

Social Media Management in Croatian National Ballet Ensembles: A Content Analysis¹

Lucija Radić Palinko², Algebra Bernays University, Croatia

Krešimir Dabo^{3,4}, Faculty of Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Hrvoje Ratkić⁵, VERN' University, Croatia

Abstract

This paper examines how social media shape communication practices, visibility, and brand-building among three Croatian national ballet ensembles: the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split. The framework draws on research on cultural public relations and media relations, social media communication in cultural institutions, theatre-specific communication, and the digital presentation of dance, with a focus on ballet. The study applies quantitative content analysis to 157 Facebook and Instagram posts published over a six-month period. Coding categories include post format, thematic focus, calls to action, interaction type and intensity, and differences in the use of platform tools across ensembles. Findings indicate that social media is pivotal for constructing institutional identity and maintaining audience relationships, yet communication effectiveness varies considerably. The Zagreb ensemble achieves the highest reach and engagement, while Rijeka and Split maintain lower but stable activity. Visual and interactive formats are associated with higher engagement, whereas video content and dialogic practices designed to stimulate discussion remain limited. The article contributes empirical insight into digital communication in cultural institutions and offers implications for improving social media strategies. Limitations include the time-bounded sample, reliance on quantitative indicators, and the absence of audience perception data. Future research should adopt longitudinal and qualitative approaches and expand the analysis to additional platforms.

Keywords: digital communication, social media management, public relations in culture, dance art, ballet

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² ORCID: 0009-0008-5373-5074

³ Corresponding author: dabo.kresimir@gmail.com

⁴ ORCID: 0000-0001-9260-7384

⁵ ORCID: 0009-0007-2747-9233

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Introduction

Over the past decade, digital transformation has profoundly reshaped the ways in which cultural institutions communicate with their audiences. Social media platforms have become central channels for visibility, interpretation, and public engagement in the cultural sector. These platforms enable institutions to communicate beyond physical and institutional boundaries, offering new opportunities for audience reach, brand-building, and the mediation of cultural value in increasingly competitive media environments.

In the context of culture and the performing arts, social media function not only as promotional tools but also as spaces in which institutional identities are constructed and relationships with audiences are negotiated. Through visual, narrative, and interactive formats, cultural institutions can enhance accessibility, stimulate interest, and foster emotional connections with diverse publics. Consequently, the strategic management of social media has become an integral component of contemporary cultural communication and public relations practice.

Theatre, and ballet in particular, represents a compelling case within digital cultural communication. Due to its strong visual dimension, embodied aesthetics, and symbolic expressiveness, ballet possesses significant communicative potential in digital environments. Social media content such as performance photography, short video excerpts, rehearsal material, and behind-the-scenes insights enables ballet institutions to extend the theatrical experience beyond the stage and engage audiences before and after live performances.

Despite the growing importance of social media in cultural communication, empirical research on how national ballet ensembles strategically use these platforms, and how specific content practices relate to audience engagement, remains limited, particularly in the Croatian context (Chhabra & Chaturvedi, 2022; Gagliano, 2020; John, 2023). Existing studies suggest that cultural institutions often rely on announcement-driven and institution-centered communication, while the dialogic and participatory potential of social media remains underutilized (Vassiliadis & Belenioti, 2015; Rodríguez-Veras et al., 2023; Capriotti & Pardo Kuklinski, 2012).

Against this backdrop, the research problem addressed in this study concerns the extent to which Croatian national ballet ensembles use social media strategically, and how different content formats and communication practices are associated with audience engagement on Facebook and Instagram.

The main objective of the study is to analyze and compare the social media communication practices of the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split, with a focus on content formats, thematic orientation, and audience interaction.

More specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Which themes and post formats are most frequently used in ballet-related posts published by the Croatian National Theatre institutions in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split on Facebook and Instagram?

RQ2: How do post type, content, and format relate to digital audience engagement (likes, comments, shares, views, and other interactions)?

RQ3: What differences emerge across the three institutions in quantitative indicators of social media management on Facebook and Instagram?

By addressing these questions through quantitative content analysis, the study aims to contribute empirical insight into digital communication practices in national cultural institutions and to identify key opportunities and challenges in the social media management of ballet ensembles.

Theoretical Framework: Public Relations, Social Media, and Digital Communication in Cultural and Performing Arts Institutions

In the context of mass media and ongoing digital transformation, public relations have assumed an increasingly strategic role within the cultural sector. Cultural institutions operate in a media environment shaped by convergence, audience fragmentation, and accelerated digitalization, where communication extends beyond information dissemination to encompass dialogue, interpretation, and meaning-making processes.

Public relations in culture therefore represent a distinct field of communication practice and research in which social values, cultural policies, institutional missions, and audience engagement intersect. Unlike commercially oriented sectors, cultural public relations are embedded in frameworks of public interest, social responsibility, and cultural mediation. As Plenković and Mustić (2020) note, communication practices in cultural institutions contribute not only to institutional visibility but also to the development of broader media and communication culture by mediating relationships between institutions, audiences, and society. Museums, theatres, festivals, and other cultural organizations rely on communication to interpret cultural content, enable participation, and legitimize their social role. Consequently, cultural public relations extend beyond promotional functions and operate as mechanisms for balancing artistic values, audience expectations, and institutional responsibility (Maratova, 2024).

Scholars emphasize that public relations cannot be separated from their cultural context, as culture shapes communication norms, values, and practices (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2012). In cultural institutions this relationship is particularly pronounced because institutional identities and missions are deeply embedded in community-specific cultural frameworks. From a critical perspective, Edwards (2018) notes that public relations in cultural contexts can influence which voices, values, and cultural representations become more visible and legitimate in the public sphere. In a related way, Fitch and Motion (2021) highlight the often-overlooked influence of public relations on popular culture and its potential role in processes of social change.

Within this broader framework, audience development has emerged as a central concept in contemporary cultural communication. Cultural audiences are increasingly understood as active participants rather than passive recipients of artistic content. Research indicates that cultural organizations employ interconnected strategies involving digital technologies, partnerships, education, segmentation, and participatory communication in order to attract, expand, and retain audiences (Saad Alnaser & Jing Li, 2023). Digital tools enable more personalized communication, continuous interaction, and feedback loops, which can strengthen engagement, trust, and long-term audience relationships in the cultural sector (Bračić, 2021).

