

# When consumer loves heritage. The role of cultural heritage in social media engagement

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## Abstract

This study aims to investigate the cultural heritage as a strengthening factor in the social media engagement. The research is based on a content analysis conducted on 3200 posts published on Facebook by a sample of 64 medium-size and large companies registered in the “Register of Long-lived Firms” of Italian Chamber of Commerce. The Register involves firms with uninterrupted activity in the same business industry for at least 100 years. The calculation of the indices of *likeability* and *shareability* and a multiple regression model have made it possible to measure the effectiveness of posts in increasing social media engagement and verifying which dimensions are most used by the sample companies.

*Keywords:* cultural heritage; social media engagement; consumer engagement; content analysis; social media; long-lived firms.

## Sommario

Questo studio si propone di indagare il patrimonio culturale come fattore di rafforzamento del coinvolgimento dei consumatori sui social media. La ricerca si basa su un'analisi del contenuto di 3200 post pubblicati su Facebook da un campione di 64 imprese italiane di medie e grandi dimensioni iscritte al “Registro storico delle imprese” di Unioncamere. Il Registro raccoglie le imprese che svolgono un'attività

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ininterrotta nello stesso settore imprenditoriale da almeno 100 anni. Il calcolo degli indici di *likeability* e *shareability* e un modello di regressione multipla hanno permesso di misurare l'efficacia dei post nell'aumentare il social media engagement e di verificare quali dimensioni sono maggiormente utilizzate dal campione di aziende.

*Parole chiave:* cultural heritage; social media engagement; consumer engagement; analisi del contenuto; social media; aziende longeve.

## Introduction

The exploration of the concept of cultural heritage in brand research, is considered a key organizational resource capable of enhancing the competitive advantage of long-lived firms based on the uniqueness of their historical heritage (Balmer 2009; Balmer and Gray, 2003; Hakala *et al.*, 2011; Riviezzo *et al.*, 2015; Balmer and Burghausen, 2019). The centrality of cultural heritage in the communication choices of brands is well expressed by Banerjee (2008). According to Banerjee (2008), the brand heritage is a “starting point” that needs to be measurable in order to be used in practice. Likewise, Hakala *et al.* (2011) have identified a country's cultural heritage as a strategic factor for brand decisions. The authors identify homogeneity and endurance as the main distinctive factors in the communication of a brand. Other research looks at the concept of brand heritage as a branded representation of the past and its influence on cognitive and affective responses (Pecot *et al.*, 2019) or analyze the drivers and outcome of brand heritage, focusing on the functions of the brand as perceived by consumers (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2011). Mainolfi *et al.* (2015) investigated the main dimensions of the cultural heritage image (CHEI), defined as the system of beliefs, opinions and images related to the culture of a country. In the latter case, cultural heritage consists of three main components: intangible, tangible and identity. Despite this, studies on the topic still seem to be lacking.

Although this research contributed to the literature on cultural heritage, it is focused to the identification of the main components of cultural heritage and their usefulness as a tool in digital marketing communication (Liang *et al.*, 2021; Psomadaki *et al.*, 2019; Hood and Reid, 2018) in light of the opportunities offered today by social media where it is possible to configure forms of sharing and engagement by using the cultural and historical heritage provided by the territory in which the company operates as a starting point. The consumer in the digital age is open to both emotional and rational engagement in his/her consumption choices but is more careful, disillusioned, and finds it more difficult than in the past to build a stable link with the brand.

The studies on the effect of content in the engagement of users have found that content that arouses emotions and user-generated content have an effect on brand equity (Bae *et al.*, 2020) and brand attitude, while content posted by brands have an effect only on brand awareness and brand attitude (Langaro *et al.*, 2018; Phua and Ahn, 2016; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2014; Schivinski *et al.*, 2016). Despite the importance assumed by cultural heritage in the creation and success of the competitive identity of companies, little emphasis has been given to the models that evaluate the influence of the cultural heritage on corporate communication. This research deepened the possibilities offered by cultural heritage as a powerful tool for communicating the identity of businesses that can increase consumer engagement. Furthermore, this research aims to map the ways of using leverage related to cultural heritage in the context of social media communication strategies on Facebook and to identify their effectiveness in involving the consumer by measuring likeability and shareability, both used to gauge the effectiveness of the content on social networks. To do so we explored the posts of long-lived Italian firms, an interesting field for the exploration of cultural heritage on the social media.

This article's structure is as follows. Firstly, we describe the cultural heritage construct and the importance of social media engagement. Then, in the method section we present the data collection and coding procedure used to analyse how the cultural heritage attributes are used in the social media communication strategies of companies. Finally, the study's findings are discussed critically forming the research's theoretical and practical implications.

## **Theoretical background**

### *Cultural heritage*

The concept of cultural heritage has its roots in disciplinary fields characterized by different methodological approaches, purposes and perspectives. Despite the many contributions to literature (Loulansky, 2006; Rizzo and Trosby, 2006, Mainolfi *et al.*, 2015) cultural heritage is still not univocally defined although the importance of an organic discussion of the subject. However, all studies highlight that cultural heritage must be considered as the set of material and immaterial works characterizing societies and specific groups (Loulansky, 2006; Throsby 1999, 2007) and a strong affinity among the concept of heritage, culture and identity.

