

Article

Universities, Culture, and Social Media: Enhancing Engagement and Community Through Digital Strategies

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Abstract: In the digital era, social networks play a crucial role in promoting university cultural events and enhancing accessibility, interaction, and student engagement. This study examines the impact of the communication strategies employed by the West University of Timisoara (UVT) to promote the initiative “At UVT, Culture is Capital” within the framework of Timisoara 2023—European Capital of Culture. This research employs a mixed methodology, combining a quantitative analysis of the performance of Facebook and Instagram posts with a qualitative examination of communication strategies. The results reveal that, despite Generation Z’s preference for visual platforms like TikTok and Instagram, Facebook continues to be an effective channel for promoting university cultural events. This effectiveness stems from trust in the information shared and the strengthened community surrounding the university. Key factors contributing to the campaign’s success included the prominence of guest speakers, high-quality visual and textual content, and the organization of interactive giveaway campaigns. There was also a notable increase in student participation in events and an enhanced sense of belonging to the university community. The findings suggest incorporating more dynamic media formats, such as reels and stories, to boost engagement and explore emerging platforms favored by younger audiences. This research contributes to understanding how universities can effectively leverage social media to promote cultural events and foster a more engaged academic community.



Academic Editor: Andreu Casero-Ripollés

Received: 23 April 2025

Revised: 22 May 2025

Accepted: 27 May 2025

Published: 30 May 2025

Citation: Bader, S., & Condache, A. (2025). Universities, Culture, and Social Media: Enhancing Engagement and Community Through Digital Strategies. *Journalism and Media*, 6(2), 80. <https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia6020080>

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Keywords: cultural communication; social media in cultural events; European Capital of Culture; student engagement in culture; Generation Z; digital strategy

1. Introduction and Working Hypotheses

The influence of social networks extends to universities in all aspects, from learning to social communication, including cultural projects, as in the context of “At UVT Culture is the Capital”, which was studied in this article. One of the primary reasons for promoting events via university social networks is their accessibility and visibility. Posts can reach a vast audience, effectively overcoming geographical and temporal barriers. The real-time interaction facilitated by these platforms enables two-way communication between organizers and participants, which in turn stimulates active student involvement and fosters a stronger sense of belonging in the university community (Ladogina et al., 2020). Moreover, social networks provide an inclusive virtual environment where diverse perspectives and ideas can be shared, promoting cultural diversity and strengthening community bonds (Kim & Kim, 2017). Additionally, analyzing social network data allows for a precise evaluation of cultural projects, identifying their strengths and weaknesses. This insight is crucial for refining communication strategies and informing future decision-making.

Recognizing that social media plays a vital role in fostering meaningful experiences and vibrant communities within university cultural projects, the West University of Timișoara (UVT) has acknowledged the unique characteristics of this dynamic digital space. Consequently, it has implemented several effective strategies to enhance the visibility of the project “At UVT, Culture is the Capital” and to actively engage students with the proposed activities. The case of the West University of Timișoara holds general interest for other universities that aim to organize similar large-scale campaigns over extended periods. By analyzing UVT’s approach, higher education institutions can gain valuable insights into best practices for long-term cultural engagement through digital platforms.

This study focuses on three interrelated variables: digital communication strategies, social media engagement, and student participation in university-led cultural events. Social media engagement refers to the interactive behaviors of users—likes, comments, shares, and follows—on platforms like Facebook and Instagram, which serve as proxies for interest, resonance, and reach. In this context, digital communication strategies encompass the design, content, tone, and format of social media messages disseminated by the university to promote its cultural campaigns. These strategies are increasingly tailored to appeal to Generation Z, a cohort known for its preference for visual, dynamic, and participatory online content. Lastly, student participation is conceptualized not only as physical attendance at events but also as digital involvement, including interaction with posts, sharing content, and co-creating media. Together, these variables shape the effectiveness of university communication efforts and reflect broader trends in how higher education institutions foster cultural engagement and a sense of community through digital platforms.

This study explores the role of social media communication in cultural campaigns targeting students. It examines the effectiveness of different digital engagement strategies, the type of content that resonates most with students, and how social media facilitates interaction and participation in university-led cultural initiatives. Another key area of focus is the intersection between cultural interests and the ways in which Generation Z engages with them. Understanding how younger audiences consume, interact with, and contribute to cultural projects on social media provides essential insights into shaping future initiatives that align with their preferences, behaviors, and digital habits.

This study builds on previous research on digital cultural engagement in higher education by demonstrating how student involvement in social media strategy not only enhances digital literacy (Selwyn, 2016) but also fosters cultural agency in a real-world institutional context. Unlike traditional digital learning models that emphasize passive consumption, our project aligns with constructivist pedagogy by involving students as active co-creators of cultural narratives (Kolb, 1984; Jenkins et al., 2009).

This article aims to showcase how the project’s communication team crafted a communication plan to capture the attention of young audiences on the significance of culture via Facebook and Instagram. Cultural events were held in the context of Timișoara’s designation as the European Capital of Culture in 2023, with promotional efforts primarily focused on these social media platforms. In 2023, UVT had not yet established a TikTok channel, and while a YouTube channel was launched in the latter half of the cultural year, it was seldom utilized. The main difficulty in our research is that there are no other studies on a similar subject: on the one hand, because the context was unique, namely a cultural project with more than one hundred events held by a university inside a larger context of European Cultural of Culture; on the other hand, the specificity of following the outcomes of this project in social media. Therefore, there are a limited number of direct references in the literature on similar cultural projects, and we had to conceive our work hypothesis and methodology. Although the concept of the European Capital of Culture is not new, existing since 1985 (Hudec & Džupka, 2016), nor is the commitment of this European project to

address youth involvement (Pekkarinen, 2023), the long cultural campaign of the university was a new approach, and consequently, studying it required an adequate methodology.

This study contributes to the growing literature on digital cultural promotion in higher education by showcasing a collaborative model in which students are not merely recipients of knowledge but are active producers of cultural content. In contrast to conventional top-down promotional strategies, the approach adopted here aligns with calls for more participatory and reflexive cultural communication (Jenkins et al., 2009; Holdgaard & Klasttrup, 2014). Additionally, by embedding this initiative within the framework of Hull's tenure as the UK City of Culture, the project challenges common critiques in the ECoC literature regarding the ephemerality and exclusivity of cultural legacies (Garcia & Cox, 2013; Palmer, 2004), suggesting that digital engagement through education can provide more inclusive and enduring cultural outcomes.

The primary hypotheses we aimed to explore were related to the impact of posts on these two social media platforms:

I 1: Students prefer discovering cultural events within the university via social networks rather than through traditional methods like posters and banners.

