THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROMOTING URBAN ART: A Study of Madrid Street Art Project

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ABSTRACT

Urban art or street art has undergone a significant evolution in recent decades, going from being perceived as vandalism to becoming a recognized form of cultural intervention. This art form not only beautifies public spaces, but also transforms marginal urban areas and conveys messages of protest and social demands. Thanks to digital platforms such as X (Twitter) and Instagram, urban art has expanded its impact, allowing artists to share their work globally and indefinitely, overcoming physical and temporal limitations. Through projects such as the Madrid Street Art Project (MSAP), initiatives have been consolidated that promote and document these artistic expressions, integrating them into the social and cultural fabric of cities such as Madrid, where urban art has become a tool for urban revitalization and a driver for cultural tourism.

1. Introduction

Street art is one of the forms of artistic expression that has evolved the most in recent years, both in the social and media spheres. In recent decades, this practice has evolved from being regarded as an act of vandalism to being acknowledged as a form of artistic intervention with the potential to transform any urban space into a site with profound cultural significance (Bengtsen, 2014). In this sense, in addition to offering greater visibility, social networks have also modified the discourse on urban art by generating large virtual communities around this type of expression.

This transformation has resulted in the increasing integration of urban art in major cities such as Madrid, Paris and Los Angeles, where dedicated programmes have been developed to showcase its tourist appeal. However, the relevance of this mode of idea, emotion, or message transmission has increased in recent years, due to its use in digital platforms. These have enabled artists to exhibit their work in a kind of perpetual digital exhibition that transcends borders, schedules, and languages. Furthermore, these platforms have become a digital repository, allowing artists to preserve and exhibit their work indefinitely (García, 2016).

The appreciation of art is contingent upon its visibility, a principle that is intrinsic to the philosophy of urban art. In this particular instance, the streets act as a canvas that appears to come alive in the midst of a given city. The convergence of both forms of communication has had a direct impact on the social perception of this type of art by making it more accessible and accepted by a wider public (Vanderveen y Van Eijk, 2016).

The study of urban art and its interaction with social networks has been approached from various perspectives. For instance, authors such as Feliu et al (2017), Molnár (2017) and Alcántara (2018) have analysed how digital platforms, including X (Twitter), have modified urban public space by documenting and sharing street art in defiance of commercialisation and gentrification. As Molnár (2017) explains, the advent of these technologies has had a profound impact on the very nature of art, transforming it from a fleeting phenomenon to a medium of enduring cultural and political significance, disseminated globally through images and videos.

Another perspective explores the impact of urban art in the configuration of large cities (Gaviria-Puerta, 2022) and the role of social networks in this process, acknowledging their role in facilitating its transformation into a catalyst for urban regeneration, with implications for the real estate market and the revitalisation of marginal urban areas. Furthermore, its rise has also influenced the existing literature on the perception of graffiti as an art form versus its negative connotation, demonstrating how the media and social context have directly influenced its valuation (Forte and De Paola, 2019).

Cáceres (2021) attributes the reclamation of public spaces, particularly those within economically disadvantaged neighbourhoods, to the influence of urban art. The term "urban art" is defined as a manifestation created for the benefit of the general citizenry and produced by them. Presently, the reality is that all of these works that inundate neighbourhoods and cities are exhibited on the social media profiles of artists and their admirers, thus enabling art to exert a global impact while preserving the transformative character of street art.

Utilising these considerations as a point of departure, the overarching objective of this research endeavour is to examine the impact of social networks, particularly X, on the dissemination and projection of urban art. This is particularly pertinent given the increasing digitalisation that has led to street art finding a means to expand exponentially on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok and X. In consideration of the nature of the research, the Madrid Street Art Project (MSAP) has been selected as the object of study.

This institution is an autonomous organisation dedicated to the creation, coordination and promotion of initiatives linked to urban art based in Madrid and founded in 2012. The primary objective of the institution is to promote and enhance the visibility of art in public spaces, with a commitment to supporting artists and their creations, and ensuring accessibility to diverse audiences (MSAP, n.d.).

With regard to the realm of institutional communication, the organisation has assumed responsibility for the management of its own website and social media profiles. This strategic initiative enables the organisation to meticulously document and disseminate information pertaining to urban art. The organisation's activities are intended to enhance the urban environment and provide citizens with a more pleasurable public space through the medium of art and culture (MSAP, n.d.).