The in-depth analysis of empirical studies on cultural heritage circumscribed to the managerial areas of tourism management and business management (Del Barrio *et al.*, 2012; Throsby, 1999, 2007; Bedate *et al.*, 2004; Taylor, 2004), economics, sociology (Bessi re, 1998; Kuutma, 2009; Pearce, 1998; Turnpenny, 2004) human science, arts, archeology, anthropology, etc. (Reher 2020; Patiwael *et al.*, 2019; Silva and Roders 2012) and environmental sciences (Ahmad, 2006; Alivizatou, 2008; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 2004), made it possible to identify the main lines of studies on the subject.

Table 1. Main components of Cultural Heritage

Conceptual categories	Maining	Research stream	Main Authors
<i>Tangible cultural heritage</i>	Tangible heritage includes buildings and historic places, monuments, artifacts, etc., which are considered worthy of preservation for the future. These include objects significant to the archaeology, architecture, science, or technology of a specific culture	Cultural and management studies	Hakala <i>et al.</i> , 2011; Vecco, 2010; Rojas-M�endez, 2013; Blake, 2000; Lenzerini, 2011, Icomos, 2002; Trunfo <i>et al.</i> , 2022.
<i>Intangible cultural heritage</i>	The practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts, and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.	Cultural studies	Loulansky, 2006; Throsby, 1999; 2007; Del Barrio <i>et al.</i> , 2012; Bedate, <i>et al.</i> , 2004; Taylor, 2004; Su <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Chen, 2022.
<i>National identity</i>	The national identity appears such as a group of collective characteristics closely linked to one another, which confer distinctive character and value to a community.	Country image studies	Mainolfi <i>et al.</i> , 2015; Napolitano and De Nisco, 2017; Timothy 2011; Di Pietro <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Verlegh and Steenkamp 1999; Anholt, 2007; Ko and Lee, 2011; Hakala, 2011; Rojas-M�endez, 2013; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 2000.

Source: our elaboration

Also in the field of management, as we have had the opportunity to learn from previous works (Mainolfi *et al.*, 2015; Napolitano and De Nisco, 2017), cultural heritage is confirmed as a decisive value asset for the image and identity of territories, organizations and states.

Cultural heritage is therefore a powerful tool for communicating the distinctive identity of territories and companies (Napolitano and De Nisco 2017; Napolitano *et al.*, 2018). National identity is closely linked above all to tourism when nations use their history and cultural heritage to increase the attractiveness of the country as a tourist destination (Soper, 2007) but it is also important for companies that represent the productive excellence of the same territory (Ko and Lee, 2011). When studying the cultural heritage image (CHEI), Mainolfi *et al.*, (2015) define it as the system of beliefs, opinions and images related to the culture of a country, thus reinforcing the idea of a multidimensional cultural heritage made up of three components: one tangible component, one intangible component and finally a component connected to the national identity (Mainolfi *et al.*, 2015). Each one represents a lever of competitive advantage that can influence the perceptions and intentions of consumers' buying. Therefore, in the light of what has just been said, Table 1 summarises the main studies on cultural heritage with reference to its multidimensional matrix: tangible, intangible and identity.

### **Social media engagement**

Consumer engagement on social media has received great attention in recent marketing literature (Dolan *et al.*, 2019; Cao *et al.*, 2021). Social media engagement refers to the specific context where the consumer manifests his/her engagement in the community (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Dessart, 2017). The wide use of social media platform such as Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook and Pinterest, has determined a strong attention on the part of companies towards actions to involve the consumer towards their own brands (Pentina *et al.*, 2018). In particular, some studies show that social media engagement has been investigated as brand-user interaction on social media platforms (Hallock *et al.*, 2019; Trunfio and Rossi, 2021; Peltier *et al.*, 2020; Schivinski *et al.*, 2016). Smith and Gallicano (2015) argue that social media engagement requires a cognitive and emotional commitment that translates into active participation (through sharing, "I like" and "comments"). For Gambetti *et al.* (2012) a core category of consumer brand engagement is "brand enacting" that verifies when "consumers 'put the brand into action', participating in the world of the brand. Therefore, the actions of liking, commenting and sharing content are considered actions of engagement on social media (e.g. Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). Schivinski *et al.* (2016) developed a scale (COBRA) based on three dimensions to identify different levels of social-

media engagement with brands: consumption, contribution and creation. Based on this research, Pentina *et al.* (2018) verified that “consumption” represents the minimum level of engagement, “contribution” leads to a higher level of engagement for interactions generated by users, and “creation” generates the highest level of engagement. Many researchers have attempted to measure social media engagement through the development of additional scales, applied to different issues, indicators and metrics (Harrigan *et al.*, 2017; Trunfio and Della Lucia 2019).