Empirical studies in Croatia suggest that many cultural institutions still lack fully professionalized public relations structures, despite recognizing the growing importance of systematic digital communication (Gali & Vidak, 2019). The absence of strategically embedded communication practices often results in reactive and fragmented approaches that weaken long-term audience relationships and limit the potential of cultural institutions to engage with contemporary media environments (Gregory, 2010; Zelenika, Grmuša, & Jurišić, 2018). Research on Croatian media coverage of culture further shows that cultural topics rarely receive prominent attention in traditional media and often remain confined to informational or promotional formats, which restricts deeper interpretation and critical engagement (Dabo, 2024).

The rise of digital media and social networking platforms has further transformed the communication environment of cultural institutions. Media systems increasingly function as spaces in which cultural meanings are negotiated, interpreted, and circulated among various actors. Media therefore acts not only as channels of information but also as co-creators of cultural meaning, shaping how artistic content is interpreted and valued in the public sphere (Couldry, 2012). Transparency, accessibility, and continuous communication have consequently become normative expectations in the relationship between cultural institutions and their audiences (Johnston, 2012).

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok play a particularly important role in this process by enabling collaboration, community building, and digital identity formation (Imani Rad & Banaeian Far, 2023; John, 2023). From a network perspective, social media operate through interconnected nodes and ties that shape influence, information flows, and the formation of online communities (Bebić & Volarević, 2013; Ali et al., 2021). Such structures are especially relevant for cultural communication because they allow cultural content that may receive limited visibility in traditional media to reach new and diverse audiences (Lipić, Dabo, & Kolić Stanić, 2025).

Within cultural and artistic fields, social media therefore acquire a strategic dimension. Active social media management is associated with stronger visibility, clearer institutional identity, and higher levels of audience engagement (Vassiliadis & Belenioti, 2015). At the same time, scholars warn that algorithmic logics and metric-driven evaluation may encourage superficial cultural consumption and shift attention from professional critique toward popularity indicators such as views,

likes, and shares (Ugwu, 2024; Abbing, 2023). Influencers and digital intermediaries further reshape cultural mediation by amplifying the reach of artistic content while simultaneously challenging traditional institutional mechanisms of cultural legitimation (Meng, 2025).

Within the performing arts, dance and ballet provide particularly illustrative cases for examining digital cultural communication. Due to their strong visual aesthetics and embodied forms of expression, dance performances are especially compatible with image-based and video-oriented social media platforms. Digital engagement increasingly serves as an indicator of organizational visibility and sustainability for dance institutions (Ford & Mandviwalla, 2020). Social media expand dance audiences into global networks, creating what Gagliano (2020) describes as a “distributed performance landscape” in which performances are viewed, shared, and reinterpreted across digital environments.

Digital platforms also enable new forms of participation and learning through tutorials, rehearsal materials, and behind-the-scenes content that bring audiences closer to artistic processes (Akram & Kumar, 2017; Zimányi & Lanszki, 2020). At the same time, the growing importance of platform visibility contributes to the emergence of an attention economy in which visually optimized and algorithm-friendly content gains prominence (Lisowski, 2025).

Research on screen dance and digital choreography further highlights the emergence of screen-oriented forms of dance production and participatory audience practices, positioning dance as an audiovisual phenomenon and audiences as co-creators of meaning (Rosenberg, 2012; Bench et al., 2021). In ballet, these dynamics are particularly visible due to the form’s aesthetic precision and its compatibility with platform aesthetics, especially on visually oriented networks such as Instagram (Krajac, 2023; Wulff, 2020).

However, digital visibility also introduces new cultural and aesthetic pressures. Scholars note that social media may intensify expectations related to bodily perfection and self-presentation through a persistent “digital gaze” directed at dancers and performers (Gagliano, 2020; Fitzgerald, 2023). Platforms such as TikTok further accelerate the reinterpretation of ballet through short, repeatable video formats and viral challenges (Zeng, Abidin, & Schäfer, 2021), while simultaneously opening ballet to more inclusive, participatory, and non-institutional forms of engagement (Morrow, 2019; Abbing, 2023).

Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate why social media management has become a crucial component of contemporary communication strategies in performing arts institutions. Social platforms function simultaneously as promotional channels, spaces of cultural interpretation, and infrastructures for audience development. Understanding how ballet institutions use these digital tools is therefore essential for examining the ways in which visibility, engagement, and institutional identity are constructed in contemporary cultural communication. This perspective directly informs the present study, which analyzes how Croatian national ballet ensembles use Facebook and Instagram as platforms for communicating ballet-related content and engaging with audiences.

Method

In line with the research questions outlined in the introduction, this study applies a quantitative content analysis to examine how Croatian national ballet ensembles manage their social media communication and how specific content characteristics relate to audience engagement. Quantitative content analysis is suitable for systematically and objectively examining publicly available communication content and for identifying patterns in institutional digital practices (Pilar & Lamza Posavec, 2004).

This method enables a structured comparison of observable social media communication practices across institutions and platforms by transforming social media posts into measurable analytical units. Each post represents one unit of analysis and is examined using a predefined coding scheme designed to address the study's research questions.

Specifically, the methodological framework was constructed to:

- identify dominant themes and formats of social media communication (RQ1),
- examine relationships between content characteristics and audience engagement (RQ2),
- compare quantitative indicators of social media management across institutions and platforms (RQ3).

Sample and procedure

The empirical sample consists of all Facebook and Instagram posts related to ballet ensembles published on the official social media profiles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split during a six-month period, from 18 January to 18 July 2025.

Because ballet ensembles do not maintain separate official social media profiles, the analysis focused exclusively on ballet-related content published within the institutional accounts of each theatre. From the total corpus of posts, only those thematically related to ballet were included in the analysis.

The final sample comprises 157 posts, including 95 Facebook posts and 62 Instagram posts. This time frame was selected to capture regular communication patterns during an active theatre season and to allow comparison across platforms and institutions.

All posts were manually coded using a standardized coding matrix. Coding was conducted consistently across platforms to ensure comparability of results.

Measures

A structured coding matrix was used to capture content and engagement characteristics of each post. The coding scheme was developed to operationalize the study's research questions through clearly defined variables. Each measure corresponds to at least one research question, ensuring analytical coherence. A

structured coding matrix was developed to capture key characteristics of social media posts and their engagement outcomes. The coding scheme included variables related to post format (e.g., text combined with images, videos, or external links), thematic orientation of posts (such as event announcements or reports on completed events), and the presence and type of calls to action. Calls to action were coded as direct when posts explicitly encouraged specific actions (e.g., buying tickets, watching content, sharing, or commenting), as indirect when posts contained questions or invitations that implicitly encouraged audience responses without explicit instructions, or as absent when no engagement prompt was present.