I 2: Building an online community around a cultural project can strengthen students' sense of belonging and encourage active engagement.

I 3: There is a correlation between the fame of guests at promoted events and the amount of user interaction.

I 4: The social media platforms that universities frequently use effectively promote cultural events to young people, even if they typically spend more time on other social networks than those used by their universities.

Literature Review

Numerous studies have confirmed that students spend a significant amount of time on social media (e.g., Wang et al., 2011; Perrin, 2015). While prolonged interaction with social media can lead to negative effects (e.g., Glogocheski, 2015), responsible use of these platforms often produces positive outcomes (Gonzales et al., 2019). On the one hand, social networks facilitate communication between students and faculty, which many students find more spontaneous than traditional email correspondence. On the other hand, these platforms can also serve as effective pedagogical tools for engaging with students (Al-Bahrani et al., 2015; Junco, 2014).

Universities are increasingly recognizing the importance of social media in engaging with students. Social media facilitates closer collaboration with instructors, enables faster information exchange, and helps students develop skills relevant to the job market (Legaree, 2015). Additionally, these platforms play a crucial role in universities' marketing campaigns, as they aim to attract both domestic and international students. Social media serves as an essential channel for communicating information about curricula, logistical details, and research programs offered by institutions. By leveraging social media, universities seek to strengthen their brand and make it as appealing as possible to prospective students (Rekettye & Pozsgai, 2015).

Another way universities utilize social media is to promote extracurricular activities for students. It is essential to prioritize the promotion of these activities because several studies indicate that they positively impact students' socialization and integration into the academic community, help them acquire skills and knowledge, and even enhance their academic performance (Lee et al., 2016; Harb et al., 2024). Whether the activities are sporting, social, or cultural, they are likely to attract more students if they are effectively promoted on social media.

A study by Hester et al. examines the role of online communication in the relationship between campus art museums and Generation Z students. The authors argue that museums should promote events and exhibitions on social networks in a way that resonates with Generation Z. They suggest fostering an interactive relationship with students through images and selfies taken in the museum, thereby creating an environment where young people feel they can socialize. This, in turn, encourages them to share their experiences on social media, enhancing their interest in curating an online image. However, the authors also highlight a stagnation in museum students' interest, underscoring the importance of tailored communication strategies. Furthermore, many cultural institutions are exploring diverse communication channels to capture the attention of digital natives. For instance, TikTok has emerged as a platform utilized by some cultural institutions, although it is still not widely adopted, and its impact has not been thoroughly analyzed by researchers (Carignani et al., 2024). In contrast, there has been greater interest in other platforms, such as Facebook, where cultural institutions have confirmed their effectiveness in promoting cultural events. A study conducted in 2011 by Rebelo, Márcia, and Alturas, Bráulio concluded that Facebook serves as a valuable tool for promoting cultural events (Rebelo & Alturas, 2011).

In the context of the European Capitals of Culture, promoting organized events and showcasing cities as attractive tourist and cultural destinations are priority issues (Liu, 2014). Since 2016, online promotion has become essential (Coman et al., 2021). The target audience for these promotions includes local residents, national audiences, and international tourists who may visit the city during the time it holds the title (Lamza-Maronic et al., 2011). To date, few studies have analyzed the impact of communicating cultural activities among students from a qualitative or quantitative perspective. Additionally, research on how communication plans are developed to promote cultural activities in these contexts is lacking. Even fewer studies have examined how universities communicate in relation to their status as European Capitals of Culture.

2. Materials and Methods

To analyze the impact of UVT's social media communication strategies, we adopted a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The quantitative component involved systematically tracking engagement metrics—such as likes, comments, shares, reach, and impressions—on Facebook and Instagram posts related to the campaigns “At UVT, Culture is Capital”, “Ideas that Change the World”, and “Connect to the Future” from February to December 2023. These metrics were extracted directly from the platforms' analytics tools, consistent with the established practices in digital communication research (Moro et al., 2016; Molyneux, 2015). For the qualitative component, we conducted thematic content analysis of selected posts, comments, and visual materials to identify patterns in communication styles, audience interaction, and narrative framing (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This dual-layered methodology allowed us to triangulate the findings and draw nuanced conclusions about digital engagement and cultural participation among university students, following best practices in mixed-methods research in media studies (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

Our research is grounded in a quantitative analysis of social media data, specifically by monitoring the number of followers, likes, shares, and comments on Facebook and Instagram from February to December 2023. In addition to this quantitative approach, we employed a qualitative analysis of an online campaign aimed at young people. We focused our examination on the campaigns “At UVT Culture is the Capital”, “Ideas that Change the World”, and “Connect to the Future”, assessing both the number of likes and shares, as well as analyzing comments on Facebook. Similarly, we evaluated the impact of

these campaigns on Instagram. We analyzed 143 posts on Facebook and 143 on Instagram. The resulting graphs enabled us to identify trends, correlations, and disparities, which we utilized to qualitatively validate our research hypotheses. Since this study aimed to track the overall impact of these cultural events on users, no exclusion criteria were used; however, we took into account all posts related to each event in the quantitative analysis.

This research focuses on the Facebook and Instagram channels used by UVT to promote cultural events on social media, as these are the main online communication channels used by the university. UVT does not have an X account, and the university's TikTok account was not used to promote cultural events in 2023. Additionally, the YouTube channel created by UVT for cultural events has been used less consistently than the Facebook and Instagram accounts.

2.1. Cultural Events Background

In 2023, Timișoara was designated as the European Capital of Culture, with the West University of Timișoara playing a key role in organizing cultural events throughout the city. The university received financial support from Timișoara City Hall, Timiș County Council, the Ministry of Culture, and various private partners. Throughout the year and in the years leading up to this honor, UVT arranged hundreds of cultural events aimed at engaging the local community, tourists, and students from pre-university education. The central theme guiding these events was reflection, which sought to create cultural environments fostering reflective thinking, critical analysis, active listening, and meaningful dialogue. In this spirit, the university hosted three main types of interactive conferences and dialogues:

1. "At UVT, Culture is Capital", focusing on discussions with writers, philosophers, historians, literary critics, theater critics, directors, and actors.
2. "Connected to the Future", featuring scientists who presented topics from the sciences, such as physics, mathematics, spatial engineering, biology, neuroscience, economics, and architecture, in an accessible manner to the public.
3. "Ideas that Change the World" brought together internationally recognized guests whose influential ideas and public stances have a global impact, including Nobel laureates and widely translated thinkers.