Many researchers (e.g. Asley and Tuten 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2014) have conducted content analyses on Facebook and Twitter in order to understand the effectiveness of different kinds of multimedia content on consumer engagement. Not all published content has an effect on users. In addition to the power of persuasion of images and videos, Lee *et al.* (2014) found that the use of persuasive content, such as content that evokes emotions or philanthropy, increases engagement more than that used for purely informational purposes. The literature on social media engagement therefore shows the importance of content to encourage dialogue and interaction with consumers. All social networks include engagement among the key factors in placing content within each subscriber's timeline. The more you create interaction in a content, the more these platforms will show it to all the fans or followers. Therefore, all strategies that aim to stimulate engagement in order to create a direct impact on their business in terms of traffic on their website, leads and customers become important.

Schivinski *et al.* (2014, 2016) study the effect of content generated by users and brands. While the content generated by users activates brand equity and brand attitude, the content generated by companies activates only the brand attitude. Other studies have verified the impact of the number of Likes and Friends' Likes on the attitude towards the brand, on participation and the purchaser's intention suggesting that friends' 'likes' have a stronger influence on consumers' judgments of Facebook brand pages than overall 'likes' (Phua and Ahn, 2016). Friends' likes have an impact on the content of the posts posted by the brands on their pages, on the customer participation and can also encourage a greater identification with the most influential users (Phua and Ahn, 2016). In addition, “I Like” and “Sharing” reflect the consumer's cognitive and emotional commitment when interacting on social media (Quesenberry and Coolson, 2018). Quesenberry and Coolson (2018) consider consumer shares, likes and comments as social media engagement metrics (or viral engagement factors). Shares on Facebook measures the volume of message sharing and forwarding by Internet users. Likes on Facebook is considered as the expression of emotion to online messages. In this sense it is the type of Facebook brand content, that produces consumer engagement

with increased shares, likes and comments, that is essential to increasing the consumer commitment. The content becomes important to determine the interaction of the consumer and therefore his/her engagement. It is likely that the more the consumer interacts on social media, the higher his commitment to social media. Therefore, in the light of what has just been said, it is possible to hypothesize that:

**H1:** *a post that receives “I Likes” when referring to a cultural heritage dimension, influences consumer engagement on the social network (expressed by the number of comments that the customers post).*

**H2:** *a post that is shared when referring to a cultural heritage dimension, influences consumer engagement on the social network (expressed by the number of comments that customers post).*

Langaro *et al.* (2018) found that the participation of users on social media and the attitude towards the brand is mediated by brand awareness. Therefore, the authors suggest developing content that is related to the elements of brand communication and therefore capable of having an impact on brand awareness rather than developing content that drives interactions. That is why brands need to invest heavily on their identity in order to be able to continue talking about themselves in a relevant way. (Langaro *et al.*, 2018). While the literature has demonstrated that the content related to the elements of brand communication and brand awareness has an impact on consumer engagement a study on cultural heritage as a factor of the identity of the brand to assess its impact on consumer engagement as a lever of marketing communication still seems to be lacking. Therefore, starting from this gap, it would be interesting to study whether the leverage of cultural heritage used in business communication has a positive effect on the engagement of consumers on the social media and which leverages of cultural heritage affect the engagement of users.

## **Method**

### *Sample*

To investigate how to use the levers connected to cultural heritage in the social media communication strategies of companies, it has been decided to investigate long-lived firms. Their cultural heritage is inevitably connected to the history of the country and to the culture of the territory in which companies have been operating for years. It is precisely this connection with the

culture and history of its own country that makes it a fertile ground for exploring the cultural leverage of business communication and finding useful insights into the potential of its dimensions. The sample was chosen from a dataset of 2,459 registered companies, and the first 100 medium and large companies registered in the “Register of Long-lived Firms” of Italian Chamber of Commerce who fulfilled the following requirements were selected for data collection and analysis: a company constitution dating back at least 100 years; an economic sector of activity included in one of the 3 “F”s of the Italian productive excellence – Fashion, Food and Furniture.

From the sample were excluded trade companies, services companies, including banks and insurance companies, small businesses and companies in the food sector, thus focusing only on medium-large companies in accordance with the parameters of the European Commission. Finally, the last aspect considered for the selection of the sample was the effective presence of the company on the social network Facebook. The decision to select only medium and large companies allows us to verify the actual presence of cultural heritage categories on social network. In fact, medium-large companies are usually rooted in the territory which is very often part of their corporate assets. Starting from the official website of the company we first verified the presence of a link to the official, company Facebook page, accessible directly from the home page of the company website. The next step was to check the update status of the Facebook page. We chose Facebook because it is the platform most used by Italian companies to communicate with the target audience. Recent studies report that 99% of Italian firms are active on Facebook, a higher percentage than the global average which is equal to 95% (Gattolin, 2018). The sample was selected only when the actual effectiveness of a company’s presence on the social media was verified. This preliminary check allows us to verify that companies actually use the social network as a privileged channel of communication with consumers. Using this further restriction, 64 companies were finally identified (see table 2).