In addition, engagement indicators were recorded for each post, including the number of reactions or likes, comments, shares, and video views where available. The coding matrix also captured whether posts contained links directing users to external sources, such as institutional websites, ticketing platforms, media coverage, or partner content. Together, these variables enabled systematic comparison of observable communication practices and engagement patterns across institutions and social media platforms.

This operationalization enables quantification of institutional posting practices and comparative assessment of how specific formats and thematic choices align with engagement outcomes across the three theatres and two platforms. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize distributions of formats, themes, and engagement indicators. Comparative analysis across ensembles and platforms was conducted to identify institutional differences in social media management practices. All analyses were aligned with the research questions to ensure consistency between theoretical objectives and empirical procedures.

Results

The following section presents a systematic overview of the results of the quantitative content analysis, aimed at identifying specific communication practices, post formats, and levels of interaction that characterize the digital activity of the analyzed ballet ensembles.

The Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split are active on the social media platform Facebook, as evidenced by the number of likes and followers associated with their official Facebook pages (Table 1).

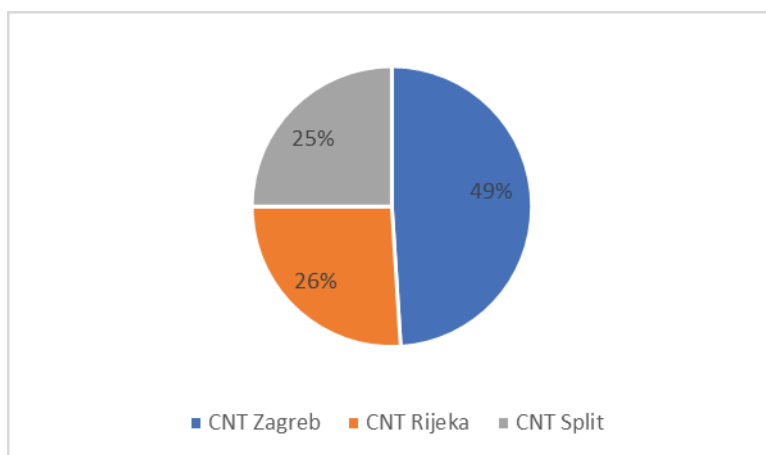
Table 1
Facebook page popularity of Croatian National Theatre institutions

	CNT ZAGREB	CNT SPLIT	CNT RIJEKA
Page Likes	37.000	23.000	15.000
Followers	39.000	24.000	17.000

Table 1 shows differences in the size of Facebook audiences across the analyzed institutions. The Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb has the largest follower base, followed by the Croatian National Theatre in Split, while the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka records the smallest audience on this platform.

The Facebook platform is used for digital communication by the ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split, as evidenced by a total of 95 posts published by the three institutions during the observed six-month period. During this time, the Zagreb ensemble published 46 posts on Facebook, the Rijeka ensemble published 25 posts, and the Split ensemble published 24 posts.

Figure 1
Number of posts published by the ensembles on Facebook



The data presented in Figure 1 indicate that, out of the total number of Facebook posts, the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb accounted for 49%, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka for 26%, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split for 25%.

The following sections present a segmented interpretation of the results obtained from the analysis of ballet ensemble communication during the period from 18 January to 18 July 2025. The analysis first focuses on post format. Regarding post formats on Facebook, the analyzed ballet ensembles used text combined with images, text combined with video, and text combined with links to media content. The distribution of these formats across the analyzed ballet ensembles is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Comparative overview of Facebook post formats

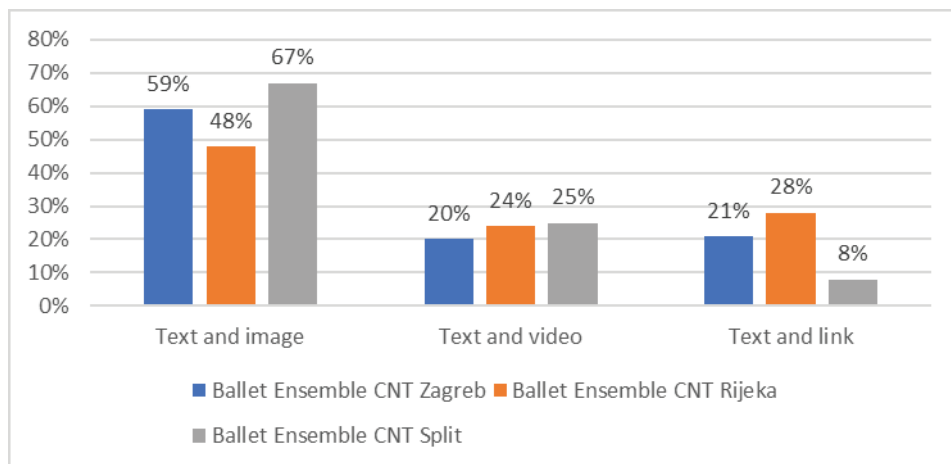


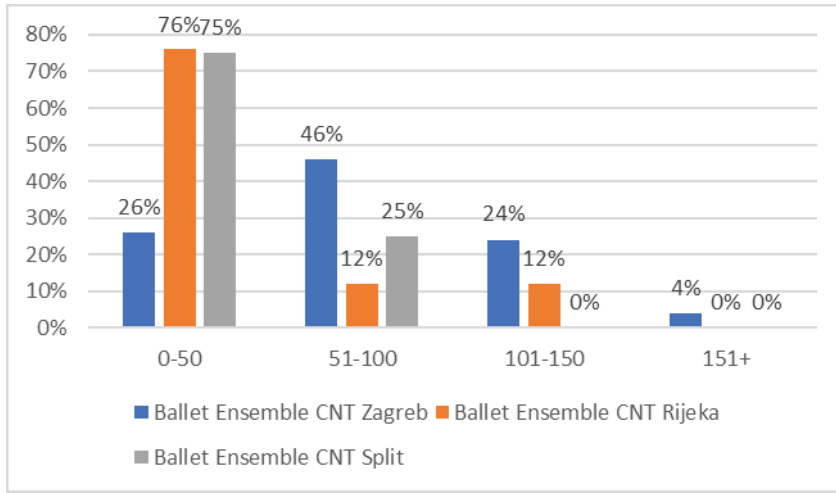
Figure 2 presents the distribution of post formats used on the Facebook pages of the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split during the observed period. Across all three ensembles, posts combining text and images clearly predominate, highlighting the central role of visual communication in social media practices. Although this format is dominant in all cases, its prevalence varies somewhat across institutions, suggesting different emphasis in the use of visual content for audience communication.