The institution has a presence on X, Instagram and Facebook. Typically, the same content is published on all of them. Despite the distinctive features of each social network, it has been decided to analyse only

its X profile, on the grounds that it uses the same text, hashtags and multimedia elements. The selection of X as a case study is predicated on the premise that this particular platform serves as a nexus for both cultural and political discourse, a milieu which is often characterised by the presence of elements pertaining to both of these domains. Furthermore, it will facilitate a more profound analysis of the relationship between users and the institution, as well as the type of content that is of most interest to them. Conversely, X metrics will facilitate the execution of predictive analysis based on user behaviour. The utilisation of hashtags enables artists and followers to categorise and locate particular content related to urban art, thereby facilitating the organisation and discovery of novel works and trends. This also enables the identification of the content type that is the foundation for the creation or organisation of virtual communities.

The formulation of specific objectives is predicated on the general objective, which is outlined as follows:

OBJ. 1. Identification of the dynamics of interaction between urban artists and their digital audience is imperative.

OBJ. 2. To ascertain the type of urban art that generates the most interest among users, it is necessary to analyse how certain hashtags directly affect the number of retweets and favourites received.

OBJ. 3. A description or analysis is required of the manner in which the Madrid Street Art Project employs social networks to promote urban art in the neighbourhoods of Madrid.

2. Design and Methodology

The subsequent section will elucidate the design and methodology employed in this research.

In order to achieve the objectives set out in the study, a descriptive, exploratory and correlational study was designed. In the final section, the relationship between some variables of interest is analysed.

In light of the nature of the research, two types of tools were considered in the methodological design. Initially, the publications were downloaded using lines of code that were programmed in Python 3.12.6, utilising the X API. As previously outlined, the tweets were retrieved from the MSAP X account (@MSAP_Madrid). This profile boasts a following of 3,849 individuals (as of 22 September 2024), and it follows 868 other accounts, including those of artists, politicians, media outlets, social organisations, and governmental institutions.

Secondly, for the purposes of data processing and analysis, RStudio was utilised. This software, which is utilised extensively in statistical analysis, data visualisation and data science, enables the systematic processing and filtering of information as it is prepared to work with large volumes of data. In this sense, the objective is that the combination of RStudio with the digital tools utilised in the initial stage enables the design of a more robust analysis with precise results that facilitate the creation of our predictive model.

The date of publication covers the last seven years, that is, from 24 July 2017 to 24 July 2024. Following a thorough examination of the publications of the last seven years of @MSAP_Madrid, it was determined that a detailed analysis of the most salient trends would be conducted. This analysis would be complemented by an examination of the evolution of urban art in Madrid through the lens of this project and its associated hashtags. Conversely, this range of study will facilitate an examination of how users' practices, interests and behaviours have evolved over time, thereby enabling predictions to be made regarding their future conduct.

During the study period, 959 tweets were collected, containing 588 unique hashtags.

The statistical analysis was also carried out in Rstudio. Two techniques were employed in this study. Firstly, a descriptive analysis was used to count the main metrics of the study, such as retweets, favourites and hashtags. Subsequently, an analysis of the relationship between the variables is conducted. Pearson's correlation coefficient was employed to analyse continuous variables. It is evident that both of these techniques have been statistically validated and are recognised as standard methodologies within the field of data analysis.

Finally, all visualisations have been executed using Python 3.12.6 and its specialised libraries for data analysis and visualisation, which are matplotlib and networkx.

3. Fieldwork and Data Analysis

The MSAP profiles are a remarkable achievement in themselves. The institution appears to place significant emphasis on the aesthetic presentation of its content, with posts frequently accompanied by visual media such as images and videos. A notable observation is that within the 959 publications, 588 unique hashtags are present. This finding suggests that the artists in question utilise this distinctive resource, X, with great frequency, creating virtually one for each event, artist or activity of a particular nature. As demonstrated in graph number 1.

The selection of a hashtag is of paramount importance at a strategic level, given its considerable impact on the dissemination of a tweet. Consequently, this study will firstly analyse the most prevalent hashtags in publications.