*Table 2. Descriptive table by sector and number of posts*

<i>Sector</i>	<i>N° Companies</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N° Post</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N° Like</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N° Share</i>	<i>%</i>
Food	29	45	1,450	45.31	354,486	83.14	31,053	77.63
Fashion	15	24	750	23.44	40,577	9.52	4,061	10.15
Furniture	20	31	1,000	31.25	31,311	7.34	4,887	12.22
Total	64	100	3,200	100	426,374	100	40,001	100

Source: our elaboration



All the results discussed in this paper therefore refer to the sample represented by companies established in the form of limited companies, registered in the Register of Long-lived Firms, medium-large in size, and of which 29 belong to the food sector (45% of the sample identified), 15 to the fashion sector (24% of the sample identified) and 20 to the furniture sector (31% of the sample identified).

### **Data collection and coding**

The units of analysis were identified by consulting the first most recent 50 posts published by each company on their official Facebook page (September - December 2018), for a total amount of 3200 posts analyzed. The use of content analysis for the evaluation of content on social networks and on websites is a consolidated method in literature (Schmidt *et al.*, 2008; Marino and Lo Presti, 2018a; Lo Presti and Marino 2020; Manzanaro *et al.*, 2018). This method is used when the characteristics of the content and the effectiveness and usability of the websites need to be investigated (Wan, 2002; Kline *et al.*, 2004). To obtain an objective evaluation and ensure the reliability of the analysis, two researchers, not belonging to the research group studying the topic in question but with a solid experience in the analysis of content and social media, individually evaluated and classified each post into one of the 11 categories of cultural heritage adopted and already verified by Mainolfi *et al.* (2015). The divergences of the two evaluators were discussed.

Table 3 illustrates the 11 categories of cultural heritage used to classify every post. The 11 categories are the result of an empirical research conducted in a preliminary study of Mainolfi *et al.* (2015) in order to analyze the concept of cultural heritage within the theoretical framework of the country image. As proposed by UNESCO (2006), together with an emphasis on aspects more closely related to national identity, cultural heritage is divided into three different categories: tangible and intangible cultural heritage and national identity categories. Every component of the cultural heritage image is declined in different conceptual sub-categories as can be seen in Table 3.

To reduce subjectivity, prior to the analysis of the posts, the evaluators were “trained” to respect the formal criteria established in the design phase of the research and, at this stage, definitions and examples were provided to explain and illustrate each category of the cultural heritage. To register the results of the analysis, an evaluation grid was developed containing, in addition to the 11 categories of cultural heritage, also the coding criteria provided in the “codebook”. To verify the correctness of the procedure, a pilot test was carried out on some randomly chosen posts from the Facebook official web

pages of some long-lived Italian firms. Furthermore, the first analysis was carried out together the authors of this paper. The reliability test in the evaluation of the posts gave a satisfactory result (K Cohen 0.81).

### **Likeability and Shareability rate**

Since this work aims at exploring the efficiency in engaging customers with the cultural heritage content posted on social networks, we studied the relation between the firms' posts/reposts on Facebook. For the evaluation of the social network's efficacy as a tool for community engagement we used a method based on two indicators: shareability and likeability rates. "Likes" and "Sharing" reflect the consumer's cognitive and emotional commitment when interacting on social media (Quesenberry and Coolsen, 2018). So it is likely that the more the consumer interacts on social media the higher is his/her commitment within the social media (Lo Presti and Marino, 2016). We refer to these classes as to either content categories or communication modalities. In this work, we have applied the indicators to cultural heritage categories in order to analyse which type of content has a high probability of being broadcasted on Facebook.

In order to evaluate the effective engagement created by the contents published by the companies under examination, an analysis was made considering the number of "likes" and "sharing" of posts published on Facebook. The analysis made it possible to measure the effectiveness of communication in increasing social media engagement, estimating this through the calculation of the likeability and shareability rates for each of the 'made in Italy' sectors: Food, Fashion and Furniture.