Video-based posts appear less frequently but are used at relatively comparable levels across the three ensembles, indicating a shared recognition of the communicative potential of video content on social media platforms. By contrast, posts containing external links are the least common format overall and appear more frequently in the Rijeka ensemble's communication, while the Split ensemble relies on this format only marginally.

Overall, the figure indicates differences in the relative emphasis placed on particular post formats across the three institutions, while confirming the dominant role of visually oriented content in the digital communication of ballet ensembles on Facebook.

Figure 3 compares the number of likes received by the ballet ensembles on Facebook.

Figure 3
Comparative overview of the number of likes on Facebook posts



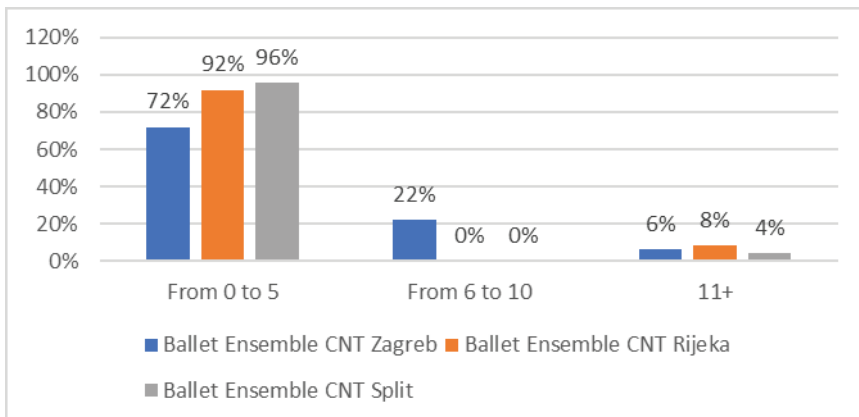
As shown in Figure 3, most posts published by the Rijeka and Split ensembles fall into the lowest engagement range, indicating relatively modest audience interaction on Facebook. In contrast, posts from the Zagreb ensemble appear more frequently in higher engagement categories, suggesting stronger audience response on this platform.

While Rijeka and Split posts are largely concentrated in lower engagement ranges, the Zagreb ensemble records a more balanced distribution that includes a noticeable share of posts achieving higher numbers of likes.

Overall, the pattern indicates that the Zagreb ballet ensemble tends to generate higher levels of audience engagement on Facebook compared with the other two institutions, whose posts are predominantly associated with lower engagement levels.

Figure 4 presents a comparative overview of the number of comments on Facebook posts.

Figure 4
Comparative overview of the number of comments on Facebook posts



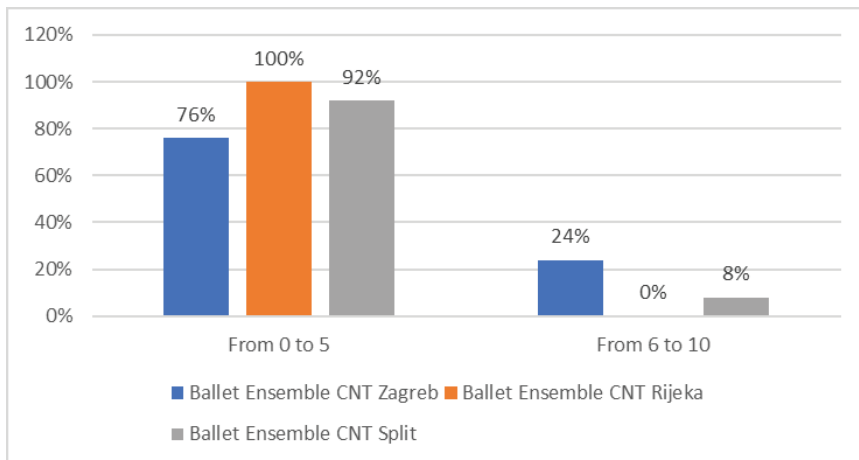
As shown in Figure 4, most posts across all three ensembles fall into the lowest comment category, indicating generally low levels of audience interaction through commenting on Facebook. This pattern is particularly evident for the Rijeka and Split ensembles, whose posts are largely concentrated in the lowest engagement range.

By contrast, the Zagreb ensemble appears more frequently in higher comment categories, suggesting a comparatively stronger level of audience interaction on this platform.

Overall, the results indicate that commenting activity remains limited across all ensembles, although the Zagreb ballet ensemble shows somewhat greater potential to stimulate audience responses.

A comparative overview of the number of shares of Facebook posts is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5
Comparative overview of the number of shares of Facebook posts



The figure shows that Facebook posts by the ballet ensembles in Rijeka, Split, and Zagreb generate very low levels of sharing. Most posts across all ensembles fall into the lowest category (0-5 shares), indicating limited organic reach. This trend is most pronounced for the Rijeka ensemble, where all posts (100%) remain within this category, followed by Split with 92%, suggesting that content rarely circulates beyond core audiences and is insufficiently engaging to prompt sharing.

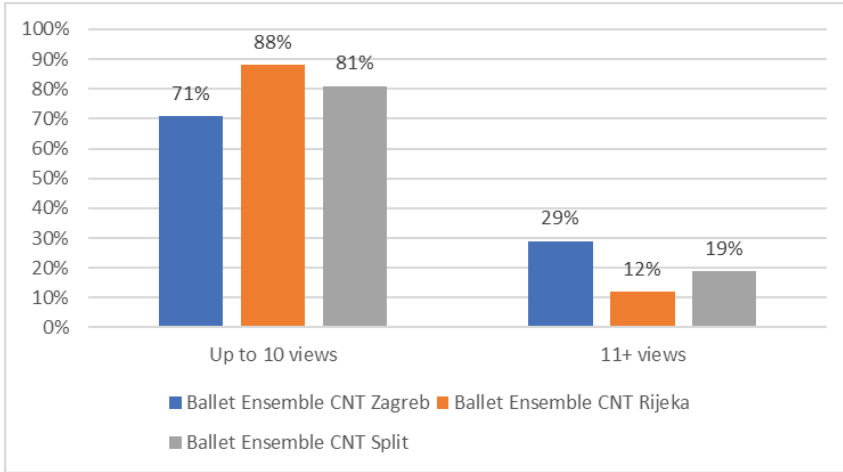
The Zagreb ensemble performs slightly better, although 76% of its posts also remain in the lowest category. Notably, however, 24% of Zagreb's posts reach the next range (6–10 shares), indicating occasional success in extending reach, possibly due to more effective content selection, stronger visual presentation, higher recognizability, or more active communication strategies.

