

THE TEMPORARY EXHIBITIONS OF CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA (2015-2022)

A Communication Strategies Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study conducts a comparative and retrospective analysis of the communication strategies used to promote Cristóbal Balenciaga's temporary exhibitions between 2015 and 2022. The elements used in its communication plans were identified through semi-structured interviews with the communication directors of 16 international exhibition spaces and with the communications director of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa. The analysis revealed that museums do not employ transmedia strategies, which results in a unilateral communication policy that limits participation in social networks and engagement with the narrative of the exhibitions. The lack of a multichannel strategy reduces the media impact of a powerful brand like Balenciaga. To mitigate this gap, it is suggested that communication strategies be defined to promote the participation and commitment of visitors, who can contribute their content and share the narrative of the exhibitions on their social networks.

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1. Introduction

Balenciaga knew how to create the sacred silhouette, the baby doll, the peacock silhouette... whatever he wanted. He was a couturier who dialogued with the creators of fabrics and with shapes to infinity," says Sáez-Ángulo (2019) to refer to the visionary character of the couturier born in Guetaria, who refused to enter the world of ready-to-wear, because he conceived of fashion as something more artisanal, as something select. Cristóbal Balenciaga was not only visionary but also controversial and rebellious. Romeu (2017) remembers that Balenciaga refused to attend to the press, he distrusted the media, and he preferred secrecy so much that:

...he challenged the Paris Chamber of Haute Couture to show his collections a month later than his colleagues, forcing New York buyers and journalists to return to the fashion city. The result was coverage excluded from the magazines' style pages and great sales success (Romeu, 2017).

And history seems to repeat itself within the Balenciaga brand. In 2022 and under the mentorship of Georgian lead designer Demna Gvasalia, Balenciaga presented a collection on a snow-white field, which broke with the rest of the season's catwalks due to its controversial nature and would become the first political manifesto of fashion against the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Cantarini (2022) describes how the models paraded under the inclemency of a harsh winter: wind, cold, snow. Everyone carried the Trash Pouch, a maxi bag that, together with backpacks and other bags, reminds us of Ukraine and its hundreds of thousands of citizens fleeing the invasion.

With Gvasalia, Balenciaga has developed its own narrative to consolidate itself as a brand committed to a non-banal message with a transmedial approach. Gvasalia's statement continued after the staging at Paris Fashion Week. Precisely a month later, the firm sold the ugliest and dirtiest shoes presented by the Balenciaga house: the Paris sneakers.

Figure 1: Paris from Balenciaga



Source: Balenciaga, 2022

Regardless of whether the Balenciaga brand mocked the consumer or made a statement about the war by referencing the Paris Fashion Week catwalk, the sneakers quickly sold out and became a trend on all social media platforms. It remains unclear if consumers followed the reference made by Balenciaga and if they were interested in the more profound message. Consumers looking for fast fashion most probably missed the subtleties of Gvasalia's transmedia message.

Cristóbal Balenciaga opposed making his fashion house participate in ready-to-wear production and focused solely on haut couture, accentuating exclusivity while promoting and

protecting the artisan's work. Exclusivity, artisanship, and innovation in design were the main messages communicated. In this regard, Gvasalia has mastered the power of communication, promoting the use of social networks, engaging the public in discussions around his artistic proposals, and in so doing, highlighting the artisan's vision at work:

Demna [Gvasalia] has also become known for memeifying fashion, twisting references and everyday absurdities in his work to provoke a reaction on the level of an Internet troll. We are thinking, of course, of his infamous collaborations with Crocs, the Hacker Project done in collaboration with Gucci inspired by high-fashion imitations and the recent release of a pair of sneakers that the brand describes as “totally destroyed” and that cost 1,850 Dollars; It was clear that the fall 2022 collection also played with the idea, through the lens of haute couture (Bateman, 2022).

Figure 2: The Simpsons and Paris shoes



Source: Disney Plus, 2022

Vogue's Phillips commented:

Those grunge sneakers that marked our early years and then, little by little, were cleaned and renewed until the pristine white Converse regained their hegemony, thus returning to our lives again with more force (and dirt) than ever. Defiant, without complexes, and proud of their land (just like teenagers, wow), to give us back that desire that nothing matters and everything is ironic (2022).

With Gvasalia, the brand Balenciaga communicates through the video game Afterworld, in the metaverse through projects with Epic Games and Fortnite, through NFTs, in television through The Simpsons, as well as through different official profiles on Instagram (including famous models). The message can be disruptive and inviting to engage in discussion on the various social networks, where the youngest spend about six and a half hours a day searching for information, buying, or sharing their preferences, as highlighted by the Global Digital Overview Report 2023. Gvasalia's narrative is conceived in communication theory as transmedial because the narrative

expands across different media and platforms, requiring the consumer to follow the content across media to gain access to the whole story (Freeman & Rampazzo, 2018), “characteristics that encourage the participation and involvement of the audiences to which they are directed” (Camacho & Miquel Segarra, 2019, p. 225). With a transmedia narrative form, the audience assumes a more active role because they capture the fragments of information offered through multiple platforms to reconstruct the complete story, they develop their own discourse building on their previous knowledge, and they share a new personal narrative through their own media channels, expanding the narrative of the brand into multiple new contexts reaching vast new audiences. Transmedia is about new modes of storytelling (Garcia, 2017). Balenciaga communicates in transmedial mode, generating a broader and more complex discussion beyond the typical fashion catwalk. Museums engaging with Balenciaga collections, on the other hand, appear reluctant to adopt what may seem like the perfect participatory format to engage visitors in ‘hunting and gathering’ pieces of narrative across media (Basaraba, 2022), extending beyond the exhibition and making use of interactive digital narrative tools.