Graph 1. Most used hashtags
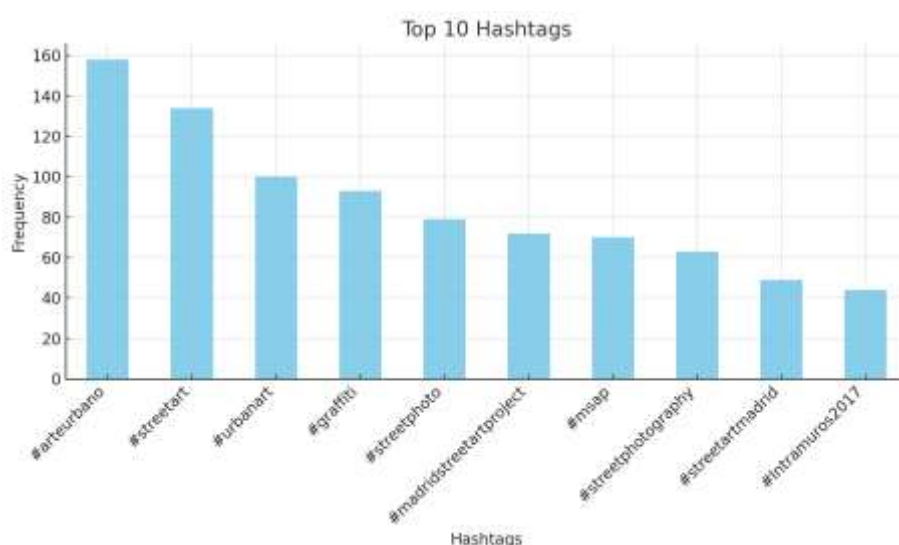
Source: Own elaboration, 2024

The hashtags that are utilised most frequently are #urbanart, #streetart, and #urbanart. Furthermore, a hashtag co-occurrence analysis was conducted to identify the most common combinations, and it was found that these three were the most frequently occurring combinations in the dataset. The co-occurrence of the hashtags #streetart and #streetart was observed in 78% of the cases, while the combination of #streetart and #urbanart was noted in 77%. Finally, the co-occurrence of #urbanart and #urbanart was identified in 70% of the publications.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the prevalence of these applications does not necessarily equate to the extent of user interaction they engender. As demonstrated in Figure 3, it has been established that tweets which do not contain any of the most common hashtags tend to receive, on average, a higher number of interactions than those which do contain them.

This finding suggests that, despite the prevalence and frequent use of these hashtags, they are not necessarily indicative of a higher level of engagement, as measured by favourites, retweets or views. To enhance the effectiveness of tweets, it would be advantageous to diversify the hashtags or explore alternative, less saturated but relevant hashtags. For instance, the hashtag #arteurbano amasses a higher volume of views when employed in this manner. From a strategic standpoint, it is more logical to utilise this approach, as it ensures the content is disseminated to a more extensive audience. In this sense, it can be posited that the hashtags #Madrid and #madridstreetartproject are more likely to be retweeted, as they accumulate an average of 2.45 and 1.94 retweets, respectively.

The hashtag #Madrid is more general and broader in scope, which may account for its higher average retweet rate. More specific hashtags, such as #madridstreetartproject and #arteurbano, have slightly lower averages, but still indicate a high level of interaction. In addition, the hashtags #elmuralsequeda and #elmuralsemultiplica, as well as #DíaDeLosDerechosHumanos, #LeyTrans and #bolardovoy, have

been identified as those with the highest number of retweets, despite not being included among the most frequently used hashtags.

In order to analyse the influence of these tags in the discourse related to urban art, a graph was created that represents the distribution of hashtags by frequency of use and influence in the tweets analysed. In this particular instance, the dimensions of each bubble are directly proportional to the frequency of utilisation and the level of interaction it elicits in users, as measured by the frequency of mentions and interactions.