By contrast, only 8% of Split's posts fall into the 6-10 shares category, while Rijeka records none. This distribution suggests that the Rijeka and Split ensembles are less effective in motivating audiences to share content, potentially due to smaller follower bases, weaker sharing habits, or a lack of interactive and innovative content.

Figure 6 presents a comparative overview of the number of video views on Facebook.

Figure 6

Comparative overview of the number of video views on Facebook



As shown in Figure 6, most video posts published by the analyzed ballet ensembles fall into the lowest view category, indicating generally low levels of audience reach on Facebook. This pattern is particularly pronounced for the Rijeka and Split ensembles, whose videos are predominantly concentrated in the lowest engagement range.

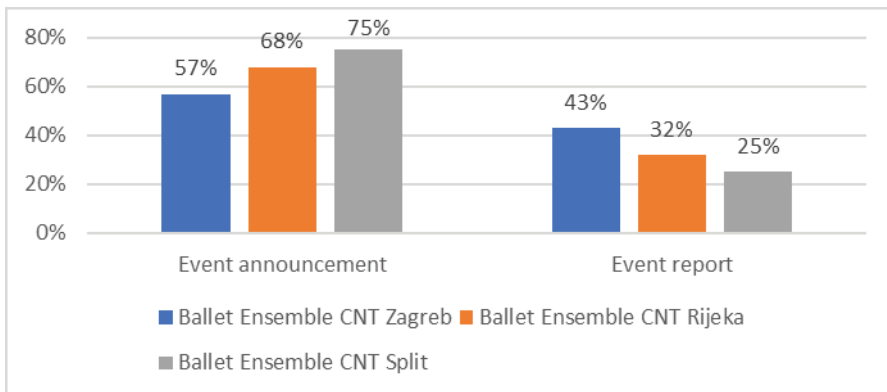
The Zagreb ensemble appears somewhat more frequently in higher view categories, suggesting comparatively greater video visibility on this platform.

Overall, the results indicate that video content generates relatively modest engagement across all three ensembles.

A comparative overview of post themes used by the ballet ensembles on Facebook is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Comparative overview of post themes on Facebook



As shown in Figure 7, event announcements clearly dominate as the primary thematic focus of posts across all analyzed ballet ensembles. Posts reporting on completed events appear considerably less frequently, indicating that social media communication is primarily oriented toward promoting upcoming performances and activities.

Although all ensembles follow this general pattern, the Zagreb ensemble shows a somewhat higher presence of post-event content compared with Rijeka and Split.

Overall, the results suggest that social media platforms are used predominantly as channels for event promotion rather than for post-event communication.

Figure 8 presents online engagement indicators, namely calls to like, share, comment, and similar forms of interaction, on Facebook posts published by ballet ensembles.

Figure 8
Comparative overview of online engagement in Facebook posts

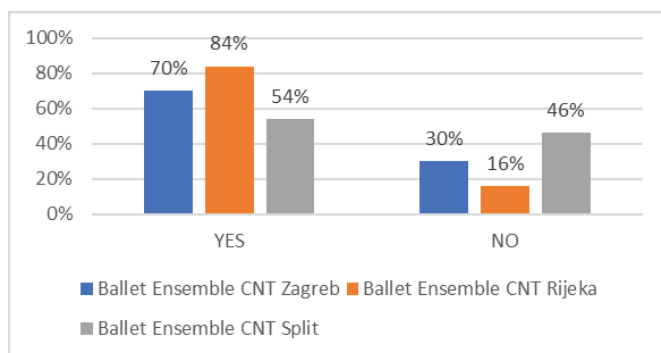


Figure 8 shows the extent to which the analyzed ballet ensembles include calls to action encouraging audience interaction on Facebook. Most posts across all three ensembles contain some form of engagement prompt, indicating that inviting audience interaction is a common communication practice.

However, differences emerge across institutions. Engagement prompts appear more consistently in posts published by the Rijeka and Zagreb ensembles, whereas such elements occur less frequently in the communication of the Split ensemble.

Overall, the results indicate that encouraging audience interaction through calls to action is a widely used practice, although its consistency varies across the analyzed institutions.

The Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, the Croatian National Theatre Ivan pl. Zajc in Rijeka, and the Croatian National Theatre in Split are active on the social media platform Instagram, as evidenced by the number of posts, followers, and accounts followed (Table 2).

Table 2
Number of posts, followers, and accounts followed on Instagram

	CNT ZAGREB	CNT SPLIT	CNT RIJEKA
Posts	2.373	3.436	640
Followers	14.300	5.918	8.393
Following	2.932	2.509	317

Table 2 presents a comparative overview of the activity and reach of the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split on Instagram, based on three indicators: number of posts, number of followers, and number of accounts followed.

All ensembles are active on Instagram, although with notable differences in intensity and effectiveness. Table 2 presents differences in Instagram activity and audience size among the analyzed institutions. The Rijeka theatre account records the highest total number of posts, followed by Zagreb, while the Split account shows substantially lower overall posting activity. However, the largest follower base is associated with the Zagreb theatre account, followed by Split, whereas Rijeka has the smallest number of followers despite its higher overall posting volume. This imbalance suggests that higher content volume does not necessarily translate into greater reach and may point to differences in content quality, audience targeting, or institutional visibility.

Regarding networking practices, CNT Zagreb and CNT Rijeka follow many other accounts (2,932 and 2,509, respectively), which may reflect strategies of visibility building and interaction within cultural networks. CNT Split, by comparison, follows substantially fewer accounts (317), indicating a more selective or less network-oriented approach.

During the observed period (18 January-18 July 2020), the CNT Zagreb ensemble published 25 posts, CNT Rijeka 18 posts, and CNT Split 19 posts.

Figure 9 presents a comparison of post formats on the social media platform Facebook.