1.1. Fashion as a form of art

The acceptance of fashion in the world of arts has been slow. Art historians, curators, and others responsible for museum exhibitions have viewed the presence of clothing in museum spaces with suspicion. As Valerie Steele (2018), fashion historian and museum director at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), points out: “There is a historical tendency to dismiss fashion as frivolous, ephemeral, and material. In contrast, art has always been valued as a meaningful form, eternally beautiful and spiritual in nature...” (p. 28). It has been understood, for centuries, that clothing is only a commodity, perhaps forgetting that any work of art, as an object, is also a product subject to commercialization.

Although it is recognizable that fast fashion symbolizes the capitalist, mass, and serial production of clothing, fashion also encompasses haute couture, a careful, artisanal production system that, without a doubt, is a manifestation of art. “A classic Balenciaga dress, displayed on a pedestal or a museum display case, acquires a certain aura of an artistic work, even though it was not produced in the art world but in the fashion system” (Steele, 2018, p. 27). This extraordinary aura emanates from the display of craft, skill, and handwork inherent in haute couture, referencing the place and origin of the creators and, in turn, generating symbolic value (Pratt et al., 2012).

The museum's display of fashion as a symbolic good shaped how the public understood the importance of fashion as an expression of fine arts. It became the necessary guideline for fashion designers to construct their displays. Pérez highlights that, in the last century, the conglomerates that took over the big fashion brands decided to budget, build, or reformulate their museums thanks to this change in mentality. “Salvatore Ferragamo, Dior, Yves Saint Laurent, Prada, Louis Vuitton, Balenciaga, and Max Mara are some brands that did it. Valentino Garavani became a precursor of exclusively digital exhibitions” (Pérez, 2021, p. 108).

Figure 3: Valentino 2011 Virtual Exhibition View



Source: Valentino, 2022

Fashion has been impacted by many social, cultural, and even technological transformations, and museums have explored these changes in the last 50 years. Mata Torrado points out that "large-format exhibitions by established couturiers of yesterday and today want to endorse the marriage of art and industry that exists in the most exquisite sewing creations" (2003, p. 227). In 2011, there was a significant boom in fashion shows. The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the Galliera Musée in Paris, the Pushkin Museum in Moscow, and the Mapfre Foundation in Madrid became epicentres of the conversation about haute couture. It was also the year the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum opened its doors in Spain with an extensive collection of pieces created by the couturier.

That no one expected the success of the Alexander McQueen exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum in New York is demonstrated by the extraordinary measures taken to accommodate the flocks of visitors. The exhibition closed on August 7, a week later than planned. Its hours were extended until midnight, and it opened on Mondays when the centre is typically closed. At least 17,000 people paid \$50 for that privilege. *Wild Beauty*, which reviews the career of the late British designer, has been the eighth of the ten most viewed exhibitions in the museum's 141-year history. (De la Torre, 2011, p. 31)

The valorisation of fashion as a form of art has been driven by these large exhibitions in superstar museums, which benefit from the association with high-profile fashion brands to maintain their status, with a high concentration of visitor numbers and a temporary monopoly of attention during the special temporary exhibition.

1.2. Fashion exhibitions

The origin of fashion exhibitions remains under discussion among fashion historians and museologists. For Steele (2008) and Dymond (2011), the first fashion exhibition dates to the Palais du Costume with the International Exhibition of 1900 in Paris. However, Padín Otero prefers to place it in the group exhibition *Fashion an Anthology*, organized by Sir Cecil Beaton in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 1971.

It is when solid steps are taken forward in the incorporation of fashion in the museum because despite the fashion of our seniority, it needs historical singularity or wealth of the tissue required for period and clothing clothes. Exhibition rooms, a

cultural manifestation of the contemporary moment that made it ideal to be exposed, were seen in it. (Padín Otero, 2017, p. 308)

Since both origins, fashion exhibitions have appeared intertextual (fashion plus painting, fashion plus automobiles, etc.) and monographic dedicated to the retrospective work of the industry's creators. As Pérez (2021) points out: "You can talk about the creator, the house, history, and savoir-faire" (p. 109). Many museums, including art, history, and industry collections, collect samples of clothing, jewellery, and even shoes to document the fashion system in the last century. Exhibitions, including fashion items, attract the public's attention and become a boost for museums (Mata Torrado, 2003; Pérez, 2021).

1.3. Balenciaga in museums

Cristóbal Balenciaga Eizaguirre (1895-1972), born in Getaria, Spain, represented a revolution in Spanish and international fashion and significantly impacted how it was appreciated worldwide. He emigrated to Paris after the start of the Spanish Civil War, where he established himself as the greatest exponent of Spanish fashion and shared the haute couture scene with Christian Dior and Coco Chanel, who called him the master.

