No. share
June 2020	59	13424	201	1640
June 2019	26	2615	30	150
May 2020	88	12960	395	2265
May 2019	10	1003	68	96
April 2020	110	23070	557	4928
April 2019	5	290	6	273
Total 2020	257	49454	1153	8833
Total 2019	51	3908	104	273

Source: Authors 'processing based on "Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum Facebook page.

According to Table 4, "Dimitrie Gusti" National Village Museum has intensified its activity on social network in the context of pandemic and lockdown. There is a significant increase in number of posts, appreciations, comments and distributions.

#### 6.4 Digital Innovation in Theatres

Theatre institutions have started broadcasting recordings of performances and rehearsals through the social networking or video streaming platform, and in some cases, through local television stations. It should be noted that watching online theatre performances imposes different limits on the public experience. On the one hand, the technical quality is poor, respectively the image quality is affected by the distribution channels, the sound is captured from the only source. Despite these difficulties, theatres launched the shows that were scheduled for the premiere, but also shows from previous seasons. In addition to these solutions, various special activities for children were carried out (interactive workshops designed especially for the introduction into the world of theatre). Theatres have developed various virtual platforms to promote the cultural product. Within these institutions, consumers' interest can be expressed by the appraisal, as well as by appreciations, comments and distribution of all posts (Table 5).

**Table 5. Number of likes on the Facebook pages of some museums in Bucharest**

Theatre name	Number of likes on Facebook
Masca Theatre	11 397
Bulandra Theatre	52 426
Nottara Theatre	23 816

Source: Authors 'processing based on theatres Facebook pages.

The following tables present a comparison of the number of posts, appreciations, comments and distributions in April, May and June of 2019 and 2020, for three theatres in Bucharest, in the period before the pandemic and the lockdown period.



*Masca Theater*, founded in 1990, is the only theatre of gesture, body expression and pantomime in Romania. Table 6 shows a comparison of the Facebook activity of the Mask theater, in 2020 and 2019.

**Table 6. Number of posts, likes, comments, share on Masca Theatre' Facebook page**

	No. posts	No. likes	No. comments	No. share
June 2020	85	5293	59	322
June 2019	23	574	15	48
May 2020	90	4816	149	507
May 2019	24	1292	37	77
April 2020	72	2061	287	334
April 2019	16	374	43	15
Total 2020	247	12170	495	1163
Total 2019	63	2240	95	140

Source: Authors 'processing based on Masca Theatre Facebook page.

According to Table 6, during the lockdown, *Masca Theater* was with the public through frequent posts on the social network, but also through the distribution of the number of people. *Bulandra Theater* was founded in 1947, being the first state theatre in Romania. After only 10 years of performances, the troupe of actors of the theatre is composed of over 100 people. In 1995 and 2008, the theatre organized *the Festival Union of European Theatres*. Table 7 shows a comparison of the Facebook activity of the Bulandra theatre, in 2020 and 2019.

**Table 7. Number of posts, likes, comments, share on the Facebook page Bulandra Theatre**

	No. posts	No. likes	No. comments	No. share
June 2020	180	22181	974	2444
June 2019	23	735	28	43
May 2020	155	24438	786	3987
May 2019	24	1460	94	74
April 2020	48	5730	241	1228
April 2019	16	486	63	24
Total 2020	383	52349	2001	7659
Total 2019	63	2681	185	141

Source: Authors 'processing based on Bulandra Theater Facebook page.

According to Table 7, there is a significant increase in the Facebook activities of *Bulandra Theater*, and this increase is quantified both by the increase in the number of posts in 2020 compared to 2019, and the increase in the number of distribution, comments and appreciations. *Nottara Theater*, founded in 1947, is in the top of public preferences in Bucharest and has adapted its offer of shows, integrating a series of comedies in the repertoire. Table 8 shows a comparison of the Facebook activity of the Nottara theatre, in 2020 and 2019.

**Table 8. Number of posts, likes, comments, share on the Facebook page Nottara Theatre**

	No. posts	No. likes	No. comments	No. share
June 2020	59	2653	442	646
June 2019	23	1023	105	198
May 2020	65	2924	800	753
May 2019	21	1244	224	210
April 2020	62	2096	213	801
April 2019	24	1150	208	354
Total 2020	186	7673	1455	2200
Total 2019	68	3417	537	762

Source: Authors 'processing based on Nottara Theater Facebook page.

According to Table 8, *Nottara Theater* intensified its activity in the online environment during the lockdown period, through a significant increase in the number of online posts.

## 7. Conclusions

The crisis caused by COVID-19 is unprecedented, both in Romania and globally, affecting the routine of people, the economy of states, human resources and the pace of public services. The restrictive measures that have been imposed to limit the spread of the virus have affected all economic fields in general, but also the CCS. In the context of this pandemic, in addition to the measures taken by the central authority and civil society solidarity, cultural institutions have developed various methods and strategies to combat the side effects caused by the pandemic, as well as to maintain a close relationship with their public. The response of the institutions was varied, depending on the infrastructure and human resources available.

While libraries have benefited from online databases and archives, some museums have had virtual tours that have been promoted more intensively, and music institutions have been able to rely on the interaction between their audience and musical performance. It can be concluded that both in museums and in theatres, there has been an increase in the activity on social networks, especially on Facebook, where there were more posts, more comments, more appreciations and more distributions. Museum and theatre staff wanted to be with their audience during the lockdown, so they stepped up the number of posts.

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