Figure 9
Comparative overview of post formats on Instagram

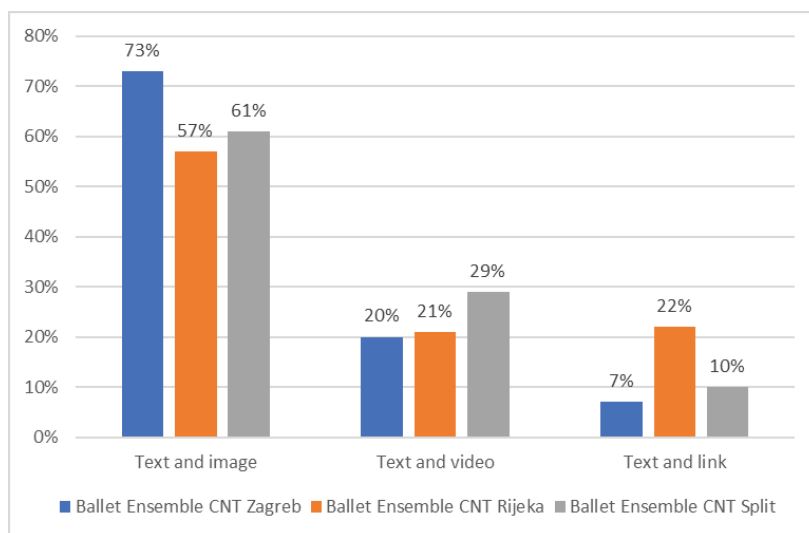


Figure 9 presents a comparative overview of post formats used by the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split on Instagram.

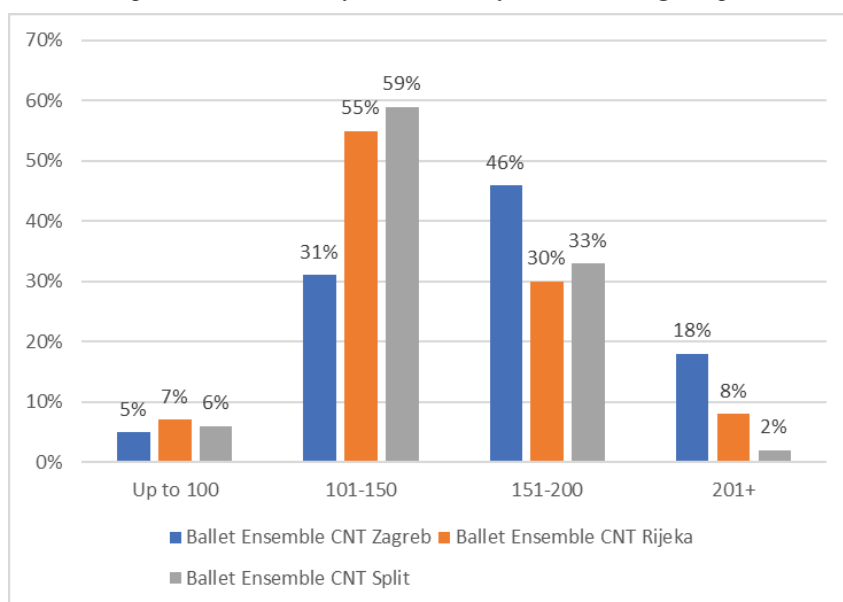
Across all ensembles, posts combining text and images clearly predominate, highlighting the central role of visual communication on this platform.

Video-based posts appear less frequently but are present across all three ensembles, indicating that video is used as an additional format for presenting ballet-related content on Instagram. By contrast, posts containing external links are the least common format overall and appear somewhat more frequently in the communication of the Rijeka ensemble.

Overall, the figure confirms the dominant role of visually oriented content in Instagram communication, while also revealing minor differences in the relative emphasis placed on video and external linking across the analyzed institutions.

Figure 10 presents a comparative analysis of the number of likes on Instagram posts.

Figure 10
Comparative overview of the number of likes on Instagram posts



Across all ensembles, only a small share of posts receives fewer than 100 likes, indicating that most content surpasses this basic engagement threshold (Zagreb 5%, Rijeka 7%, Split 6%). This suggests that all ensembles consistently reach their core audiences and maintain a baseline level of attention.

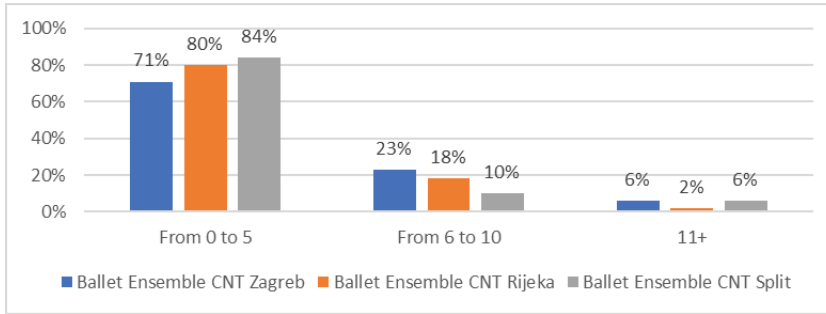
For the Rijeka and Split ensembles, the most common engagement range is 101–150 likes, accounting for 55% and 59% of posts, respectively. In contrast, Zagreb records a lower share in this category (31%), reflecting greater variability and higher overall engagement.

Zagreb clearly dominates the higher engagement ranges, while posts from the Rijeka and Split ensembles appear far less frequently in these categories. This pattern suggests that the Zagreb ensemble achieves consistently stronger audience engagement on Instagram. Overall, these results indicate that the Zagreb ballet

ensemble achieves both more consistent and higher peak engagement on Instagram, whereas Rijeka and Split tend to cluster around moderate engagement levels.

Figure 11 presents a comparative overview of the number of comments on Instagram posts.

Figure 11
Comparative overview of the number of comments on Instagram posts



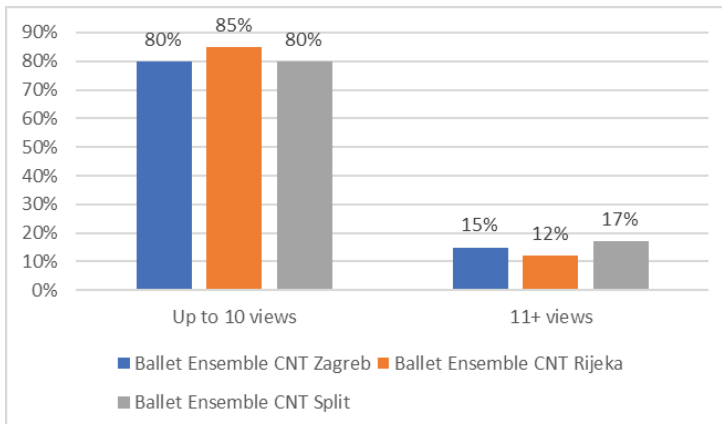
As shown in Figure 11, most posts across all analyzed ensembles fall into the lowest comment category, indicating generally low levels of audience discussion on Instagram. This pattern is particularly evident for the Rijeka and Split ensembles, whose posts are largely concentrated in the lowest engagement range.