Additionally, the university supported the production of a series of documentary films titled "Timișoara. The Secret Map: People and Places". These films have been broadcast on local and national television and presented in cinemas, museums, universities, high schools, and bookstores.

In addition to these activities, various events exclusively for students and pupils were organized, including artist talks, debates, film screenings, dialogues, cultural treasure hunts, creative camps, and guided tours. According to the organizers' estimates, between 3000 and 4000 pupils and students participated in the cultural events organized by UVT in 2023, showcasing a growing interest among young people in experiences that extend beyond traditional formal education. To ensure accessibility for diverse audiences, these events were held at various venues. Activities took place not only in university halls but also in high schools, aiming to bridge the gap between the university and prospective students. Additionally, alternative spaces throughout the city, such as libraries, parks, and other public areas, have transformed into vibrant meeting points for cultural engagement.

2.2. Communication Plan Background

A comprehensive communication plan was devised because UVT's cultural events are designed to engage a diverse audience, ranging from corporate stakeholders to independent sectors and educators, seniors, and youth. This plan employed a variety of promotional

channels, including online press, radio, local and national television, posters and flyers distributed at strategic locations throughout the city, and social media outreach.

The team responsible for conceptualizing and executing the communication strategy comprised both communication specialists and students, who helped craft engaging messages tailored to their peers. The communication process commenced with a press conference where cultural offerings were introduced. Throughout the project and subsequently, numerous features were featured on local (Radio România Cultural, Radio Guerilla, Radio France International, etc.) and national (TVR International, TVR Cultural, Digi 24, etc.) media outlets.

Traditional communication channels were complemented by a steady flow of press releases, which garnered attention from both local (Timpolis, Banatul Azi, Ziua de Vest, etc.) and national (G4 Media, Agerpres, ziare.com, etc.) press outlets, depending on the significance of the event. Additionally, the project garnered support from various niche publications, such as Dilema Veche, Observatorul Cultural, Orizont, and România Literară, as well as Scena9, Cultura la dubă, and Revista 22, which published articles highlighting major events.

For both indoor and outdoor promotion, UVT created and utilized posters, flyers, banners, and roll-up displays featuring project-specific visuals to promote the events. They installed mesh banners in high-traffic areas throughout the city, and more significant events were advertised on several digital screens.

In terms of online promotion, tailored content was developed for Facebook and Instagram accounts, titled “La UVT, Cultura este Capitală” (At UVT, Culture is Capital) and “Universitatea de Vest din Timișoara” (West University of Timisoara). All events were promoted through posts and event listings, with follow-up content shared later. Many of these posts and events were sponsored to increase their reach. Additionally, interactive campaigns were organized on social media, such as giveaway contests for larger events. Cross-promotion was also practiced through partnerships with various cultural institutions in the city, libraries, theaters, and the Timis County School Inspectorate.

Content included videos, such as after-movies documenting the events, while panels, debates, and conferences were filmed and subsequently shared on the YouTube channel “La UVT, Cultura este Capitală” and the associated Facebook page. Over fifteen podcasts in the series “Recomandări la Înălțime” (High Recommendations) featuring guests from the three conference series were also produced and disseminated on the YouTube channel and social media pages dedicated to cultural events. Data were collected through the synthesis provided by the Facebook and Instagram admin pages.

2.3. Qualitative Analysis of the Online Youth Campaign

UVT’s communication strategy for cultural events in 2023 adopted a complex approach aimed at various target groups, with particular emphasis on student audiences. In addition to events specifically designed for young people, even those open to the broader local community employed online communication strategies tailored to attract students.

2.4. Facebook

While the Facebook platform may not be the top choice for Generation Z, who tend to favor more visual and dynamic platforms like Instagram and TikTok, it still plays a significant role in the cultural communication efforts of the West University of Timișoara (UVT). [Teixeira et al. \(2023\)](#) affirmed that Facebook remains a valuable marketing tool for Gen Z. The UVT Facebook page has proven to be an effective asset for cultural marketing, attracting an audience primarily composed of students and alumni of the university. They find it a reliable information channel for events organized by the university, regardless of

their general digital platform preference. Therefore, even though Generation Z does not spend extensive time on Facebook for personal use, it remains a trusted source for relevant information regarding the university's academic and cultural activities. Its value lies in consolidating information in one location, allowing for quick access to events, announcements, and initiatives. Furthermore, the UVT Facebook page boasts a strong community of over 55,000 followers, mainly students, alumni, and academic community members.

A Facebook page dedicated exclusively to cultural events was created in 2022, named "At UVT, Culture is Capital". This page has experienced organic growth and, by 2023, surpassed 1800 followers, now exceeding 2000. It provides more content related to cultural events than the main "West University of Timișoara" page, which also features information about various other events. When a cultural event is initially promoted on the UVT home page, it is subsequently shared on the "At UVT, Culture is Capital" page to reach audiences interested in cultural activities. Conversely, events first announced on the "At UVT, Culture is Capital" page are also shared on the university's homepage, ensuring visibility among both the academic community and the general public.

To enhance clarity and avoid redundancy, teaser posts and introductory materials for cultural events are no longer duplicated across the two pages. This decision aims to create a consistent communication experience for its followers. While the "At UVT, Culture is Capital" page focuses on detailed content related to cultural events, the main UVT page adopts a broader perspective, providing information about various activities organized by the university. The entire study design was developed from scratch by the communications team, which designed the study stages from post-design to final data collection and interpretation.

Generation Z prefers concise messages on social networks that adopt an informal and friendly style. Both pages adapt their content to appeal to this demographic: the text is structured in short fragments for easy readability, and the tone is friendly and accessible. The narratives promote interactive and thought-provoking events while also promising enjoyable, relaxing, and novel experiences, in contrast to academic events that can seem inaccessible. Each post fosters an atmosphere that emphasizes acquiring new information while engaging in quality entertainment. The text is often accompanied by emoticons that create a playful tone and, in some cases, a humorous one. Emoticons related to arts or culture are used, along with those that express enthusiasm, convey a friendly atmosphere, or suggest a charming ambiance.

The pre-event postings highlight the use of dynamic and visually striking graphic elements designed to appeal to a generation accustomed to intense visual stimulation (Kullolli & Trebicka, 2023). This visual communication offers a fresh reinterpretation of architectural symbols representative of Timișoara and cultural symbols from sculptures. For instance, the conference series focused on science is promoted using graphic elements that reproduce Michelangelo's famous depiction of the hand of Adam from the Sistine Chapel. In terms of the color palette, combinations that convey energy, freshness, creativity, and enthusiasm are utilized, such as blue and white or yellow and white. Photographs of well-known guests are also included, and the combination of their notoriety with graphic elements enhances the impact of the posts on social media.