Table 3. Conceptual categories and sub-categories of Cultural Heritage

Conceptual categories	Sub categories	Coding Criteria	Examples	Example of long-lived firms
Tangible cultural heritage	Cultural sites	Posts that communicate: wide variety of cultural assets and sites; cultural and archeological sites of high value; Cultural heritage of ancient origins; Cultural and archeological sites; Cultural and archeological sites adequately preserved.	The spirit of Montalcino rests on the grounds of Tenuta Castelgiocondo. Ancient, majestic and dominant, the estate is a stronghold rich in fascination and history.	Frescobaldi Vini
	Cultural services	Posts with content that communicates variety of museums and libraries; Usability and accessibility of museums; Presence of libraries and cultural excellence centers; Museums and libraries representing the national history.	Prenota una visita guidata e gratuita al Museo della Liquirizia "Giorgio Amarelli".	Amarelli Fabbrica di Liquiriziasas
	Natural environment	Posts with content that communicates Gardens and parks of high value; Evocative landscapes; Scenarios of absolute beauty; Healthy environment.	Voglia di neve? Il Trentino ti aspetta per le prime sciate, le passeggiate in montagna e per scoprire tutta la magia all'interno della nostra Cantina. Lasciatevi trasportare in un luogo senza tempo: prenotate un tour alla scoperta delle bollicine #Ferrari-Trento!	Cantine Ferrari F.lli Lunelli S.p.A.
	Craftsmanship	Posts with content that communicates value of handcrafts; quality of Manufactured products; Manufactured productions characterized by strong originality; Creative productions and economical activities.	After taking gold leaf with the appropriate tools, we are ready to coat it on the affected area! The gilding process is ready to begin!	Giusto Manetti Battiloro S.p.A.
Intangible cultural heritage	Performing arts	Posts with content that communicates musical traditions recognizable at international level; Musical style and traditions as expression of national culture.	Questa settimana vi proponiamo un caffè tra le stelle del Cinema.	Goppion Caffè S.p.A.
	Literature and art	Posts with content that communicates literature and poetry universally recognized; Painting and sculpture of high value; Value of contemporary art.	This vase, designed around 1924 by Ercole Barovier and produced by his company Vetreria Artistica BarovierandC, is a rare piece of art: it was also selected for	BarovierandToso srl

			<p>exhibition at the 50th Biennale d'Arte in Venice, in 1952, and in a number of museums around the world.</p> <p>It's and ovoid vase where red roses with green leaves come to life thanks to a particular technique called Mosaic Glass. Ercole Barovier invented various techniques of glass making, but this absolutely was not one of those. Mosaic glass is a traditional Murano glass that was originally made by artisans in Alexandria (Egypt) well before the Roman Empire, later imported in the island.[...]</p>	
	Food and gastronomy	Posts with content that communicates cuisine and food products of high quality; Gastronomy as expression of national culture; Creative and original cuisine; Varied gastronomy; Typical astronomy, expression of local traditions; Emotional food and cuisine.	Made in Italy, non solo spaghetti! ;) #FernetBranca#Fernet#Branca#amaro #spirits #liquor #madeinitaly	Fratelli Branca Distillerie S.r.l.
	Language	Posts with content that communicates: popular and appreciated language; Language of high cultural value	-	-
	Traditions	Posts with content that communicates traditional culture and folklore; Folk events of high social value; Considerable importance of religious traditions; Variety of traditions and local cultures; Presence of religious and folk events.	A #fonterutoli è tempo di frangere le #olive. It's time to pick the #olives for the 2016 #wonderful #oliveoil from Fonterutoli. #tuscany #tuscanyoliveoil #extravirgin #extravergine #olio #foodie #chianticlassico	Marchesi Mazzei S.p.A.
National identity	People	Posts with content that communicates passionate people; People connected with the traditions of the past; National pride; Multiethnic population Nationalist population; Deep spirituality of	Vi avevamo chiesto di condividere con noi la Fiat che porterete sempre nel vostro cuore... Grazie a tutti, ci avete fatto commuovere.	Fiat S.p.A.

		people; Original and creative people; Sociable population.		
	Cultural diversities	Posts with content that communicates cultural diversity adequately protected and enhanced; Freedom of cult; Respect and tolerance of linguistic minorities.	Natale con i tuoi, Fernet-Branca con chi vuoi ;) #FernetBranca #Fernet #Branca #santostefano #natale #natale2016 #xmas #amaro #bitters #spirits	Fratelli Branca Distillerie S.r.l.

Source: our adaptation from Mainolfi *et al.*, 2015, p. 5

Based on the works of Lo Presti & Marino (2016) and Marino & Lo Presti (2018b) which calculated the engagement rate on Tweet and Facebook (tweetability rate and likeability rate respectively), the likeability rate (1) is calculated as the ratio of the number of “likes” and posts for each of the established categories, multiplied by a normalization factor  $Z$ .  $Z$  in turn is given by the ratio between the sum of the Posts and the sum of the Likes:

$$(1) \quad \text{Lrate}_{fb} = (\text{Like}^x / \text{Post}_{fb}^x) \times Z$$

$$Z = \frac{\sum \text{Post}_{fb}^k}{\sum \text{Like}^k}$$

In analogy to the likeability rate, the shareability rate (2) was defined in order to measure the probability that posts associated with a certain category will be posted a second time:

$$(2) \quad \text{Srate}_{fb} = (\text{Share}^x / \text{Post}_{fb}^x) \times Z$$

$$Z = \frac{\sum \text{Post}_{fb}^k}{\sum \text{Sharing}^k}$$

These rates gauge the probability that a post in a certain category can receive an “I Like” or can be shared. Values equal or major to 1 mean that the post in a certain category of cultural heritage has more chance to engage the consumer.