The Zagreb ensemble appears somewhat more frequently in higher comment categories, suggesting comparatively stronger audience interaction through commenting.

Overall, the results indicate that commenting activity remains limited across all ensembles, although the Zagreb ballet ensemble shows slightly higher levels of audience response on this platform.

Figure 12 presents a comparative overview of the number of video views on Instagram.

Figure 12
Comparative overview of the number of video views on Facebook

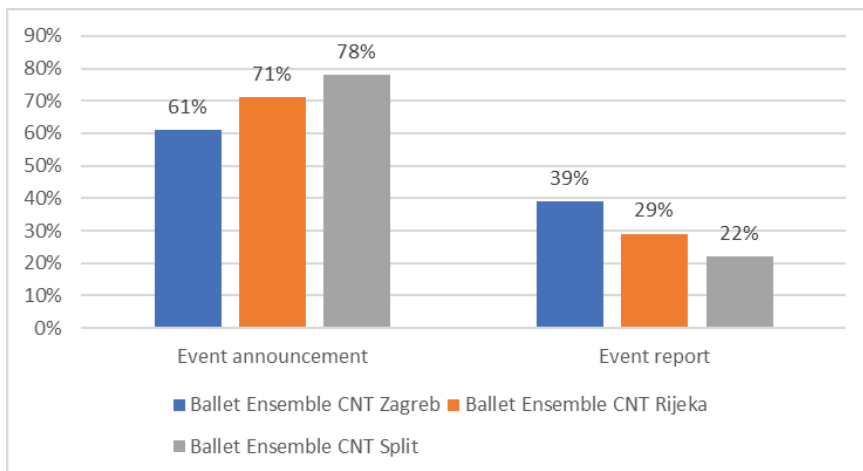


Most videos published by all ensembles receive very low numbers of views, with this pattern most pronounced in the Rijeka ensemble, where 85% of videos do not exceed ten views. Similarly high proportions are observed in Zagreb and Split (80% each), indicating that video content rarely reaches broader audiences and is primarily consumed by the most loyal followers.

Videos with more than 11 views constitute a much smaller share. Split records the highest proportion in this category (17%), followed by Zagreb (15%) and Rijeka (12%), suggesting that only a limited number of videos occasionally generate increased interest, potentially due to special events, appealing themes, or more effective production and promotion.

Overall, these findings highlight challenges in the visibility of video content. They may reflect insufficient promotion strategies, content formats that are not fully aligned with Instagram's preference for short and dynamic videos, or institutional constraints related to adapting classical presentation styles to platform-specific expectations.

Figure 13
Comparative overview of post themes on Instagram



Across all ensembles, event announcements constitute the dominant post theme. This approach is most pronounced in the Split ensemble (78%), followed by Rijeka (71%), while Zagreb relies on announcements to a slightly lesser extent (61%). These findings indicate that ballet ensembles primarily use Instagram as a tool for direct program promotion, aimed at attracting audiences and stimulating interest in upcoming performances and activities.

Event reports are considerably less frequent, particularly in Split (22%), compared with Rijeka (29%) and Zagreb, which places greater emphasis on reflective content (39%). By documenting completed events, the Zagreb ensemble extends communication beyond promotion, potentially fostering a stronger sense of community, transparency, and sustained audience relationships.

Overall, the thematic distribution reveals a predominantly promotional orientation across all ensembles, with reporting content remaining secondary. While effective for audience mobilization, this approach also highlights opportunities to strengthen two-way communication and long-term audience engagement through increased use of post-event reporting. Figure 14 presents a comparative overview of engagement levels in Instagram posts.

Figure 14
Comparative overview of post themes on Instagram

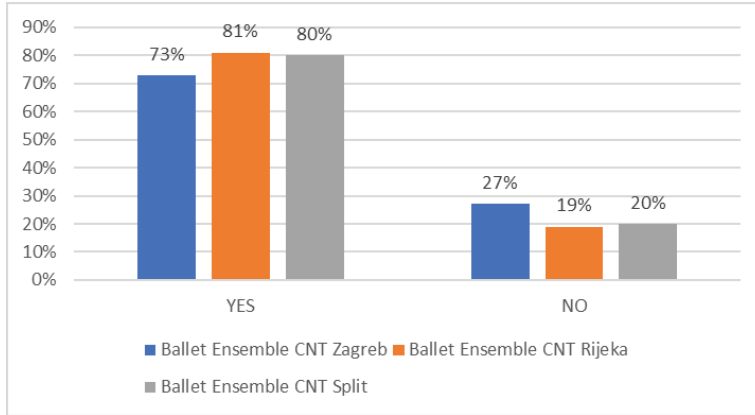


Figure 14 shows the extent to which the ballet ensembles of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb, Rijeka, and Split encourage audience interaction on Instagram through explicit calls to like, share, comment, or otherwise engage.

Most posts across all ensembles include some form of engagement prompt, with the highest proportions recorded for Rijeka (81%) and Split (80%), followed by Zagreb (73%). This indicates a strong overall awareness of the importance of active audience involvement in digital communication.

Posts without calls to engagement are least frequent in Rijeka (19%) and Split (20%), while Zagreb records a higher share of such posts (27%). This suggests that engagement strategies are applied more consistently by the Rijeka and Split ensembles, whereas the Zagreb ensemble, despite generally strong performance, retains a larger proportion of communicatively passive content.

Overall, the findings confirm that encouraging audience interaction is a widely adopted practice among the analyzed ensembles and represents a key component of effective Instagram communication in cultural institutions. Rijeka and Split demonstrate the most systematic application of this strategy, while Zagreb shows further potential to enhance engagement through more consistent use of interaction prompts.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined how Croatian national ballet ensembles manage their social media presence and how specific communication practices relate to audience engagement on Facebook and Instagram. The findings provide insight into how digital communication practices in ballet institutions reflect broader theoretical perspectives on cultural public relations, digital communication, and audience development.

From the perspective of cultural public relations, social media function as key communication channels through which cultural institutions promote programs, construct institutional visibility, and maintain relationships with audiences. The dominance of promotional and announcement-oriented posts observed in this study illustrates the continuing role of public relations in communicating cultural programs and informing audiences about upcoming performances. At the same time, engagement indicators such as likes, comments, and shares demonstrate how digital platforms create opportunities for audience interaction, which aligns with theoretical approaches that conceptualize social media as participatory communication environments within the cultural sector.

