

SOCIAL MEDIA FINAL REPORT

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Valletta 2018 Foundation

INTRODUCTION

Social Media Final Report

As a cultural entity for a major year-long event that was the European Capital of Culture, the Valletta 2018 Foundation needed to reach many diverse audiences. This meant that various Social Media and digital channels were established in order to create a dialogue between the audience and the Foundation in terms of advertising for events and special events, as well as sharing progress of the years leading up to the main event and also the whole ECoC year itself. What will follow is a brief overview of all the channels used within the Foundation with a more detailed discussion following in the sections to follow.

The most prolific and accessible channel was the Valletta 2018 Facebook page which since its initial 6,373 followers has grown progressively ending the year with 40,553 followers at the end of December 2018. The page has seen a growth of 34,180 followers over the course of three years, with 2018, understandably, showing the most drastic jump in the number of people following, clicking, interacting and viewing the page.

The Foundation's Instagram account was used throughout a range of events; large-scale events, music performances, and other visual or performative activities. Throughout this, both profile grid and Insta Stories were used in the process. Instagram was first used in August of 2014 and accumulated 3,959 followers by January of 2017. The growth on this medium was more constant, with the medium gathering a further 2,279 followers between January 2017 and the end of the ECoC year. The numbers here do not take into account followers we lost along the way.

Twitter was a lesser used medium compared to the previous two. Between June 2016 and end of December of 2018, the followers amounted to a total of 7,511, also not taking into account unfollows on the medium from one month to the next. Most of the followers here were international, given that statistically Twitter is believed to be less used overall across the Maltese islands. In line with this, Twitter was mostly used for the duration of the Annual International Conferences, showing a surge of followers and interactions concentrated around the 3 days of the event.

In reference to the Valletta 2018 website and its users, a separate chapter will outline data such as demographics, nationalities and other matters directly linking to our website.

The chart below displays a very quick overview of the progression of followers on various channels.

Facebook

Throughout the time leading up to the ECoC year and during the Valletta 2018 Cultural programme run, Facebook was regarded as the Foundation's most flexible and best medium to reach the majority of our audiences.

As discussed previously, the progression of followers on this particular medium showed a remarkable difference at the beginning of 2018 when there was an increase of 3,938 followers between December 2017 and January 2019. The bulk of the followers happened around the build up to the Valletta 2019 Opening Spectacle. Facebook was used as both an advertising platform and a tool to keep audiences updated and involved in the preparations.

As of January 2015, the follower's growth had been of an average of 5.8K per year, between 2015 and 2017. This saw a drastic change in 2018, when during the first month of the year, there was a 3,938 increase which continued until the February of the same year, taking the previous 20K followers to 35,995 as of the beginning of March with a 15,464 increase in just over a month.

The chart below displays the progression of followers Facebook.