Post-event updates aim to capture the atmosphere of events by sharing photos taken by professional photographers accompanied by brief descriptions. These posts promote the image of dynamic and interactive gatherings that emphasize collaboration and the exchange of ideas. The photos showcase social interactions among the attendees, highlighting their active participation and creating a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Each post includes images of large audiences and portraits of young participants who are smiling, asking

questions, or making comments. Additionally, the project's branding is prominently featured and integrated into the content, linking it to the overall ambiance of the events.

2.5. Instagram

The content shared on Facebook has also been featured on two Instagram accounts with the same names as the Facebook pages used by UVT to promote cultural events. The Instagram account "At UVT, Culture is Capital" has 593 followers, while the "West University of Timisoara" account has 8286 followers. Both accounts have seen a slight increase in followers compared to 2023. Similar to their Facebook counterparts, the "At UVT, Culture is Capital" account primarily shares cultural content. In contrast, the other account also posts various content relevant to the academic and student community. Given that Instagram prioritizes visual content, the promotion of events is enhanced through eye-catching graphics and photographs taken at those events. Additionally, Instagram's algorithms use hashtags (Erz et al., 2018), which is why most posts on this platform include the hashtag #lauvtculturaestecapitala.

Most Instagram posts are similar to those on Facebook, but they are tailored to fit Instagram's unique style, as explained in the Methods section. The text is typically short and fragmented, adopting an informal and friendly tone. Light-hearted emoticons are often used to enhance the text flow and add a dynamic touch. Additionally, attractive graphics and a wide variety of photos are key components of these posts. Both Facebook and Instagram primarily target young audiences and their content is designed to appeal to this demographic.

A series of successful giveaway campaigns were conducted on this platform to boost interactions with followers. One notable campaign occurred after Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Nadia Murad's lecture. Conference attendees were encouraged to share a photo or selfie from the event using a set of relevant hashtags, such as #NadiaMuradUVT and #lauvtculturaestecapitala, along with a brief, creative text about their experience. Engaging with cultural events through selfies has been a widespread practice in some museums for several years (Hariyanto, 2020). Winners of the campaign received prizes, including books written and signed by Nadia Murad and tickets to the Flight Festival, a well-known music festival in Timisoara. The campaign's objectives were twofold: to keep the memory of the event alive among followers and to promote awareness of the conference within their communities. Additionally, the campaign aimed to demonstrate to the student community that attending a culturally focused conference is a "cool" and desirable activity for their age group.

2.6. Use of Video Materials

In 2023, UVT's utilization of video materials to promote organized cultural events was only partially leveraged to its full potential. The significance of video content on social media platforms, including those that do not primarily focus on video, such as Facebook, is considerable. As early as 2019, it was projected that 80 percent of the content on Facebook would be video (Karol & Norman, 2019). In conjunction with the Facebook and Instagram pages titled "At UVT, Culture is Capital", a YouTube channel with the same name was also created. This channel featured recordings of conferences and discussions held during the three series of events. However, due to Meta's algorithms favoring the distribution of videos uploaded directly to the platform, the video content from the YouTube channel was duplicated on the Facebook page "At UVT, Culture is Capital". Some of these posts garnered a significant number of views, thanks in part to the fame of the featured guests. For instance, a recording of a lecture by Cristian Presură, a physicist well-known among young audiences for his popular science videos, received 2600 views organically on Facebook.

One effective way to promote cultural events is through a series of podcasts titled “High Recommendations”. Each podcast features a one-on-one dialogue between a guest and a moderator, lasting approximately twenty minutes. These podcasts aim to make the content of the conferences and discussions accessible to younger audiences while also providing cultural recommendations from the guests. The podcasts are initially shared on the “West University of Timișoara” Facebook page and later uploaded to the “At UVT, Culture is Capital” Facebook page. Most episodes receive a promotional boost, resulting in view counts ranging from 22,000 to 30,000. The highest number of views, reaching 64,000, was for an interview with Dumitru Prunariu, a well-known figure among young people as he is the only Romanian to have flown into space.

Although reels and story videos have already shown strong performance in various campaign types due to their ability to generate interactions and significantly enhance organic reach quickly, UVT’s social media channels have not utilized this content consistently to promote cultural events. These videos have appeared sporadically, primarily as a method of presenting giveaway campaign draws. As a result, reels and stories were not used to capture the atmosphere of events until 2024.

3. Results

To obtain conclusive data, we analyzed the number of likes, comments, shares, interactions, and reach of Facebook posts and the likes, impressions, and reach of Instagram posts.

On Facebook, the best-performing organic posts are as follows:

The highest impact recorded was for the post-event featuring Ana Blandiana, a Romanian poet and activist, widely known for her resistance to communism and all political authoritarian attempts as a respected voice speaking about social and political actual issues, on 7 June 2023 (Figure 1: FB Impact at UVT—Culture is Capital). This highlights the public’s interest in literary-themed events involving authors’ interactions with their audiences. The guest’s reputation also plays a significant role in the positive outcomes of this post. Although Ana Blandiana does not write literary genres typically favored by Generation Z, such as graphic novels or manga, she remains a prominent figure in the media. News about her literary work and the awards she receives are widely shared on social networks.

The post with the highest number of reactions featured a special meeting with Adriana Babeți on 18 February 2023 (Figure 2: FB chart: Ideas That Change the World). Adriana Babeți is a well-known literary figure in Timișoara and across Romania, contributing to high visibility for the events she participates in, particularly on social media. This particular event was likely to attract attention due to its interactive multicultural theme, which included tastings of Central European cuisine as described in various regional novels. Additionally, the large number of reactions can be attributed to the event being part of the official program for the opening of TM2023. This ensured visibility across various media channels. Furthermore, the University of Timișoara included additional information about the event in their post, allowing many interested individuals to interact with it and find all the necessary details about the meeting with Adriana Babeți. Initially, people learned about the event through various sources, including the press, the Facebook and Instagram pages of the City Hall of Timișoara, the TM2023 Association, and the official TM2023 website.