Findings related to RQ1 indicate a clear dominance of event announcements and visually oriented formats across all ensembles and platforms. This pattern supports earlier research suggesting that cultural institutions frequently use social media primarily as promotional channels rather than as spaces for dialogue or co-creation with audiences (Vassiliadis & Belenioti, 2015; Chhabra & Chaturvedi, 2022). The prevalence of image-based posts, particularly on Instagram, is also consistent with theoretical arguments regarding the strong visual compatibility between dance, ballet, and image-centered social media platforms (Gagliano, 2020; Krajac, 2023). Ballet performances rely heavily on visual aesthetics and embodied expression, which makes photographic representation a particularly suitable format for communicating this art form in digital environments.

At the same time, the relatively small share of posts reporting on completed events suggests that communication is primarily oriented toward promoting upcoming performances rather than extending audience interaction after the event has taken place. This indicates that the dialogic potential of social media, frequently emphasized in digital communication theory, is only partially realized in the observed communication practices. Such findings correspond with previous research showing that cultural institutions often maintain predominantly one-directional communication patterns even when using interactive digital platforms (Edwards, 2018; Rodríguez-Veras et al., 2023).

In relation to RQ2, the analysis shows that visually oriented formats, particularly posts combining text and images, are associated with higher engagement levels. This result is consistent with broader research on social media communication, which emphasizes the importance of visual content for attracting audience attention and encouraging interaction in digital environments. In contrast, video posts in this study

generated relatively modest engagement levels. Although video formats are often considered effective tools for stimulating interaction on social media platforms (Ford & Mandviwalla, 2020), the present findings suggest that the use of video format alone does not necessarily guarantee stronger audience response in the context of ballet communication. One possible explanation is that engagement with video content may depend not only on format but also on factors such as platform algorithms, distribution mechanisms, and audience expectations regarding cultural content (Abbing, 2023; Ugwu, 2024).

The results further indicate that the presence of calls to action does not automatically lead to higher levels of audience interaction. While many posts include prompts encouraging users to like, comment, or share content, engagement levels vary considerably across institutions and platforms. This finding suggests that formal engagement prompts alone may be insufficient to stimulate audience participation and that audience interaction is likely influenced by a broader combination of factors, including institutional visibility, audience size, and communication practices.

Addressing RQ3, the analysis reveals notable institutional differences in social media engagement patterns. The Zagreb ballet ensemble consistently records higher engagement levels than the Rijeka and Split ensembles. This difference may partly reflect the stronger institutional recognition and visibility of the Croatian National Theatre in Zagreb within the national cultural landscape. At the same time, the findings demonstrate that higher posting frequency does not necessarily translate into higher audience engagement. This observation supports earlier research emphasizing that effective digital communication depends not only on the volume of content but also on its relevance and its alignment with audience expectations (Meerman Scott, 2011; Bahonjić & Dabo, 2020).

Taken together, these findings illustrate a broader tension between promotional communication practices and the participatory possibilities offered by digital media. While Croatian national ballet ensembles clearly recognize the importance of maintaining an active social media presence, their communication practices remain largely oriented toward informing audiences about upcoming events rather than fostering sustained dialogue and interaction. This suggests that social media within these institutions currently function primarily as extensions of traditional public relations activities rather than fully developed platforms for participatory cultural communication (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2012; Fitch & Motion, 2021).

The study is based on a six-month analytical period and relies on quantitative engagement indicators, which provides a focused overview of institutional communication practices but does not capture longer-term trends or audience perceptions. Future research could therefore adopt longitudinal and qualitative approaches, including interviews with communication managers or audience surveys, in order to better understand the strategic intentions behind social media communication and the ways in which audiences interpret and respond to ballet-related content online.

Overall, the study highlights the growing importance of social media as communication infrastructures within the performing arts sector. By examining how

ballet institutions use Facebook and Instagram to communicate with audiences, the research contributes to a better understanding of digital cultural communication practices and identifies opportunities for developing more dialogic and audience-oriented social media strategies in the cultural sector.

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Upravljanje društvenim mrežama u hrvatskim nacionalnim baletskim ansamblima: analiza sadržaja

Lucija Radić Palinko, Univerzitet Algebra Bernays, Hrvatska
Krešimir Dabo, Fakultet hrvatskih studija Univerziteta u Zagrebu, Hrvatska
Hrvoje Ratkić, Univerzitet VERN, Hrvatska

Sažetak

Ovaj rad ispituje na koji način društvene mreže oblikuju komunikacione prakse, vidljivost i izgradnju brenda triju hrvatskih nacionalnih baletskih ansambala: Hrvatskog narodnog kazališta u Zagrebu, Hrvatskog narodnog kazališta Ivana pl. Zajca u Rijeci i Hrvatskog narodnog kazališta u Splitu. Teorijski okvir rada zasniva se na istraživanjima odnosa s javnošću i odnosa s medijima u kulturi, komunikaciji kulturnih institucija na društvenim mrežama, specifičnostima pozorišne komunikacije, kao i digitalnom predstavljanju plesne umetnosti, s posebnim naglaskom na balet. Istraživanje primenjuje kvantitativnu analizu sadržaja 157 objava objavljenih na Facebooku i Instagramu tokom šestomesečnog perioda. Kategorije analize obuhvataju format objava, tematski fokus, prisustvo poziva na akciju, vrstu i intenzitet interakcija, kao i razlike u korišćenju platformskih alata među ansamblima. Rezultati pokazuju da društvene mreže imaju ključnu ulogu u izgradnji institucionalnog identiteta i održavanju odnosa s publikom, ali da se komunikaciona efikasnost značajno razlikuje. Ansambl iz Zagreba ostvaruje najveći doseg i angažman publike, dok Rijeka i Split beleže niže, ali stabilne nivoe aktivnosti. Vizuelni i interaktivni formati povezani su s višim nivoima angažmana, dok su video-sadržaji i dijaloške prakse usmerene ka podsticanju rasprave i dalje ograničene. Rad doprinosi empirijskom razumevanju digitalne komunikacije u kulturnim institucijama i nudi smernice za unapređenje strategija na društvenim mrežama. Ograničenja istraživanja odnose se na vremenski ograničen uzorak, oslanjanje na kvantitativne pokazatelje i izostanak analize percepcija publike. Buduća istraživanja trebalo bi da uključe longitudinalne i kvalitativne pristupe, kao i proširenje analize na dodatne digitalne platforme.

Ključne reči: digitalna komunikacija, upravljanje društvenim mrežama, odnosi s javnošću u kulturi, plesna umetnost, balet

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