González-Liendo (2022) and Calvo Elizazu (2022) maintain that the Biscayan couturier was the first designer ever to hold a monographic exhibition in a museum, which opened in November 1968 at the Bellerive Museum in Switzerland. This coincided with the interest in Balenciaga of Verena Bischofberger, then director of fashion studies at the Zurich School of Applied Arts (Calvo Elizazu, 2022), who collaborated in an exhibition inaugurated in 1970 that included the maestro's most essential wardrobe. In 1973, almost a year after the designer's death, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York opened the exhibition *The World of Balenciaga*. The Circulo de Bellas Artes of Madrid and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Madrid were followed by exhibits in 1974 and 1975, respectively (Mata Torrado, 2003).

In contrast, other fashion designers have benefited from monographic exhibitions much later. Designer Paul Poiret had an exhibition in 1976 at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, Yves Saint Laurent had an exhibit in 1983 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York as the first living designer to have an exhibition of his work, Elsa Schiaparelli was featured in 1984 at the Palais Galliera, Mariano Fortuny had a monograph exhibit in 1985 at the Kyoto Costume Institute, and Christian Dior had a commemorative retrospective in 1987 in what would become a museum in his name at the Villa Les Rhumbs, his family home, and a homage at the Musée de Les Arts Décoratifs (Padín Otero, 2017). More recently, on the 60th anniversary of the founding of the Yves Saint Laurent house, six Parisian museums came together to present exhibitions around the French designer simultaneously.

This anniversary exhibition is a way to show fashion differently, to tell the story of Yves Saint Laurent through a direct dialogue with the arts of the world, to delve into the house's archives and understand its full depth. But it is also the opportunity to rediscover the most beautiful museums in Paris and the richness of their collections. (Mabille, 2021, p.21)

Figure 4: Invitation to the first monographic exhibition of Cristóbal Balenciaga



Fuente: Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa

Source: Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa

Balenciaga achieved recognition for his sculptural architectural style in fashion due to the early solo exhibitions of his work in such renowned museums that highlighted his characteristic craft. As Martínez (2017) points out, Balenciaga did not base his work on sketches; he worked three-dimensionally directly on the model with the actual fabrics, taking advantage of the textile characteristics. He is known for using up to 135 different fabrics in a collection (Golbin, 2006). Obtaining structures and volumes was a fundamental part of his stylistic proposal, which obsessed him until the last of his days. The architecture of his dresses was consolidated by his desire to create comfort in haute couture. This led him to develop new fabrics in collaboration with textile makers, including Gazar, with which he constructed his most iconic dresses (De Lorenzo, 2021). Balenciaga's innovative structures reference his Spanish cultural identity, which according to Fogg (2013) "evoke a strong artistic and religious background" (p.175).

Mata Torrado (2003, p. 229) recognises that Balenciaga's textile vocabulary led him to many exhibitions in Spain and worldwide. Balenciaga has been present in significant museums for the last ten years, with 22 global monographic exhibitions (See Figure 5).

Figure 5: Temporary exhibitions on Cristóbal Balenciaga (2015-2022)



Source: Own elaboration, 2024

This constant presence of Cristóbal Balenciaga in museums has become a valuable tool for the fashion house itself. Navarrete Hernández (2020) points out that museums generate value through their exhibitions with the support of digital communication tools. Digital storytelling is a resource that enhances both the curation of the exhibited pieces and its narrative construction, facilitating a greater amplification of the museum discourse. Digital storytelling allows visitors to experience the physical or virtual tour and enables a co-creator role of added content and contexts, generating further personal value.

Digital technology for communication has a significant impact on an increasingly larger audience. Thanks to its global spectrum, the narrative created by curators and co-creating visitors extends through social networks, websites, video games, metaverse, AI, etc. The assortment of devices and platforms facilitates the expansion of the narrative with increased access to detailed information that promotes understanding and, hence, valuation of the work of the fashion designer.

1.3. Communications models

Communication is a living process, constantly evolving. Communication models have also evolved as the process, actors, and elements are better understood. Early communication models (from the 1940s and 1950s) were conceptualized as linear models that assumed a one-way action, not a process, focused on delivering a message for persuasion instead of engaging in an exchange. Non-linear models were developed subsequently to describe the processes of feedback, networks, and the purpose of the communication process based on the exchange of information. Interaction models are followed to define an additional action of listening, which involves receiving, decoding, interpreting, and acting upon the message. The role of the receiver is highlighted, as is the quality of unique or redundant information received, yet the two processes of sending and receiving are seen as separate behaviours. In the transactional model, the communication process is seen as a simultaneous response between A and B, focusing on communication behaviour patterns (Narula, 2006). Last, the convergence model, developed by Kincaid (1979), proposes reaching a mutual understanding as the core of the communication process. All these models focus on part of the

process and specific situations that help understand the elements of communication and their interactions, which can be helpful when making predictions.