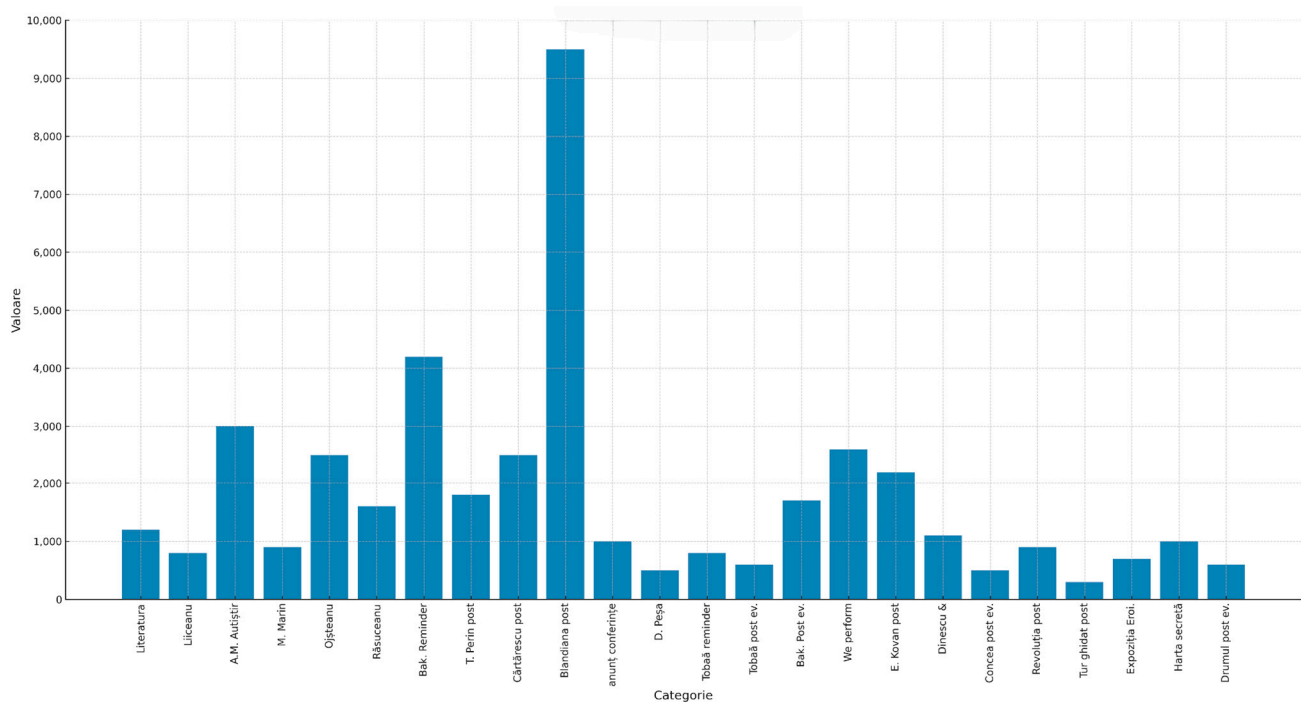


Figure 1. FB Impact at UVT—Culture is Capital.

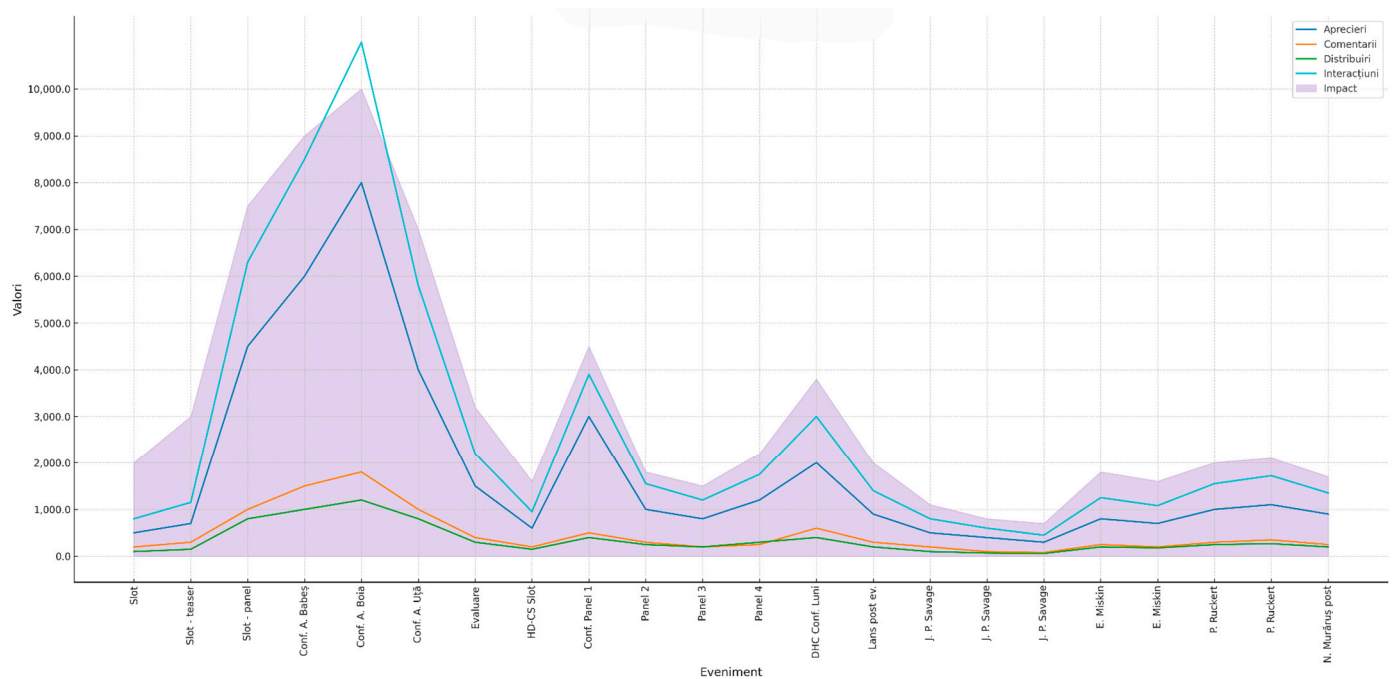


Figure 2. FB reactions—Ideas That Change the World.

The post-event discussion featuring Orhan Pamuk on 1 April 2023 received the highest number of comments in the “Ideas That Change the World” category (see Figure 3). The event, attended by a Nobel Laureate in Literature, was moderated by Radu Paraschivescu, one of Romania’s most prominent contemporary writers. The notable presence of these guests undoubtedly drew significant attention, especially since the dialogue between the two authors was covered by several national publications and featured on multiple national TV stations. The event garnered substantial interest on social media, as many attendees shared their experiences on their personal pages. Notably, this gathering marked the highest attendance at a cultural event organized by UVT in 2023, with an estimated

1000 participants. The high profile of both writers, particularly the internationally acclaimed Orhan Pamuk, and the politically charged topics they discussed sparked extensive conversation in the comments section. Additionally, several commenters expressed their frustration over the rapid sellout of online booking spots for the event, highlighting demand that exceeded expectations.