Chart 1: Facebook followers 2015-2018

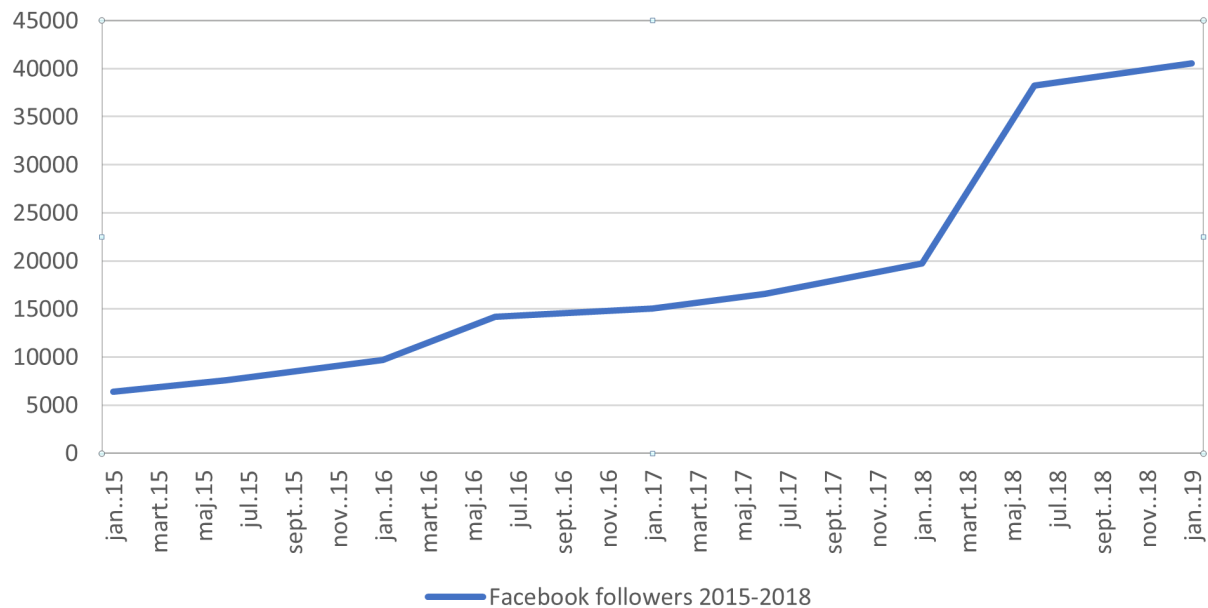
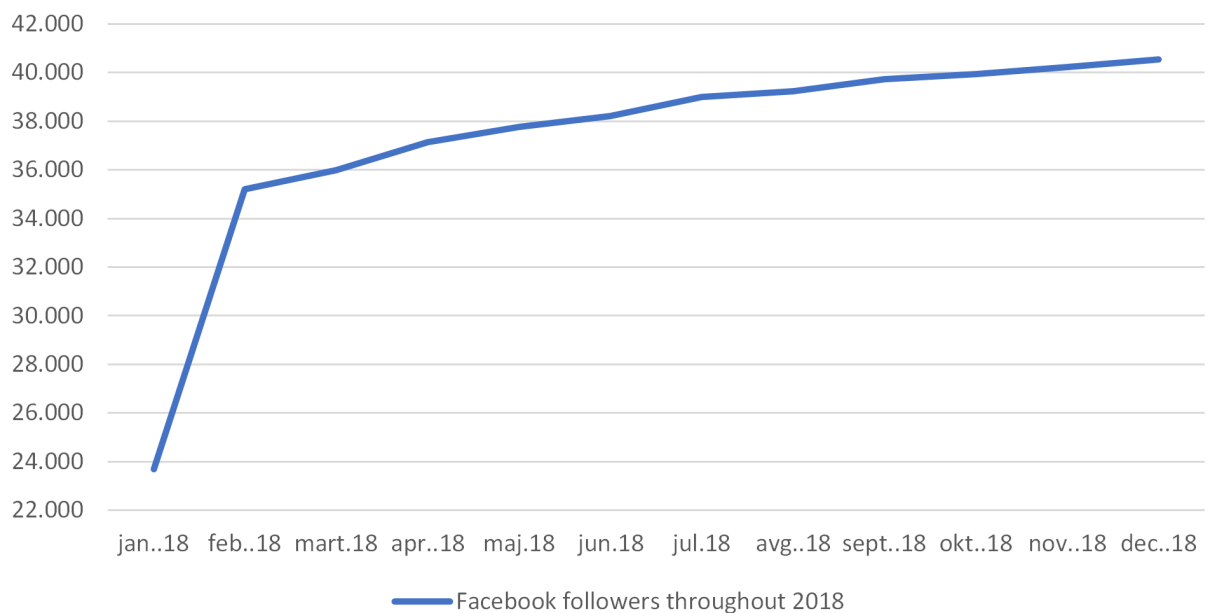