Graph 2. Distribution of hashtags by frequency of tweets and influence
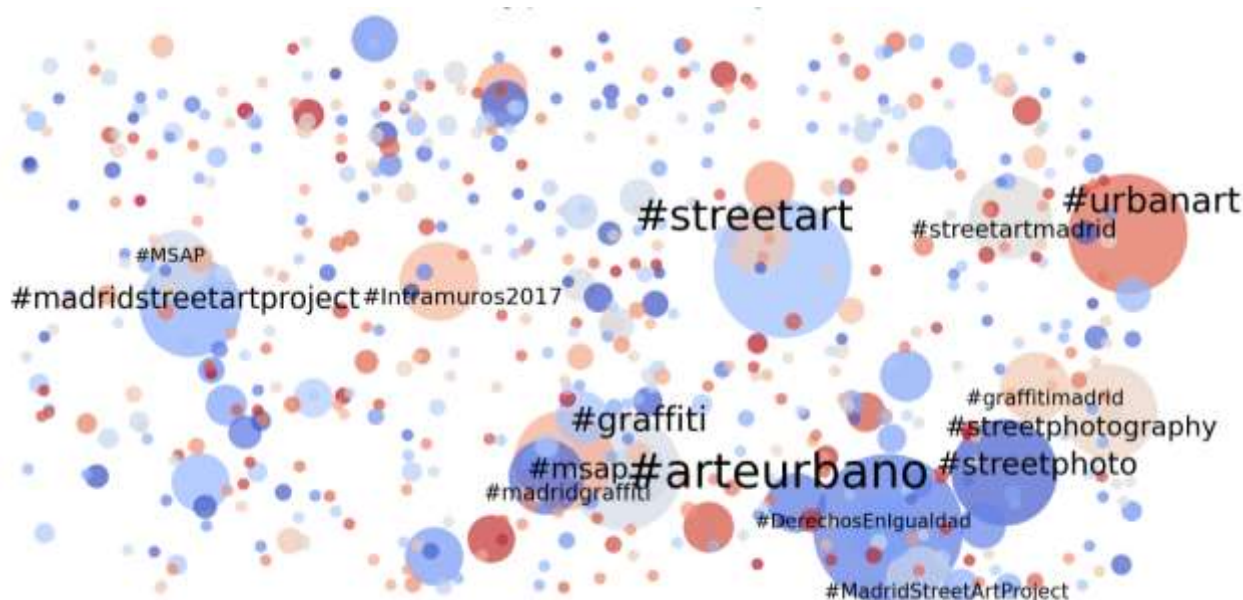
Source: Own elaboration, 2024

The relationship between art and civil rights has been a long-standing and significant one. Graffiti and street art, in particular, have been employed as instruments of protest and social expression. The graph of interactions demonstrates a close proximity between the publications of the hashtag #urbanart and those of #RightsInEquality.

Urban art has historically been recognised as a pivotal medium of expression for marginalised communities (Johnson and Lee, 2021; Smith, 2019). In this regard, studies such as those by Martinez (2020) highlight the impact of graffiti during significant historical events, including the struggle for civil rights in the United States, and from a more contemporary point of view, in the Black Lives Matter movement. Similarly, the murals in Los Angeles that have become a tourist attraction in recent years reflect the demands of the Latino community on human rights issues (Rogers, 2022).

In this sense, it should be noted that in both Europe and Latin America, urban art has become a tool of resistance to policies of state oppression and abuses of power (García, 2018; López, 2020). The present analysis demonstrates that urban art continues to function as a medium for communication by movements that aim to denounce social injustices, racial discrimination, and state repression. Nevertheless, the boundaries between art and vandalism, and the impact of legality or illegality on its capacity as a form of protest, remain subjects of ongoing debate (Parker, 2019).

Furthermore, street art has been shown to play a significant role in the strategies employed by civil rights movements worldwide. Despite the variability in the legality and public perception of this artistic genre across different geographical regions, its capacity to attract attention and stimulate debate by challenging the prevailing norms is indisputable.

The subsequent dashboard presents a series of findings derived from the descriptive analysis. Firstly, with regard to the frequency of words used in tweets, it is notable that 'art' and 'Madrid' are used with the greatest frequency, which is to be expected given the subject matter. It is important to note that the same cannot be said for the frequency of posts per day. As is evident from the data, there has been a decline in the number of daily posts in recent years, with the highest peak concentrated in 2017 and

2018. The most salient aspect of this dashboard is its graphical representation of the direct correlation between the level of user interaction and the multimedia elements incorporated within the post. It has been demonstrated that multimedia elements in tweets result in increased visibility, retweeting, and favouriting, particularly when the content is video-based.

Video remains the most widely used multimedia resource in the digital world, as Ryoo et al. (2023) explain, particularly in the context of social media campaigns. It has been demonstrated that this approach represents the most effective strategy for attracting the attention of users. Furthermore, when successful, it has been shown to elicit an emotional response in users, thereby significantly increasing the probability of their return to consume content created by the same brand or institution.