Finally, in order to estimate if the effectiveness of each category of cultural heritage stimulates the comments of customers, two multiple regression models were used. We considered likeability and shareability rate as independent variables and the comments that consumers had posted in response to the cultural heritage posts published on Facebook as dependent variables. This model permits us to detect the relationship between the engageability of

each category of cultural heritage on the social networks in terms of high likeability and shareability rates.

## Results

### *Engageability of cultural heritage posts*

The content analysis shows that long-lived firms, traditionally recognized as guardians of a strong historical and cultural heritage capable of guaranteeing a competitive advantage through a unique and distinctive positioning, do not really use the opportunities linked to the valorization of their own deeper roots. Of the 3,200 posts analyzed, 1,144 posts did not fit into any of cultural heritage categories. For this reason, they were not considered in the analysis. Table 4, on the other hand, illustrates which categories of cultural heritage are most effective in involving consumers on Facebook.

In the Food and Fashion sector, the categories Cultural sites, Natural environment and craftsmanship have indices of likeability and shareability higher than 1 while in the Furniture sector the most effective categories are People, Cultural services and Cultural sites. Cultural services can be seen as a tangible expression of the country's artistic-historical heritage while the Cultural sites are part of the assets that symbolize the cultural heritage of the country. Both are poorly used by the companies investigated and little appreciated for use in social media communication, even though the component of cultural heritage is an intrinsic leverage of engagement capable of activating participation in those categories. The analysis of the likeability and shareability indices shows that the categories mentioned above should and could be more widely communicated. With reference to the Fashion sector (Table 4) there is a high level of indices for the "People" category (likeability rate: 3.65; shareability rate: 5.34) followed by the categories "Cultural sites" and "Natural environment" (likeability rate: 1.10 and 1.20; shareability rate: 1.40 and 0.78 respectively). The "Performing arts" category, on the other hand, has a high shareability rate in relation to a lower likeability rate (likeability rate: 0.15; shareability rate: 2.05).

Table 4. Performance of cultural heritage posted by long-lived firms

Category	Sector				
	Posts	Likes	Share	Likeability rate	Shareability Rate
<i>Food sector</i>					
Cultural sites	35	26,185	2,684	2.42	2.84
Cultural services	22	2,812	334	0.41	0.56
Natural environment	96	85,708	5,189	2.89	2.00
Craftsmanship	47	21,607	1,913	1.49	1.51
Performing arts	9	3,299	133	1.19	0.55
Literature and art	59	11,125	734	0.61	0.46
Food and gastronomy	795	184,814	17,554	0.75	0.82
Language	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
Traditions	68	17,157	2,205	0.82	1.20
People	17	1,715	300	0.33	0.65
Cultural diversities	1	64	7	0.21	0.26
<i>Fashion sector</i>					
Cultural sites	8	1,028	131	1.10	1.40
Cultural services	4	278	5	0.59	0.11
Natural environment	15	2,105	137	1.20	1.03
Craftsmanship	285	34,256	3,447	1.03	1.03
Performing arts	1	18	24	0.15	2.05
Literature and art	25	1,579	153	0.54	0.52
Food and gastronomy	5	415	4	0.71	0.07
Language	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
Traditions	2	45	35	0.19	1.50
People	2	853	125	3.65	5.34
Cultural diversities	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
<i>Furniture sector</i>					
Cultural sites	10	1,155	250	2.07	2.86
Cultural services	5	325	168	1.16	3.85
Natural environment	30	1,404	197	0.84	0.75
Craftsmanship	332	18,958	2,789	1.02	0.96
Performing arts	3	27	3	0.16	0.11
Literature and art	76	2,280	313	0.54	0.47
Food and gastronomy	79	3,717	770	0.84	1.12
Language	0	0	0	0.00	0.00
Traditions	10	831	65	1.49	0.74
People	15	2,614	332	3.12	2.54
Cultural diversities	0	0	0	0.00	0.00

Source: our elaboration

Finally, with reference to the Furniture sector, there is a high level of indices for the “Cultural sites” and “Cultural services” categories (likeability rate: 2.07; 1.16 and shareability rate: 2.86; 3.85 respectively) and in the “People” category (likeability rate: 3.12; shareability rate: 2.54); in the “Traditions” category we find a high likeability rate compared to a low shareability rate (1.45 likability rate; shareability rate: 0.74 respectively). Also in this

case, the social media communication focuses on the key features of Italy that include, on one hand, the immense artistic and monumental heritage and the natural beauty of the territory, while on the other hand, their creativity and innovation, all characteristics of the Italian country brand.

### The effectiveness of cultural heritage posts on Facebook comments

A multiple regression model was performed in order to explore the relationship between the engageability of the cultural heritage dimensions and the comments that customers post in response to the firms' messages. In particular, the regression method was used to estimate if the effectiveness of each category of cultural heritage stimulated the comments of customers. Table 5a and Table 5b display the standardized-b regression coefficients,  $R^2$ , and F statistics following the entry of the likeability and shareability rate of each cultural heritage component that contributes significantly to the customers' activities on Facebook.