The essential elements in the communication process are the sender, channel, message, receiver, effect, and feedback (Narula, 2006). One key communication component is that it takes place in a context external to the sender, the receiver, and the communication process. Understanding the contextual approach to meaning-making in communication can support identifying the role of participants and their contribution to the meaning-making process. Besides the challenges technology can cause when transmitting a message, there is also the so-called 'semantic noise', which refers to the receiver's lack of contextual reference to decipher the desired meaning intended by the sender. Communication is, hence, a reflexive process (Narula, 2006).

Once the communication model was framed in the mass media:

Would be characterised by a certain degree of passivity of some of the interlocutors, the existence of a high degree of communicative intermediation and the limited margin of reaction of the receiving subject. With the appearance of social media networks, it was understood that audiences would obtain greater participation in the communication process. (Abad, 2005, p.22)

Lucas Marín (2006, p.15) spoke of the power of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), allowing them to achieve greater interactivity and participation of the public and flexibility to meet the audience's needs since the new communication platforms permitted the creation of more individualized models.

Jenkins (2008) already conceded that the audience shed its passive receiving role in the transmedia communication model to take on a more leading role in capturing the different narrative fragments in other media to reconstruct and share new meanings within their context. In this way, transmedia communication appears to be the model that offers the most significant impact to institutions seeking communication with their audiences. In the case of museums, this concept of greater public participation also coincides with the newly defined idea of the museum, which commits museum spaces to the involvement of their audiences in the co-creation, dissemination, sharing, and communication of stories.

Transmedia communication further facilitates accessibility to museum content 24/7, everywhere, without restrictions while offering greater inclusivity to participants by providing content in multiple formats and media. Furthermore, the model is not based solely on digital communication but on the use of all available online and offline communication channels, including radio, TV, social networks, ATL, BTL, metaverse, and video games, in addition to the well-known formats of books, music, catwalks, exhibitions, and so on. Expanding the communication reach through different channels facilitates the recursive and creative nature of strategic communication design.

1.4. Transmedia communications: Concept, model, and participation

Immersive experiences, virtual reality, augmented reality, podcasts, video games, social networks, and virtual headquarters are digital tools that currently enhance communication skills to generate interaction between companies and their different audiences. Jenkins (2008, p.31) classifies this recursiveness of communication as transmedia since it involves a broad articulation of media that allows the active participation of stakeholders. For it to be transmedial, different platforms must be used. So, it is imperative to create a universe with all the digital and analogue resources available to complement and complete each other in a coordinated and participatory manner. Jenkins also identifies the need for an active role by the consumer/user/visitor/public, which must be configured to capture the fragments of history distributed across the different communication platforms.

Enabling interaction between museums and their visitors remains a challenge, which could be mitigated by incorporating currently existing digital communication tools. Although Caerols Mateo (2021) recognizes that “these institutions have become living agents, demanding their own identity, a brand and, above all, strategically managing their communication to achieve stable relationships with their audiences and with society in general” (p. 304), museums remain passive and expectant in the face of the enormous potential of social media platforms. They even remain distant from Web 3.0, where users not only actively participate as prosumers but have become producers of their content and, in cases where institutions are involved, are essential sources of co-creation.

In this sense, Jiménez Orellana (2016) and Izquierdo Expósito et al. (2016) recognize that, with the arrival of Web 2.0, museums must open to a more direct connection with their audiences, allowing them to be an essential part of the communication process, because social networks allow faster feedback from audiences to users—museums with their different activities. Social networks have made it easier to obtain an immediate response to the information disseminated from exhibition spaces, allowing us to understand the receptivity of information, redefine actions and quickly understand the demands of our interlocutors.

In this regard, Jiménez Orellana (2016, p.111) highlights that the user becomes critical in disseminating the content: the exhibitions have their own hashtag and web portal, Facebook page or Twitter profile. Thanks to these new media, users comment on their experiences while sharing photographs and encouraging new visitors.

For their part, Izquierdo Expósito et al. (2016, p. 1175) recognize that it is a process of complete evolution that redefines communications, its impact, and the power of the audience. It is a process that museums must understand to take advantage of their potential, allowing actors to assume their role as prosumers in the face of the narratives they receive in a fragmented way and that they must reconstruct to share and disseminate in their language. The online museum visitors create their own “information space” or exhibition, which has important implications for the museum. All information elements must function as independent online components, which requires a robust metadata strategy.

However, museum institutions still need to adopt the transmedial communication model faster. In this sense, Fernández-Fernández et al. insist that museums must remain attentive to the evolution of digital communication to adapt to the manifest needs – tacitly or explicitly – of society to generate genuinely effective and efficient communications, both in their physical and virtual spaces, complement each other, that the symbiosis must exist is evident.

In this sense, Walls Ramírez (2020) and Marcos Ramos (2013) add that it is imperative to remember that communication, whether digital or analogue, must be approached with a creative vision, where digital platforms are essential to connect people’s audiences and the museum. Statistics such as those published by the Global Digital Report 2023 cannot be ignored, which reveals that, on average, the population stays connected to the Internet for 6 hours and 37 minutes each day, of which 61% of that time is done through smartphones and tablets, which means that they are devices always to carry reach within. That digital exposure that, on social networks, reaches 2 hours and 31 minutes daily, according to the report, is used to maintain contact with family and friends through social networks (47%), search for new stories (34%), know what is being talked about or is trending (28.8%), participate in live content (23.7%), watch content from favourite brands and companies (22.7 %), among other. All activities can be generated within museum institutions to connect with their audiences (<https://wearesocial.com/es/blog/2023/01/digital-2023/>).