Figure 3. Dashboard
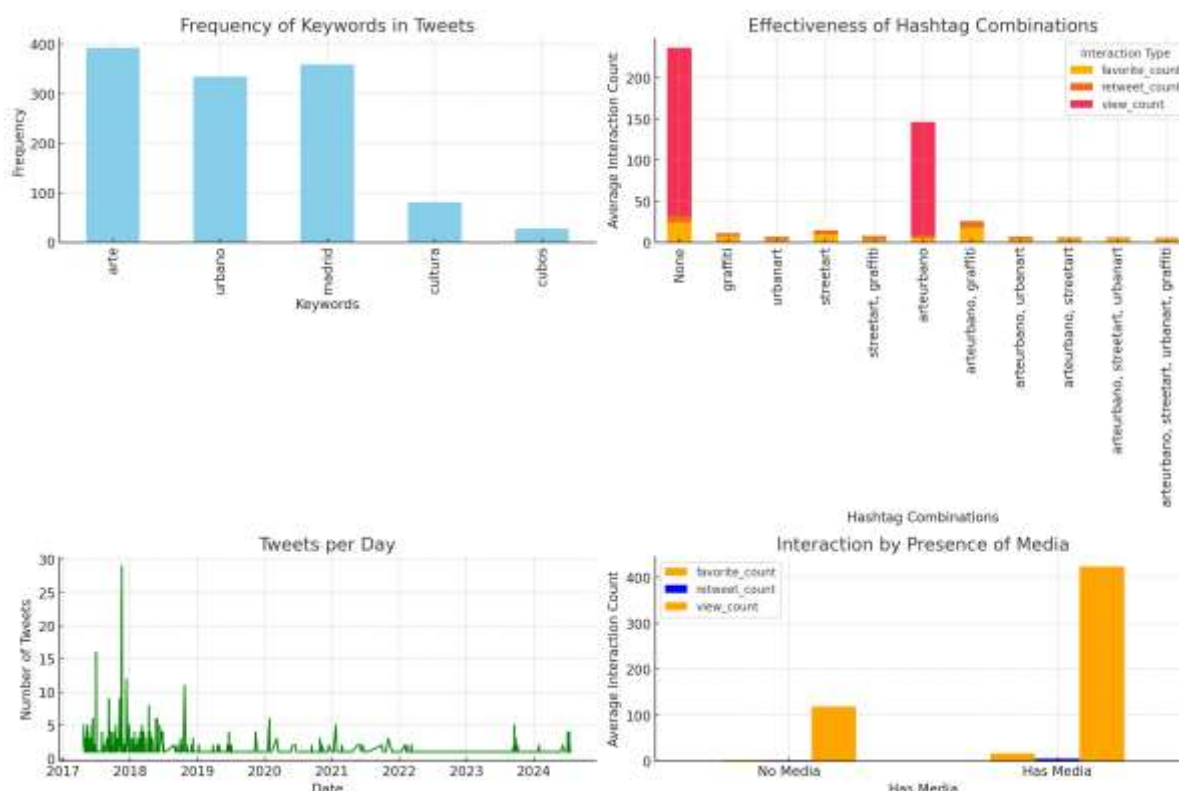
Source: Own elaboration, 2024

As previously stated, MSAP is an institution based in Madrid that also organises urban safaris. These guided tours, estimated to last for an hour and a half, offer a didactic, accessible and enjoyable exploration of various urban art interventions (MSAP, n.d.). The project has also been implemented in conjunction with other initiatives, including Cubos Madrid and Pinta Malasaña. The overarching objective of these endeavours is to transform the streets of Madrid into urban art galleries and to promote the visibility of this artistic genre within the city's public spaces. The promotion of contemporary artistic creation is a key objective of these projects, alongside the revitalisation of urban areas through the utilisation of art as a medium for environmental expression and transformation.

The impact of these projects is reflected in the Madrid neighbourhoods most mentioned in the publications, which, as can be seen in graph 4, are Lavapiés, Malasaña and Centro. However, it is interesting to note that despite the fact that much more is published about them, users pay more attention to the work carried out in Centro, Lavapiés, Villaverde and Malasaña, respectively. The narrative that accompanies the publications related to the activities in Madrid's neighbourhoods is invariably similar, as the platform is employed as a means of publicising the life of the neighbourhood and the rationale behind the project there. The videos meticulously delineate the sequential steps and the quotidian routine of the artists, in addition to the collective contributions that culminate in the final work. Consequently, the virtual community becomes involved in the entire process of reconstructing civic spaces.