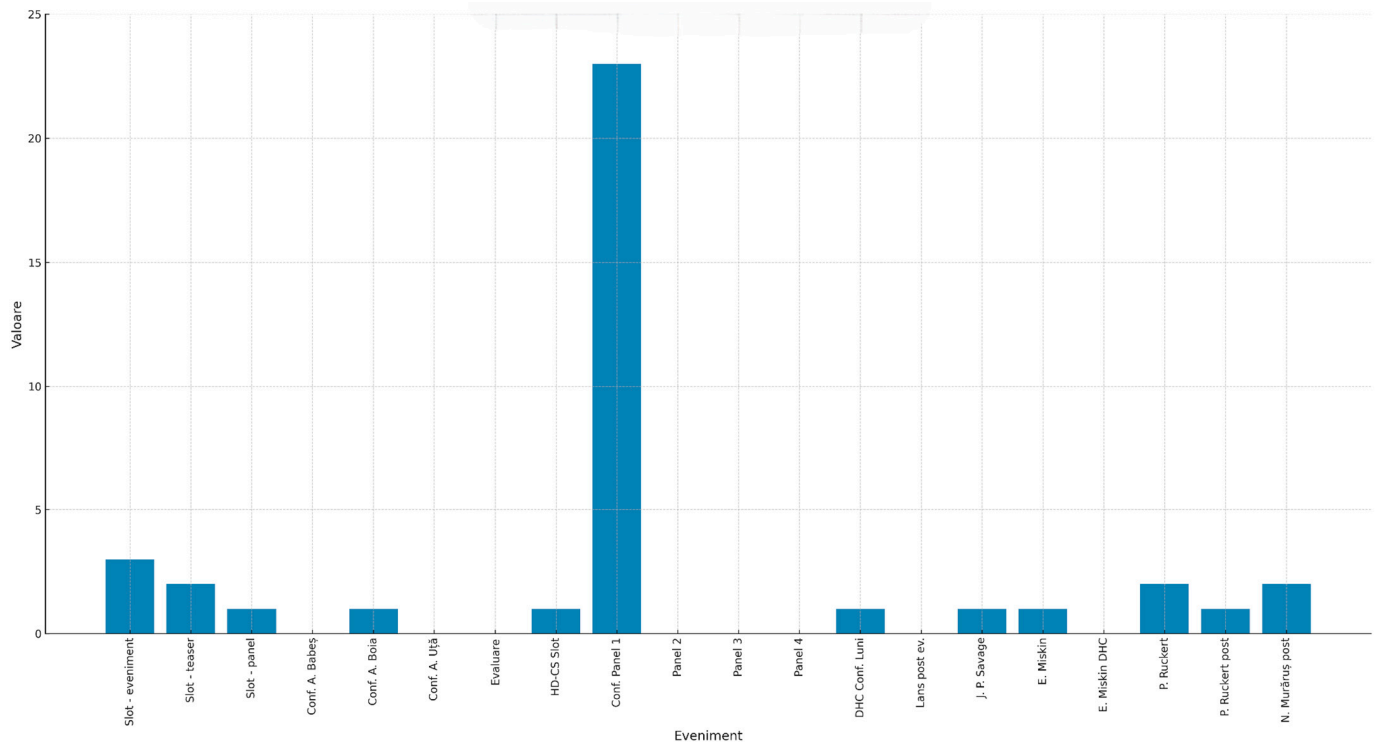


Figure 3. FB comments—Ideas That Change the World.

From February to June 2023, the page grew from 950 likes to 1269, resulting in a total of 1524 followers. This represents a 33 percent organic growth in a relatively short period. This growth coincided with the first half of the year when TM2023 events occurred, leading to the pages managed by UVT to distribute content and engage with their followers consistently. Notably, 74.4% of the audience is female, while men make up 25.6%, indicating that the content primarily appeals to female audiences.

The primary cities of the followers include Timișoara, Bucharest, Arad, Lugoj, Jimbolia, Dumbrăvița, Tecuci, London, and Cluj-Napoca. The percentage distribution by country is as follows: Romania—96.3%, Canada—0.7%, Germany—0.6%, Austria—0.3%, United States—0.3%, Algeria—0.2%, France—0.2%, Moldova—0.2%, Serbia—0.2%, and Spain—0.2%. Given that the UVT pages have a local focus, it is understandable that Timișoara ranks first. The presence of nearby localities like Dumbrăvița, Arad, Lugoj, and Jimbolia indicates that the promoted events attracted attendees who could easily travel to Timișoara. The list also features two major urban centers, Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca, which are significant university hubs in Romania and culturally vibrant cities. Except for Algeria, all the listed countries are known to have a sizable Romanian diaspora. Furthermore, Moldova and Serbia are notable for contributing a significant number of international students to the West University of Timișoara.

The page showcased events from three series: “At UVT Culture is Capital”, “Ideas that Change the World”, and “Connect to the Future”. Additionally, it highlighted anniversaries such as Constantin Brâncuși and Piano Day, along with other activities like the Treasure Hunt. These elements contributed to the steady growth of the page.

The Instagram channel “lauvtculturaestecapitala”, despite having a modest following of 310 followers, has significantly impacted views and reach. This indicates that the audience positively engages with the content shared. In contrast, the two Facebook pages managed by UVT sponsored numerous posts and events focused on cultural happenings, particularly those anticipated to draw large audiences. However, the Instagram channel dedicated to cultural events has grown entirely through organic means.

Featured events generated positive engagement, leading to a significant number of likes and impressions (see Figure 4). However, the number of post saves was relatively low compared to the overall reach and impressions. Pre-event posts typically garnered modest likes, impressions, and reach, while post-event posts saw a higher number of likes and impressions. This suggests an increase in audience interest in both events and related content. Additionally, post-event posts often include photos from the events, which tend to receive more likes on Instagram. Overall, the results for the “At UVT, Culture is Capital” Instagram page were generally positive. However, the use of similar graphics in some posts may account for the relatively lower engagement in certain instances.