Chart 2: Facebook followers throughout 2018



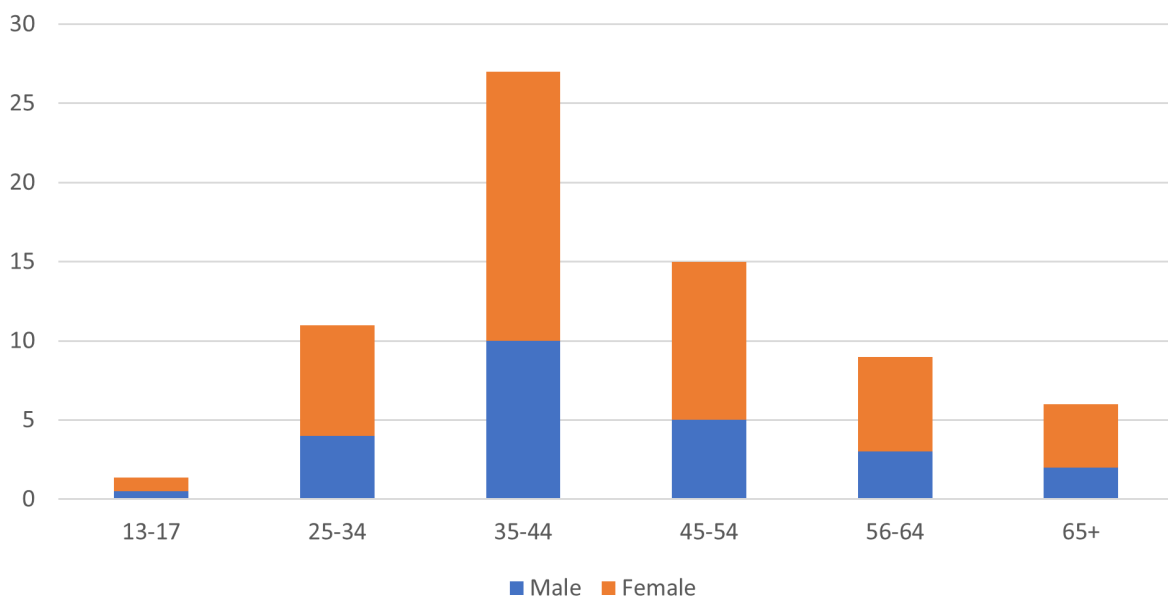
This pattern was very predictable due to the pending Opening Spectacle taking place mid-January which encouraged people to join the rest of the community on Facebook to be up to date on what promised to be a memorable night. The announcement that the whole spectacle would be broadcast live aided this. An international audience was added to the already growing community due to Maltese expats abroad tuning in to follow the proceedings.

In terms of followers on Facebook, if one looks at the highest following, it seems that followers identifying as female were generally easier to reach. On the whole, female followers have in the past years been consistently around 20–25% higher than audience members who identify as male. This puts a female following also 7% higher in the most reached age brackets on Facebook.

Female users have been higher in the 25-34 and 35-44 age bracket, the two age brackets with the highest percentages of overall users at 30% and 27% respectively. The least reachable audience proved to be the 13-17 age bracket, where both male and female users were less than 1% each on average throughout the years. The 65+ age bracket reached up to 7% overall audience members, with a majority of female users here as well.

The chart below shows a breakdown of Facebook followers by age and gender.

Chart 3: Facebook followers by age & gender (%)



Special, bigger events throughout the year also made a significant impact on audience interactions on Facebook. The special events which will be briefly analysed here are (i) The Official Valletta 2018 Opening; (ii) Il-Festa l-Kbira; (iii) The Valletta Pageant of the Seas; (iv) Orfeo & Majnun – Sflata fil-Kapitali; and (v) The Valletta 2018 Official Closing – L-Aħħar Festa. All listed events, except The Valletta Pageant of the Seas, were family oriented and had multiple vents happening simultaneously all over Valletta, inviting people to walk about and experience different performances and happened in the order listed.