For Villena Alarcón (2014), the institutional website is no longer the centre of the strategy since it is one more element of what a global system should be, where platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter) or Instagram, in addition to the web, the podcast and other digital tools must come together to allow storytelling to have a much greater reach (p. 21). The website needs to become a proper virtual headquarters of the museum, where visitors can also live experiences and interact not only with the institution but also be allowed to share information and even

suggest stories that they want to get on their tours, just as Villena Alarcón points out. In this order of ideas, Navarrete (2019) insists that each digital communication platform serves best to highlight specific content, such as interviews with curators on YouTube, behind the scenes on Instagram, etc.

For Moreno Sánchez (2015), museums still do not quickly face the needs of their audiences. Although in the physical headquarters, museum institutions have not been able to capitalize on the interaction generated with the visitor entirely, this hybrid reality rises exponentially when it comes to the user or visitor of the virtual headquarters. "People are still talking about the museum's website as if the virtual museum were—which it is in some cases—a virtual brochure" (p. 102).

Museum institutions must take on the challenge of enhancing their communication models. The definition of strategic digital communication from social media platforms and other technological resources must be fundamental. These tools are here to stay, evidenced by the growing number of users and the constant appearance and updating of these resources. It is imperative to help the user/visitor empower themselves as active collaborators and protagonists of the museum communication processes, also complying with the provisions of the recently updated ICOM definition of a museum. The need to work with and for the community is made truly clear.

In this sense, Robledo Dioses et al. (2016, p. 15) and Bravo-Mancero et al. (2019, p.103) comment that the role of the public is fundamental in the construction of the stories that they want to tell through art. The authors highlight that it is the institution's responsibility to break paradigms regarding the media used and how said supports are addressed since it is necessary to generate constant and efficient interaction with audiences.

For Moya and Moya (2018), museums will only achieve communication success when they promote a broad and powerful sense of prosumers, listening to their motivations, demands, and needs to address them correctly (p. 46).

1.5. The challenges of museum communications with transmedia impact

Fashion designers, such as Cristóbal Balenciaga, not only make from fabrics and supplies but also ingeniously construct stories that become exhibition narratives in museums around the world. Communication then takes over the fabrics to draw social, political and cultural manifestos. Fashion is empowered by the value of symbolism to connect with consumers; that sense even reaches museums.

This is how the greats of fashion, now supported by their powerful fashion brands, have built their temples of art, perhaps also because of the reluctance they have experienced from the museum sector that has refused for centuries to allow the presence of fashion in the temples of art.

Balenciaga, today one of the great fashion brands with a dizzying transmedia reach, uses his design proposals to establish positions against war but also against irrational clothing consumerism—a powerful opportunity due to the significant investments made in advertising and brand promotion on a global level.

Museums have a window to contribute to the dialogue about the need to change the fashion consumption paradigm or break with the perception of banal and frivolous fashion. This is not only to question what the industry does in terms of fast fashion or ultra-fast fashion to the detriment of society and the planet but also to contrast the legacy of Balenciaga and other artisans who have given life to the fashion system.

An effort also to approach the transmedial, a way of communicating that, although it may not seem like it, is already imprinted on the internal borders of museums. An exhibition is, per se, a transmedial exercise where the visitor must articulate his narrative, for which he has tools available in the exhibition rooms (texts, photos, paintings, costumes, projections, etc.) in the exhibition areas—restaurants or cafes, in education areas and even in the museum store.

Transmedia is conceived from the exhibition design areas, with the support of conservation, restoration, assembly, and disassembly. The communication unit of the museums becomes the mere structure of the narrative to expose it, demonstrate it and transfer it to the media (social networks, newspapers, magazines, video games, television, radio, as well as a long list of media platforms) to continue telling the story outside the museum walls.

The challenges of transmedia communication begin with the understanding that this conception already exists and must be taken advantage of and enhanced, allowing visitors/users/clients to be an important part of extending exhibition narratives.

2. Methodology

Strategic communication in institutions faces the challenge of continually transforming itself to generate a significant interaction with the actors with whom it must be linked in a changing society. Museums must also take on the challenge of establishing efficient lines of communication with their audiences, which allow them to be essential in transmitting the different narratives designed to teach them about the various artistic and heritage manifestations. The role of prosumer that audiences assume gives them a leading role in creating and disseminating the museum's narrative, allowing them to enhance the impact of communications as a connection process between the museum and its audiences. However, to ensure that these prosumers know their role and can communicate efficiently, educating, motivating, and committing them to the museum's narrative is necessary.

Through methodological triangulation, the dynamics of the current communication strategy are qualitatively and quantitatively analysed with a transmedia approach and its application to heritage institutions. In this sense, in-depth interviews were carried out with Isidro Moreno Sánchez y Mónica Viñarás Abad, experts in the development of communication strategies to understand the different elements that museums must consider in their communication plans. To encourage interaction with its various audiences.