Table 5a. Multi regression results for Facebook comments – Likeability rate

		Likeability rate					
		<i>B</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>Std Coeff.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>
<b>Cultural sites (1)</b>	(Constant)	6.440	2.746		2.345**		
		200.258	29.345	.746	6.824	.557	46.571***
<b>Cultural services (2)</b>	(Constant)	.184	.615		.300		
		35.026	12.459	.490	2.811	.240	7.904**
<b>Natural environment (3)</b>	(Constant)	4.492	1.834		2.449***		
		577.347	72.087	.623	8.009	.388	64.150***
<b>Craftsmanship (4)</b>	(Constant)	.232	.325		.713		
		1206.76	71.914	.553	16.781	.306	281.594***
<b>Performing arts (5)</b>	(Constant)	.262	.311		.843		
		13.168	.918	.988	14.339	.976	205.606***
<b>Literature and art (6)</b>	(Constant)	.227	.207		1.095		
		44.883	9.343	.433	4.804	.188	23.080***
<b>Food and gastronomy (7)</b>	(Constant)	.979	.459		2.130**		
		3376.97	124.077	.686	27.217	.470	740.754***
<b>Language (8)</b>	(Constant)	-	-		-		
		-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Traditions (9)</b>	(Constant)	1.515	2.690		.563		
		214.870	40.063	.652	5.363	.424	28.765***
<b>People (10)</b>	(Constant)	1.703	1.284		1.326		
		3.374	8.707	.156	.388	0.24	.150
<b>Cultural diversities (11)</b>	(Constant)	-	-		-		
		-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: our elaboration.



Table 5b. Multi regression results for Facebook comments – Shareability rate

		Shareability rate					
		<i>B</i>	<i>Std. error</i>	<i>Stand. Coeff.</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>F</i>
<b>Cultural sites (1)</b>	(Constant)	2.774	2.598		1.068		
		343.822	41.953	.803	8.195	.645	67.164***
<b>Cultural services (2)</b>	(Constant)	.985	.546		1.804		
		13.400	8.548	.299	1.568	.089	2.457
<b>Natural environment (3)</b>	(Constant)	4.766	2.143		2.224**		
		549.126	100.841	.476	5.445	.227	29.653***
<b>Craftsmanship (4)</b>	(Constant)	-235	.303		-775		
		1505.364	71.873	.638	20.945	.407	438.688***
<b>Performing arts (5)</b>	(Constant)	.251	.245		1.027		
		13.242	.724	.993	18.295	.985	334.704***
<b>Literature and art (6)</b>	(Constant)	.237	.197		1.203		
		43.781	8.051	.478	5.438	.228	29.568***
<b>Food and gastronomy (7)</b>	(Constant)	2.638	.516		5.109***		
		1987.87	105.73	.545	18.800	.297	353.440***
<b>Language (8)</b>	(Constant)	-	-		-		
		-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Traditions (9)</b>	(Constant)	1.855	3.021		.614		
		200.94	49.467	.545	4.062	.297	16.502***
<b>People (10)</b>	(Constant)	1.108	.882		1.256		
		8.135	5.286	.532	1.539	.281	2.368
<b>Cultural diversities (11)</b>	(Constant)	-	-		-		
		-	-	-	-	-	-

Source: our elaboration.

No multicollinearity between the independent variables is present, because all the measurements (VIF and Tol.) are well within the accepted cut-off thresholds (Field, 2009). The significance of the F shows that the multiple coefficients are widely significant. All regression models are significant and explain a substantial amount of variance as can be seen by the high R<sup>2</sup> (Squared multiple correlation). The results confirm the hypotheses H1 and H2. Indeed the analysis shows that all the dimensions of cultural heritage

have a great impact on the comments except for “people” and “cultural services”. Indeed, even if the two categories “people” and “cultural services” present a high likeability and shareability rate in almost all the three sectors, they are not capable of stimulating comments but only sharing and “I Like”. This is true also when the communication regards cultural services. Even if it has more probability of receiving an “I like” or a “share” from the furniture sector, this category is only partially capable of stimulating comments from consumers.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

This work is a first attempt at a large-scale investigation aimed at studying the tools potentially available to companies for a strategic enhancement of their historical heritage and therefore aims to understand if and how they use the levers related to cultural heritage in their social media communication strategies. The exploratory survey showed that cultural assets are an important component of social media communication.

With this in mind, research capable of providing information on the cultural variables that are most able to influence social media engagement could contribute to enhancing the consumer commitment through the identification of innovative and original communication strategies. The work provides new input on the importance of using the new social interaction channels to reinforce strategies aimed at supporting social media engagement processes. As shown by the data collected, in fact, only 64% of the companies initially selected for the purpose of the study showed that they understood the benefits of valorizing their cultural heritage through their social media communication strategy, and, in particular, those aspects related to the cultural heritage of the country.