Aprecieri, Impresii și Reach

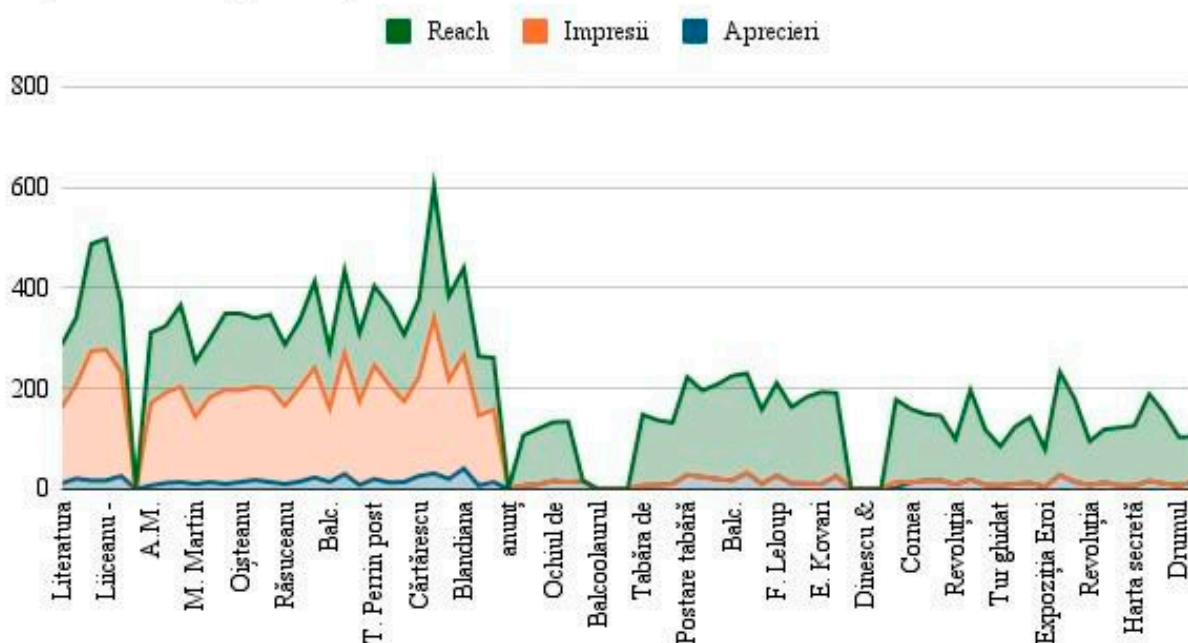


Figure 4. Evolution of the analyzed indicators on the Instagram channel.

The discrepancies in quantitative data between Facebook and Instagram, including views, shares, and comments, highlight the low impact of Instagram. This is surprising, especially considering the common belief that Gen Z frequents Instagram more than other platforms do.

To provide a clearer quantitative understanding of the social media engagement achieved through Facebook and Instagram during the “Culture is Capital” campaign, we computed descriptive statistics for major engagement metrics across all events, as can be seen in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for Facebook campaigns (Feb–Dec 2023).

Platform	Metric	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
FB “Ideas that Change the World”	Likes	22.17	20.00	11.80	6	55
	Comments	4.71	1.00	8.14	1	23
	Shares	3.63	3.00	2.89	1	11
	Interactions	182.33	95.00	215.73	12	782
	Reach	1167.18	632.50	1873.92	152	8630
FB “Connected to Future”	Likes	11.52	8.00	9.89	1	52
	Comments	1.38	1.00	0.52	1	2
	Shares	2.31	1.00	2.95	1	11
	Interactions	56.79	34.50	61.63	3	234
	Reach	996.04	448.00	1888.53	26	9619
FB “At UVT Culture is the Capital”	Likes	400.87	13.00	3365.83	1	29,552
	Comments	1.40	1.00	0.91	1	4
	Shares	3.91	2.00	6.63	1	45
	Interactions	167.52	65.50	222.73	3	1016
	Reach	1256.42	572.50	2243.11	3	15,148

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for Instagram campaigns (Feb–Dec 2023).

Platform	Metric	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Instagram “Ideas that Change the World”	Likes	17.75	16.00	7.42	9	47
	Impressions	166.00	170.50	46.16	90	236
	Reach	142.96	147.50	37.01	79	203
Instagram “Connected to Future”	Likes	12.04	11.00	6.22	3	27
	Impressions	159.70	159.00	37.86	103	239
	Reach	139.11	128.00	40.63	87	256
Instagram “At UVT Culture is the Capital”	Likes	15.06	14.00	7.57	3	41
	Impressions	185.03	186.50	51.26	12	309
	Reach	144.13	138.50	36.54	74	263

Commentary

To ensure clarity in interpreting the descriptive statistics presented in the tables, it is important to define the key metrics used in this analysis. The mean represents the arithmetic average value for each engagement indicator (e.g., likes and comments), offering a general sense of central tendency. The median is the middle value in a ranked data set and is particularly useful in cases where the data may be skewed by outliers. The standard deviation (Std. Dev.) quantifies the amount of variation or dispersion in the data, with higher values indicating greater variability. The minimum (Min) and maximum (Max) values show the lowest and highest recorded figures for each metric, respectively, offering a range of observed engagement levels. These statistical measures are commonly employed in social media analytics and communication research to summarize large data sets and reveal patterns of audience interaction (Field, 2018).

These data reinforce the conclusion that Facebook, although less popular among Gen Z for personal use, continues to be a strong tool for institutional communication due to its

informational reliability and broad follower base. Despite Facebook's variable engagement (particularly affected by high-profile guests), the mean interaction rates on event posts were consistently higher than those on Instagram.

Although favored by younger users, Instagram demonstrated modest engagement levels. While post reach and impressions were relatively consistent, the lower averages of likes and limited post saves suggest that Instagram content could benefit from richer visuals and more consistent use of stories or reels to enhance engagement.

This analysis supports the paper's third and fourth hypotheses: (1) posts associated with renowned guests yield significantly more engagement, and (2) social media platforms not inherently favored by students can still perform well when used strategically.

4. Discussions

The relationship between the working hypotheses and research results was found to be consistent, opening up the possibility of developing a methodology for studying cultural campaigns. While numerous studies have examined the impact of cities recognized as European Capitals of Culture ([Falk & Hagsten, 2017](#); [Campbell, 2011](#)), research on the influence of broad cultural campaigns on young people and the role of universities in facilitating their involvement is limited. Additionally, there is insufficient theoretical background on how universities promote cultural events through social networking sites, particularly for students. This study offers a range of explanations, although they are not exhaustive. A comprehensive methodology can be further developed and adapted to fit the concept of cultural capital, which varies based on the resources invested, the scale of events, and the collaborative efforts of cultural actors involved in promoting these projects.