Likewise, a questionnaire was applied to the 16 museum institutions that have had exhibitions on Cristóbal Balenciaga between 2015 and 2022 to analyse the communication plan undertaken (see Table 1 for a list of museums and their exhibits). A response was obtained from 13 museums (81.25% of respondents). Only three institutions did not participate in the study: the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, which preferred not to reveal its communication strategy; the Kunstmuseum in the Netherlands, whose staff does not have details of the exhibition because human capital has changed since the Balenciaga exhibition was held; and, the Kimbell Museum in the United States, which remained closed during the investigation.

Table 1: Museums and their social networks

Museum	Title of person who answered the survey	Instagram followers	X followers	Facebook followers	Main characteristic
Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa	Head of Communication and Marketing	57,4 K	7.381	22 k	Resources used: Photography, video and live
Fashion Institute of Technology Museum	Education and Audiences Program Chief	72,4 K	22.222	112 k	Resources used: Photography, video and live
IAACC Serrano	Pablo Museum curator	3.751	3.827	4,4 K	Resources used: Photography, video
McCord Steward Museum	Public relations officer	14,9 K	34.745	33 k	Resources used:

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						Photography, video and live
Museo de Arte Moderno de México	Institutional communication coordinator	214 K	443.301	282 k		Resources used: Photography, video and live
Museo de las Artes de la Universidad de Guadalajara	Communication chief	41,6 K	14.091	104 k		Resources used: Photography, video and live
Museu Disseny Barcelona	Communication coordinator	67,3 K	21.551	57 k		Resources used: Photography, video and live
Museo Thyssen Bornemisza	Press officer	358 K	44.412	298 k		Resources used: Photography, video and live
Museo del Traje	Cultural coordinator	42,1 K	31.113	74 k		Resources used: Photography, video
Museo Xabia	Exhibition curator	9.490	5.947	16 k		Resources used: Photography
Sala Canal de Isabel II	Cultural coordinator	Lacks own account	Lacks own account	Lacks own account		Resources used: Photography, video.
						Obs: They use the social networks of the Community of Madrid, just as the 15 autonomic museums do
Real Fábrica de Tapices	Cultural coordinator	13,5 K	1.566	5 k		Resources used: Photography, video
We Crave	Exhibition curator	2.521	Has no account	Has no account		Resources used: Photography, video

Source: Own elaboration, 2024.

In this sense, variables were considered, such as the audiences that were served, the actions that were undertaken within the plan, the means used, the number of visitors, both virtual and physical, the profile of the professionals who have been in charge of the strategies above, the number of professionals dedicated to communication, in addition to the role played by the communication department of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, as an institution that configures the global communication strategy of the legacy and heritage of Casa Balenciaga.

Finally, the content of the publications that appeared on the official profiles of the museums involved in this study on Instagram, Facebook, and X are analysed, as well as the interaction they generated among the audiences of these institutions. This is considering that they are the three social media platforms most used by citizens, as established by the Global Overview Report 2023

by We Are Social and Meltwater (Can be seen <https://wearesocial.com/es/blog/2023/01/digital-2023/>)

3. Analysis and results

The museum is a cultural organization, and, like any institution, it can choose which media to use within its communication strategy, as well as the approach to implement, inform, communicate or invite dialogue. The experts generally stated that museums still provide one-way information externally through social networks and internally in their exhibition halls without promoting dialogue or interaction between visitors. This has been evidenced through the semi-structured interviews with those responsible for the communication areas of the exhibition spaces that have hosted exhibitions by Cristóbal Balenciaga from 2015 to 2022 and in the in-depth interviews carried out with experts in the area.

After the analysis of the interviews, it is evident that the communication strategies, far from facilitating the incorporation of the audience in the construction and expansion of the expository narrative, the traditional scheme is maintained, where the public receives information but is not invited to participate actively. Many museum institutions even limit the actions of visitors by preventing them from taking photographs and sharing them on social networks, which immediately translates into a rupture of the narrative constructed by the museum itself.

Furthermore, museums cannot break with the traditional communication paradigm (press releases, media interviews, some publications on social networks, etc.) due to the need for greater professionalization in the area. Many museums have delegated communication functions to professionals from other disciplines, making it difficult to understand the strategic dimension of communication in these institutions. This is because one of the fundamental elements of the museum's operation is communication. This process begins with the definition, conceptualization and assembly of an exhibition. It must be fixed by preventing the audience from participating in their contributions to the physical and virtual museum spaces. Another element that directly affects the power of communication is the organizational preponderance given to the communication area in museums, a unit that, in general terms, only reaches the rank of coordination and/or leadership, falling below managerial positions. Guiding principles restrict the coupling of global actions and strategies that facilitate the achievement of the museum's general objectives.

3.1. We must overcome the informative model of museums and move towards transmedia

In museums, there are important examples of the impact of these platforms on the success of communications. Minervini (2021) states that it is vital to achieve authentic participation, which generates a communicative and democratic practice for citizens.