Based on these results, there is a push for a more convinced exploitation of the leverages of cultural heritage that comes from the competitive characteristics of the sector in which the company operates. Based on this evidence, the distinctive characteristics of a country make it possible to associate images and links to a sector and thus contribute to creating value for the brand identity. In addition, this method of communication strengthens brand awareness, which supports the brand’s attitude (Langaro *et al.*, 2018; Phua and Ahn, 2016; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016).

On the other hand, the results have shown how some categories including historical-artistic sites and museums and libraries are not considered sufficiently capable of creating strong “connections” between the company and its followers. Nevertheless, the analysis of the likeability and shareability

rates shows that, on the contrary, the categories mentioned above should and could be more widely communicated. In this regard, the research has noted that the category linked to the People's national identity, and the already mentioned categories of Cultural sites, Cultural services and Performing arts, generate high rates of likeability and shareability.

In fact, this last aspect shows how the component of cultural heritage is an intrinsic lever of engagement capable of activating participation in those categories but that are not really made the most of in the social media communication by the companies investigated. Therefore, by calculating the indices of likeability and shareability, it becomes evident that the posts published can be considered a means to favour the engagement of followers, although not all the categories of cultural heritage are fully involved in this process.

Moreover, as demonstrated by Riviezzo *et al.* (2022), corporate museums are able to achieve non-economic performance that have an impact on economic performance: "Achieving non-economic objectives, such as conserving corporate heritage, enhancing organizational culture and values, and creating enthusiasm for corporate heritage and, more in general, for cultural heritage of the territory, among others, has a positive impact on visitors number and thus on economic performance" (Riviezzo *et al.*, p. 15).

From the theoretical point of view, this paper contributes to the literature on cultural heritage by considering it as a multidimensional construct that can affect the engagement of consumers on social networks. Finally, this research integrates the studies on the cultural heritage construct, considering the latter as a strategic tool capable of influencing the perceptions and purchase intentions of customers in continuity with the studies conducted by Hakala *et al.* (2011).

In conclusion, this paper, presents an analysis of the opportunities offered by social media engagement strategy. The analysis of the posts published by the companies investigated on the social platform Facebook has highlighted important results. The adoption of measurements such as the likeability rate and the shareability rate, as well as the measurement of the levels of awareness and engagement, gives a method for evaluating the effectiveness of cultural heritage variables, with a view to favouring interaction with their followers and creating engagement.

The following work contributes to the understanding of the importance of social media in strategies to involve the social network users of long-lived firms, by providing an initial overview of actions aimed at exploiting the competitive advantage generated by both tangible and intangible variables related to cultural heritage.

Taking into consideration the companies' behaviour, the exploratory analysis showed that cultural assets are an important component of social media communication and could help to understand how the company uses them in communication and how it could make use of its heritage to strengthen its competitive advantage both in the country of origin and abroad. For example, unexpectedly, the categories Cultural sites, Natural environment and Craftsmanship, that in the Food sector are unusual, generate greater activity of engagement from users than the Food and Gastronomy category that more usually represents the sector and is therefore widely used by the companies in this sector. Therefore, long-lived firms could use the artistic and naturalistic heritage of the territory that hosts their food production if they want to capitalize on the efforts connected to marketing communication. A certain consistency, on the other hand, is evident in the Fashion sector, in which the dimension of cultural heritage most likely to involve users is linked to the categories of People and Craftsmanship. While companies in the Furniture sector should focus on Cultural sites and Cultural services if they want to make sure that there is greater consumer participation on the social media. Therefore in territories such as Italy, where the image of the national cultural heritage, and in particular the image of its intangible and identity components, represents a fundamental leverage of competitive advantage on the international markets, companies could use these dimensions to attract the attention of the customer and associate the images derived from these to the brand.

In the future, companies that have a lack of identity could select images that evoke the historical and artistic heritage of their country and that recall the distinctive characteristics of the people who populate it to take advantage of the positive image consolidated in the territory of reference.

The study is naturally not free of limitations. Firstly, the sample used is only composed of medium and large companies, set up as limited companies. Moreover, the companies analyzed were chosen from the "Register of Long-lived Firms" of Italian Chamber of Commerce which, although representing a highly reliable source, may not include all the long-lived firms active in Italy. Finally, this research does not distinguish between positive comments and negative comments, but future research could deepen the knowledge on the relationship between social media engagement indicators (such as likeability and shareability) and the value (positive or negative) of the message posted by consumers. In addition, the research could analyze comments in order to verify whether they can be considered valid indicators of the consumer's attitude towards brand marketing communication. Indeed, it is demonstrated that the digital communication is a complex operation and requires adequate skills on the part of the organization to satisfy the expectations of a potential customer (Lo Presti *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the stimulation of

comments could be driven by many other factors that have not been considered in this study, for this reason, they can be investigated in future research. Furthermore, this research only investigates Facebook and does not investigate other social networks such as Instagram which today is a social network very much used by companies for consumer engagement. This last point could, moreover, be investigated in future research. Finally, in a future study, the proposed model could include additional independent variables or control variables in order to increase the validity of the models and execute a factorial analysis in order to assess the validity of the variable “cultural heritage”.

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