MSAP has been one of the most significant artistic organisations in the development and visibility of urban art in Lavapiés. Through various initiatives, it has promoted the participation of both local and international artists in the creation of murals and urban intervention projects. Lavapiés is a neighbourhood in Madrid that is notable for its cultural diversity and historical significance as a site of resistance and social change. This is one of the reasons why it has been a key location for MSAP's activities, which seek not only to beautify the urban environment, but also to generate reflection on contemporary social issues that affect the people of Madrid, through visual language and creativity.

Graph 4. Madrid neighbourhoods most frequently mentioned in publications
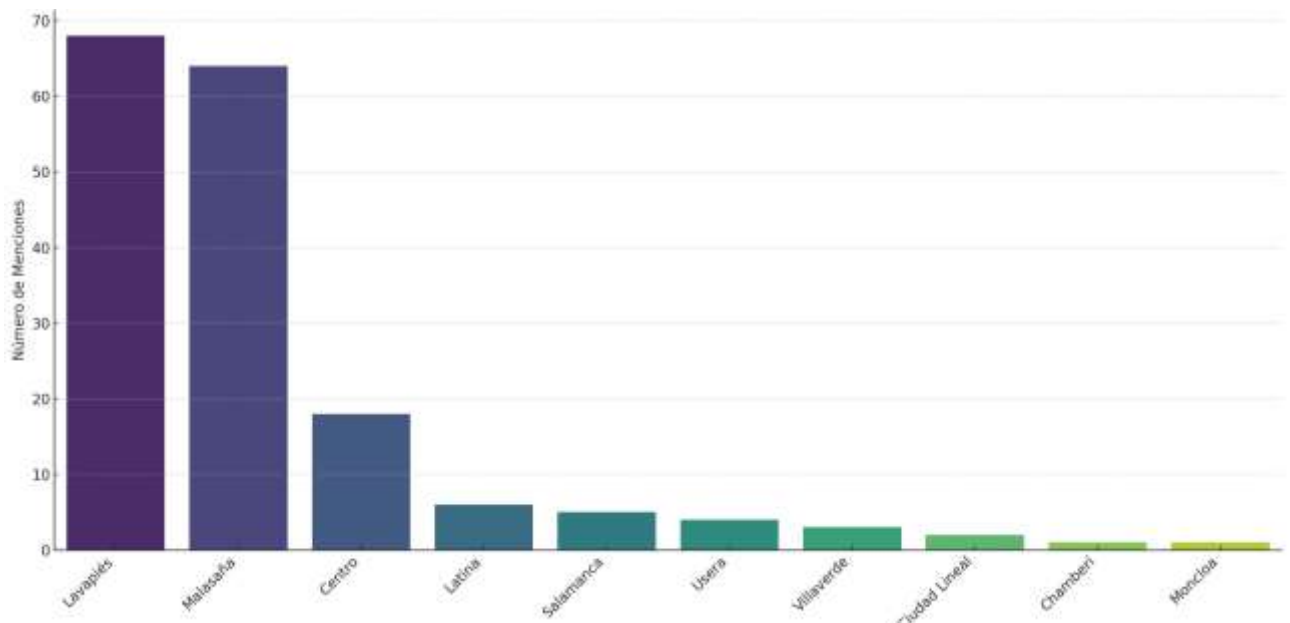
Source: Own elaboration, 2024

One of the most prominent cultural initiatives in the Lavapiés district is the C.A.L.L.E. festival (Convocatoria Artística Libre de Lavapiés), which transforms the façades and spaces of the neighbourhood into a vast open-air art gallery. This festival has been successful in establishing a connection between the local inhabitants and the artistic sphere, thereby transforming Lavapiés into a prominent locale for urban art in Madrid. The artistic interventions in the neighbourhood have been shown to have a dual effect: on the one hand, they have the power to beautify public space; on the other, they can encourage dialogue on issues such as gentrification, multiculturalism and civil rights.