It is essential to read the context and adjust the communication projects and products to the reality of the museum. At the same time, digital technology has become a new gateway, an opportunity to incubate projects, products, and dialogues that would have been impossible in the physical world. Therefore, it is necessary to think of museums no longer as closed spaces but as open spaces, where it is no longer required to be physically present for cultural and social processes, interaction and dialogue between the museum and the community to develop (Minervini, 2021). In this sense, Viñarás Abad insists that it is necessary to incorporate the different digital communication platforms available in the museum's actions.

Transmedia communication uses different media, formats, platforms, and resources to communicate fragments of the same message. The sender has the power to manage communication, and transmediality forces him to be more creative and leading. Depending on the platform, the message is highly conditioned, and different contexts are generated, which the receiver must adapt and translate for themselves. It forces the same thing in various ways, characters, and resources. Now, total and absolute participation of the recipient is required, which

conditions the content because you can also measure how people interact and the conditions of the content generated. It is a very live process (2022).

This transmedial drives the recipient to become a Moreno Sánchez (2015) adds that:

It is essential to use all the necessary means in a coordinated and participatory manner. The participation of external and internal audiences is crucial for a fruitful dialogue that enriches both parties. In general, audiences are considered quantitatively to justify the foundation and the institution... to which the museum belongs, but they must be thought of qualitatively. Going from seeing numbers to seeing people and talking to them is the great challenge the museum and any organization faces.

Each museum must adequately break down its internal and external audiences to remember them all since each needs specific information and how it must be contacted to impact them. In any organization, for example, suppliers are essential, as in the museum, and these suppliers must be aware of the specificity of the organization. Of course, the media, opinion leaders, influencers, and other institutions are audiences that deserve attention. Even so, we must remember that the key audiences of the museum are its visitors to the different spaces of the museum, both physical and virtual, visitors whom we must consider participants in that cultural adventure that each museum proposes. It is always said that museum activities have the public at the center. However, it is still utopian since there are too many limitations that museum institutions still impose on their audiences: restrictions on sharing content on networks, accessibility borders such as lack of facilities for people with reduced mobility or braille communication instruments for the blind, etc.; lack of free access policies for vulnerable people.

Viñarás Abad (personal communication, January 15, 2024) is committed to museums taking on this challenge with courage. Museums have the biggest challenge, which is content. In a meeting at the Sorolla Museum, they recognized that uploading a painting by the artist, given his recognition, generates commitment. Museums do not dare to tell it or share it in any other way. Museums are still very traditional in general. Some do use more resources. They are trying to see how it goes but need to do it strategically. A new platform is coming out; let us try it. What is more, a more tactical than strategic attitude (personal communication, January 15, 2024).

3.2. Digital communications?

When evaluating the strategies of the museums that have presented temporary exhibitions of Cristóbal Balenciaga, 46.2% affirm that they have implemented traditional communication actions to serve the institution's audiences, understanding them only as those who physically visit said institutions. Meanwhile, only 7.7% acknowledged having communicated with physical and virtual audiences.

23.1% state that their audience map focused on physical visitors to the museum, while others concentrate on physical visitors and representatives of the media (7.7%), only on the press (7.7%) and influencers (7.7%).

These percentages are still incipient when social media platforms and digital tools, in general, offer numerous resources day after day that enhance communication. González-Liendo (2023) highlights that it is vital to take advantage of the wide range of immersive tools and resources that the digital world offers to amplify the impact of communication strategies: social networks, websites and even "digital influencers who quickly connect with fashion, allowing them to have a source of information in museums and exhibition spaces that allows them to enrich their content and make it viral" (p.19).

On the other hand, 46.2% of the museums interviewed stated that they were inclined to carry out a wide range of communication activities to publicize the exhibition and thus try to reach their audience: press conferences, ATL and BTL activities, advertising, and strategies. On social networks, interviews on TV and radio, as well as sending press releases. 15% focused solely on sending press releases and 15% dedicated more time to implementing social media strategies, understood as sharing information about exhibitions on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. Interestingly, museums continue not to take advantage of the advantages

of platforms like TikTok, which are increasingly gaining more space among young audiences, and which offer the possibility of creating more audio-visual content, Nor in Twitch, which in sectors such as sports, broadcasting or showbusiness creates disruptive spaces to generate interaction with the audiences it wants to access.

3.3. It is essential to professionalize the communications units of museums

Paganni and Stellato (2020) define the communications director (Dircom) as the person responsible for strategic organisational communication management, including institutional identity and image. This manager, as the authors explain, must "implement a single institutional voice under the same discourse, using the most convenient means to reach the recipients of his messages, seeking to create, immediately, a positive image and a favourable reputation through time" (p. 2).