This study analyses the communication plan of the West University of Timișoara in the context of TM 2023, drawing on relevant literature. It examines how youth events and products are typically promoted on social media and evaluates the effectiveness of the strategies employed by UVT to promote cultural events. In 2023, the UVT did not use TikTok to promote cultural events or create reels or story video content. Instead, the university focused on podcasts and event recordings, using short, engaging texts, fresh and dynamic graphics, and many images from events. Additionally, the strategy incorporates emoticons, hashtags, and giveaway campaigns. While a YouTube channel was used, the primary communication channels were Facebook and Instagram.

The organic growth in the number of followers on the two social media channels mentioned reinforces our first hypothesis (I1). Our analysis indicates that developing an online community centered on a cultural project significantly enhances students' sense of belonging and active engagement, supporting our second hypothesis (I2). Specifically, contests such as Giveaways or Treasure Hunts conducted on Facebook and Instagram generated considerable interest. They observed a significantly higher number of interactions than other posts that simply announced various events.

The analysis revealed several insights regarding a university that organizes cultural events for young people in Timisoara as the European Capital of Culture. It highlighted distinct differences in how these events and products for young people are promoted on social media compared to other types of events:

- Although Facebook is not typically favored by Generation Z, the way UVT utilizes this platform has shown that it can be an effective communication channel.
- To promote events successfully, it is essential to do so in an appealing manner. The reputation of the guests—such as their cultural standing, awards, and presence in public life—plays a significant role in attracting attention to the content being presented.
- While several posts about UVT events were sponsored for greater visibility, the posts that achieved the highest number of reactions and the most significant reach were

those that grew organically. These posts garnered public interest because they featured well-known writers.

- Although students are a primary target audience for UVT, the promotional strategies used also resonated with followers from the Romanian Diaspora and other major cities in Romania.

5. Conclusions

The findings indicate that the most significant impact was achieved through a series of posts that did not rely on ongoing financial promotion. This suggests that the public genuinely appreciates the authenticity of the event. However, the guest's notoriety appeared to be more influential than the event's actual theme, indicating that followers prefer events likely to succeed based on the guest's reputation. Additionally, it is important to recognize that a high-profile guest shares similarities with an influencer. Their public success draws attention; followers value their opinions and are eager to engage with them directly. Notably, events featuring literary guests generated considerably more traffic than those featuring even prestigious figures from the hard sciences. The third and fourth working hypotheses (I3 and I4) are supported by these results, which are illustrated in the graphs included in the paper.

The impact of social media posts after the events was more significant than that of posts made before the events. This can be attributed to the differing nature of the two types of posts: during the pre-event phase, only a poster and an announcement were shared, while the post-event phase featured photos that sparked curiosity.

Additionally, the events attracted interest from various age groups, including those from other cities in the country and even abroad. This suggests that UVT's communication strategy, although primarily aimed at students, successfully engaged a wider audience. The organizers observed that a significant portion of the attendees at some events were over 45 years old, indicating that the project also resonated with individuals outside the intended target demographic.

It is important to note that the European Capital of Culture initiative not only supports the organization of cultural events through invested resources and promotional efforts but also creates a competitive environment for cultural operators. These operators often plan events that target the same audience simultaneously. For instance, on 18 February 2023, between 4:00 PM and 5:30 PM, the West University of Timișoara hosted a conference featuring Peter Sloterdijk, one of the leading contemporary philosophers, whom young people had the opportunity to attend several other events. These included "Tasting Craft Beer and Vinyl Music with Rekabu & Bätz", a theater performance titled "Parallel City. Fabric", and "UnderTones: Street Art Gallery and Electronic Music Party" ([Timisoara, 2023](#)). According to the organizers, Peter Sloterdijk's conference attracted approximately 150 young attendees despite the venue's capacity of 450. While this event may initially seem less appealing compared to something more entertaining, like an electronic music party, it is important to recognize that UVT employed a communication strategy designed to engage young people in its promotion. In addition, hosting an international cultural figure like Sloterdijk makes this event special.

The fourth research hypothesis (I 4) is partially confirmed: the social media platforms utilized by UVT to promote the project's events effectively attract young audiences, especially when featuring well-known guests or organizing competitions for them. Incorporating TikTok and other platforms popular among young people, which focus on video content like reels or stories, will likely alter the dynamics of interest in university-organized events ([Belotti et al., 2022](#)). This will be a topic of interest in future research.

This study contributes to the growing literature on digital cultural promotion in higher education by showcasing a collaborative model in which students are not merely recipients of knowledge but are active producers of cultural content. In contrast to conventional top-down promotional strategies, the approach adopted here aligns with calls for more participatory and reflexive cultural communication (Jenkins et al., 2009; Holdgaard & Klstrup, 2014). Specifically, this case extends the existing frameworks of digital engagement by integrating experiential learning and cultural co-production within a university setting. The communication plan developed by the West University of Timișoara demonstrates that university-led digital initiatives can successfully blend marketing, pedagogy, and cultural engagement, especially when student teams co-design and implement strategies.

Moreover, this article contributes to the literature on the European Capital of Culture (ECoC) by offering a rare institutional perspective focused on higher education's role in the broader cultural programming of an ECoC year. While many ECoC analyses critique the tendency toward spectacle and transient cultural consumption (Garcia & Cox, 2013), this case highlights how a university can facilitate lasting engagement through localized storytelling, targeted digital outreach, and youth-centered cultural participation. By leveraging existing digital platforms and youth engagement tactics, UVT's campaign provides an alternative model of sustainable legacy that complements traditional city-led initiatives. As such, the findings support broader arguments about embedding cultural legacy in community and educational structures rather than relying solely on city branding or cultural tourism.

These contributions suggest that universities can play a pivotal role in ensuring that ECoC events create meaningful digital and social legacies. Future studies might build on this work by comparing similar initiatives in other ECoC cities and further exploring the longitudinal effects of university participation in large-scale cultural campaigns.

The role of a university in organizing cultural events for students and the wider community can significantly impact event attendance and the sense of belonging among students. Focusing online communication on a young audience and curating events and guests around cultural brands are two complementary strategies. Young people often prefer short, image-rich posts; therefore, understanding their preferences is essential. However, any communication and promotion strategy for these cultural campaigns must consider the rapidly evolving and sometimes unpredictable dynamics of this field.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, Alexandru Condache and Simona Bader; methodology, A.C.; software, S.B.; validation, S.B. and A.C.; formal analysis, A.C.; investigation, S.B.; resources, S.B.; data curation, A.C.; writing—original draft preparation, A.C.; writing—review and editing, S.B.; visualization, A.C. and S.B.; supervision, S.B.; project administration, A.C. and S.B. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

WUT	West University of Timisoara
FB	Facebook
TM	Timisoara

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