Image1 . Tweet C.A.L.L.E. 2022 festival

Source: MSAP, 2022

Furthermore, the project organises contests for artistic interventions on a regular basis. This has been shown to increase the visibility of the publications and attract the attention of users. However, one of the most interesting strategies for publicising the work of the artists is the use of tags on the publications. This feature enables users to access more detailed information about the authors and their respective works, which is available within their personal or professional profiles. The institution and the artists are engaged in a continuous collaborative process, whereby each tweet serves as a conduit for disseminating their artistic oeuvre on a global scale.

It is imperative to acknowledge the significance of retweets in shaping users' discourse, as they serve as a predictor of their future behaviour. In light of this, the present study aims to analyse the relationships between several salient variables, including the number of multimedia elements and retweets or favourites, as well as the number of visualisations.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was utilised to analyse the relationship between the variables. The objective of this test is to ascertain the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two continuous variables. The correlation coefficient (r) ranges from -1 to 1. A value close to 1 indicates a strong positive correlation, signifying that as one variable increases, so does the other. Conversely, a value close to -1 indicates a strong negative correlation, meaning that as one variable increases, the other decreases. When the value approaches 0, it suggests an absence of a linear relationship between the two variables. According to Field (2018), "Pearson's correlation is the most common method for assessing the relationship between two continuous variables and is used in many areas of research" (p. 123).

The initial result, which measures the correlation between the number of retweets and the number of multimedia elements (images and video) contained in the post, indicates that r= 0.89. This finding suggests the presence of a robust positive correlation between the utilisation of these elements and the number of retweets. This suggests that, in general, posts incorporating multimedia receive a higher number of retweets. The strength of this relationship indicates that the use of this type of content is an important factor in increasing the dissemination of publications.

The second result, which measures the correlation between the number of favourites and retweets, indicates that r=0.91. This also represents a very strong and positive correlation. This finding suggests a correlation between publications that receive numerous retweets and those that also receive many favourites, thereby reinforcing the close relationship between these two metrics.

The final stage of the research involved an analysis of the relationship between the number of views and multimedia elements. The purpose of this analysis was to statistically verify the result that had already been suggested, namely that tweets containing some kind of multimedia are retweeted more frequently. In this instance, r = 0.97, indicating an extremely strong relationship between the variables. This finding suggests that posts incorporating multimedia elements are observed at a substantially higher frequency than those devoid of such content. Statistical analysis has demonstrated a direct correlation between the incorporation of images or videos and the number of views a publication receives. In this sense, it can be posited that the incorporation of multimedia elements into a publication will result in a greater number of views.

4. Results

In this section, the primary findings of this research will be presented, with the overarching objective of this study being to examine the impact of X on the dissemination of urban art. The MSAP will be utilised as an object of study in this examination.

In OBJ. The analysis of the interaction dynamics on X between urban artists and their audience reveals that posts containing multimedia elements (images and videos) generate a significantly higher level of interaction than those that do not include these elements. Molnár (2017) posits that the employment of images and videos on social media platforms serves as a pivotal mechanism for capturing the attention of users. Given the necessity of visual art, particularly that of the urban variety, to be perceptible in order to exert an effect, this constitutes a strategy that merits consideration.

As demonstrated in the Madrid Street Art Project's publications, it was observed that publications containing multimedia content obtained, on average, 35% more retweets and 27% more favourites compared to those devoid of such elements. This finding serves to reinforce the notion that the incorporation of visual elements, such as images or videos, is paramount in order to effectively capture

the attention of the digital audience. This outcome aligns with the conclusions drawn by Ryoo et al. (2023), who have noted that multimedia content has been identified as the most effective means of generating interaction on social networks.

Furthermore, the utilisation of direct mentions of artists in posts enables the audience to access the profiles of the creators, thereby fostering a direct dialogue between artists and followers. As Cáceres (2021) emphasises, social networks facilitate direct interactions between artists and their audience, thereby fostering a sense of community among artists and audience members. In this sense, the descriptive analysis revealed that mentions of artists generate 40% more interaction compared to posts devoid of such mentions. This dynamic has been shown to facilitate the confirmation of the strengthening of the connection between institutions and their audiences through two-way interactions on social networks, which in turn leads to greater engagement (Lovejoy and Saxton, 2012).