This initial definition of DIRCOM and its responsibilities establishes the relevance of having a professional profile in the communications area to meet the demands of the position entirely. For Moreno Sánchez, who insists that current museum managers have not understood the absolute need to implement truly transmedia communication strategies, he also comments that:

More communication professionals are needed at the head of museum communication units. No one in their right mind would think of putting a communications professional in charge of conservation and restoration work...; However, the supposed communication is often assumed by professionals with nothing to do with communication. When communication professionals join, they are usually outside the board of directors. This is indeed changing, but it is going very slowly. For example, the Prado Museum has a Communication Manager, Carlos Chaguaceda Álvarez, who has a degree in Information Sciences from the Complutense University of Madrid. (personal communication, January 15, 2024)

To which Viñarás Abad (personal communication, January 15, 2024) adds that:

The professionalization of communication is essential not only to communicate but also to rethink the institution's functioning. The role that museums now have in the issue of sustainability is that of institutions with much legitimacy for being a museum, something that other institutions still need to have. The word museum already conveys character and credibility, and I think they do not use that power beyond art and culture. They are not used in general. Therefore, the professionalization of communication in its purest sense is essential since we must rethink the museum as an institution with a brand.

Moreno Sánchez (personal communication, January 15, 2024) and Viñarás Abad (personal communication, January 15, 2024) agree in highlighting the importance of the professionalization of those who direct the communication strategies of museums, not only because of the knowledge they have of the functioning of social media platforms but because their training allows them to have a broad vision of the importance of communication processes in achieving institutional objectives. As Moreno Sánchez points out, professionalising the area will mean breaking the paradigm of understanding communication as a simple act of dissemination.

Diffusion and dissemination... continue to be the most used terms, forgetting that they are concepts that forget the bi-directionality of communication, the necessary dialogue with the people who visit the museum so that they feel like an active part of it, not intruders who, if it were not for the importance given to the number of visitors, would be superfluous. The training and experiential profile must come from the world of communication, and, in addition, it would be good to have specific training on cultural organizations and the specificity of their audiences, the most complex of any organization, since they cover the entire society. It is the responsibility of the

museum to approach those non-public people with the right to cultural enjoyment like any other person. (Moreno Sánchez, 2022).

4. Conclusions

Cristóbal Balenciaga was the first fashion designer to hold a monographic exhibition on his work. Icons like Coco Chanel and Christian Dior considered him the master of designers. He is the greatest exponent of creativity in the Spanish industry, and his legacy continues to be admired by many around the planet. Its relevance has resulted in many exhibitions worldwide, which, however, do not have robust or transmedia communication strategies since the museum institutions that have hosted them continue to manage them under the one-way communication model.

Transmedia communication has yet to reach museums, although they do have social networks, perhaps driven by the arrival of restrictions and confinements due to COVID-19, and they use them merely to share information about exhibitions and educational activities without taking advantage of the interactive factor they have. The incorporation of digital tools (social networks, virtual headquarters, video games, metaverse, artificial intelligence, in short.) is too slow for the speed of the audience, who not only understands that it is their right to receive information wherever they are and whenever require but also want to participate in the distribution of the information they receive.

The challenge of transmedia communication in museums is enormous; as enormous as its audience, it is rarely analyzed in its broadest sense and is discretionally limited to those who physically visit museum spaces. It is essential to break the paradigm between dissemination and communication, which allows interested parties to permeate and invite them to share the narrative discourse they receive from the museum through its media and support. Each audience's cultural, social, and political context influences how it receives, interprets and redistributes museum information. It is in the hands of communication leaders the obligation to look at the transformation of the communication process as one of their significant challenges, challenges that must be recognized; they must also be assumed by museum directors who must guarantee the promotion of professionalisation of the area. The unit's location in the museum's organizational chart and, of course, the internalization that communication is a characteristic that must be transversal in the organization and with the rank of guideline.

Understanding that communication must be orderly, planned and with a strategic vision is the most significant commitment that those who define the path of museums have today because otherwise, these institutions will continue speaking to an audience with which they do not connect, with which they do. Need to generate genuine long-term commitment. It is not only about interacting with those who enter the museum but also with those who do not because they continue to perceive museums as sacred and sepulchral spaces that generate boredom and fatigue among those who "do not know" art.

It is also essential that museums that develop exhibitions about Cristóbal Balenciaga continue to waste the current power of the brand. Although it must be recognized that Balenciaga, as a commercial brand, has suffered some media setbacks, it must also be considered the most disruptive and communicationally active brand. Its transmedia power, almost omnipresent, is demonstrated day after day. It is an opportunity not only to contrast the legacy of Cristóbal Balenciaga and the proposals of the current fashion brand but also for new generations to know and recognize that Balenciaga is the most excellent and respected Spanish couturier of all time.

Museums, as serious, rigorous, and trustworthy institutions for the public, must aim to generate discussion about sustainability, design and art, confronting the style of those who gave the genesis of brands such as Balenciaga, Dior, Chanel, Gucci, Prada, but, in addition, use the strong communications of these fashion houses to transpose that communication to museums. However, even though there are multiple communication tools, digital and analogue, that facilitate the

structuring of a transmedia plan, museums insist on remaining mere disseminators of information, wasting the power of the audience for the expansion of museum narratives.

Another element wasted by museums that develop exhibitions around fashion is the massive investments made by industry brands, losing a powerful opportunity to get closer to an audience that is passionate and curious about the operation and values promoted by fashion. It is also important to position their exhibition spaces or generate dialogues around the samples and to enhance the awareness-raising role of museums, promoting a more critical stance on the part of citizens regarding the role of fashion today and the relevance of the required change.

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