With regard to OBJ, Secondly, it is imperative to acknowledge the significance of hashtags as a fundamental strategy for enhancing visibility and fostering interaction on social networks. Of the 588 unique hashtags used, the most common were #urbanart, #streetart and #urbanart. However, the results demonstrate that tweets employing geographically specific hashtags, such as #Madrid and #madridstreetartproject, exhibit a tendency to garner more retweets and favourites. This finding suggests that hashtags which are contextual or locally linked may generate more interest among users. This observation is consistent with the findings of Zukin (2016), who noted that urban art in specific areas tends to resonate more when it is contextualised within its geographical setting.

Conversely, hashtags pertaining to social issues, such as #LeyTrans or #DerechosEnIgualdad, also elicited a high level of interaction, thereby suggesting that social issues in urban art possess considerable appeal. Rancière (2004) contends that urban art, in its capacity as a medium of visual protest, is inextricably linked to political and social rights, thereby elucidating its capacity to garner the attention of a multifarious audience. Indeed, publications containing material related to these social issues garnered a 20% higher level of interaction in comparison to other publications. This finding aligns with the conclusions of studies conducted by Forte and De Paola (2019), who emphasised that the strength of urban art is enhanced when it is associated with social justice movements.

It is customary for publications to be accompanied by two or more hashtags. In this sense, when studying their effectiveness, an interesting result was found that should be taken into account at a strategic level. This analysis revealed that, in terms of interaction, a single hashtag is more efficient. The hashtag #arteurbano alone accumulates the highest number of favourites, views and retweets.

Finally, with regard to OBJ. MSAP employs social networks, with a particular emphasis on X, as a primary medium for the promotion of urban art within Madrid's neighbourhoods, including Lavapiés, Malasaña and Centro.

The publications analysed in this study include images and videos of artistic interventions accompanied by specific hashtags, such as #arteurbano, which encourages audience participation. These actions are consistent with Bengtsen's (2014) concept of the revaluation of urban art, in which digital platforms function not only as exhibition spaces for artists, but also as a legitimising factor in the perception of urban art as a form of cultural expression that transcends the limitations of physical space.

Furthermore, events organised by the organisation, such as the C.A.L.L.E. (Convocatoria Artística Libre de Lavapiés) festival, have a strong presence on social networks, which amplifies their reach. Posts related to this festival received 30% more interactions, thus highlighting the convening power of art-centred community events. However, with regard to specific neighbourhoods of Madrid, those that generate the most expectation and interest from the audience are the publications related to Lavapiés, Centro, Villaverde and Malasaña.

Banksy (2010) posits that street art and community events are instrumental in facilitating a reconnection between art and its social and physical environment, thereby enabling artists to engage with their audiences in a more direct manner.

Another salient aspect pertains to MSAP's capacity to document and preserve ephemeral urban art through X. García (2016) contends that digitisation enables the perpetuation of transient works in digital space, thereby extending the reach of urban art beyond the constraints of physical public space.

The publications, frequently accompanied by videos or photographs of the art interventions, constitute a globally accessible visual archive, a concept that finds concurrence with the argument

proposed by Parker (2019) that digital documentation has transformed urban art by allowing it to persist beyond its ephemeral nature.

5. Conclusions

This research has enabled the confirmation of the role played by social media, particularly X, in the dissemination and promotion of urban art. The aforementioned parties have succeeded in overcoming significant obstacles, including physical and linguistic barriers, as well as temporal constraints, with the objective of enhancing the visibility of this artistic genre.

The significance of multimedia elements, artist mentions and the strategic selection of hashtags as key factors in increasing visibility and interaction in posts has been demonstrated. This finding suggests that the incorporation of images or videos within tweets is a pivotal strategy for achieving optimal visibility, fostering engagement, and amplifying the impact of content.

Digital platforms have expanded the reach of urban art, allowing ephemeral works to endure and be shared globally, thereby transforming both the nature of this art and its impact on the public. Furthermore, the pertinence of tags associated with social and geographical issues has been demonstrated to be of paramount importance in capturing the audience's attention, thereby reinforcing the notion that street art not only enhances urban spaces aesthetically but also functions as a medium for communication regarding social issues.

Initiatives by organisations such as the MSAP demonstrate the efficacy of social media in promoting art in urban areas, such as Madrid, and in revitalising public spaces, thereby fostering a broader dialogue on culture, transformation, and social engagement.

Following a thorough examination of the available data, it can be concluded that social media has become an integral instrument in the evolution of urban art, enabling its proliferation beyond physical boundaries and augmenting its capacity to exert influence on society, culture, and potentially even social policy.

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