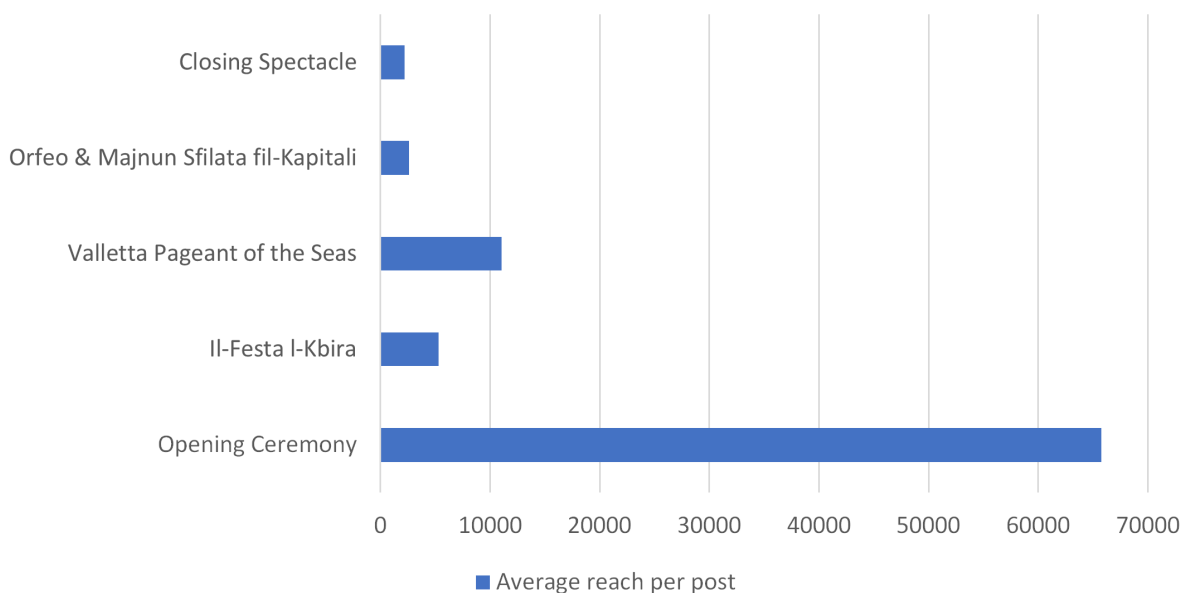
- *The Official Valletta 2018 Opening* – During The Official Valletta 2018 Opening, the Valletta 2018 Facebook page saw its highest influx of posts; both image-based and videos, including live broadcasting of the spectacle. These totalled 41 separate posts over the course of the day. The

average reach for the day was 65,781 and interactions (including reactions, comments and shares) averaged 1,106 per post.

- *Il-Festa L-Kbira* – Il-Festa l-Kbira was a two-day event, although it is the second night which will be analysed in this context. This activity consisted of where the 4 parishes of Valletta came together for one night only. With 22 videos and images posted, there was an average of 5,279 reach and 90 average interactions on each post.
- *The Valletta Pageant of the Seas* – The Valletta Pageant of the Seas was a bi-yearly event that took place in the Grand Harbour, consisting of an evening-long series of activities on the water. With a total of 22 posts, the average reach for the day was 11,059 and 320 average interactions per post.
- *Orfeo & Majnun – Sfilata fil-Kapitali* – Orfeo & Majnun was a two-night spectacle, consisting of an opera performance on the first night and a large, city-wide parade on the second day. For the purposes of this analysis, we are taking the parade (Sfilata fil-Kapitali) as the major event. In total 21 posts were published on the day with an average reach 2,608 and average of 33 interactions per post.
- *The Valletta 2018 Official Closing – L-Aħħar Festa* – For The Valletta 2018 Official Closing, a total of 26 posts were uploaded, consisting of both images and videos. The average reach for posts during this particular event was of 2,210, while there was an average of 25 interactions on each post, putting both reach interaction at a much lower standard than that of The Official Valletta 2018 Opening.

The bar chart below displays the average reach and for all 5 events.

Chart 4: Average reach per post



Facebook also served as the main advertising tool as it was considered the most flexible and easiest way to reach a more targeted audience. Given that Instagram is owned by Facebook, the latter social network also served as a secondary digital advertising platform helping the Foundation possibly reach an audience less accessible on other networks.

Instagram

Much like Facebook, Instagram was mostly used during events and activities leading up to the ECoC year as well as throughout the year to give people an extra special look into behind the scenes footage.

The formula was that for minor events, it would have the same coverage as Facebook; three images or videos, with up to three Insta Stories, directly live from events. During bigger events, it would be used for behind the scenes images and footage with the bulk of the posts being posted on Facebook due to the high concentration of material.

The inception of Insta Stories and the Highlights bar, launched around mid-2018 proved to be an ideal tool for advertising and alleviating from too many profile posts, allowing the Foundation's page to create ad-hoc videos as well as go live directly to all Facebook users to follow during events.

The progression here was slightly different because, as a platform, Instagram is more dynamic than many other platforms. The increase of followers grew by 1,210 between January 2017 and the end of the same year while in 2018 the recorded growth slowed slightly, totalling 1,069, for a total of 6,238 followers. It is believed that being such a dynamic platform, people follow and unfollow pages more easily than they would on Facebook, where users maintain a more stable link to the pages they follow. Other reasons for this slowdown in follower growth could be multiple; too many adverts on the feed, material which does not interest the user personally, or even too many posts at one go.

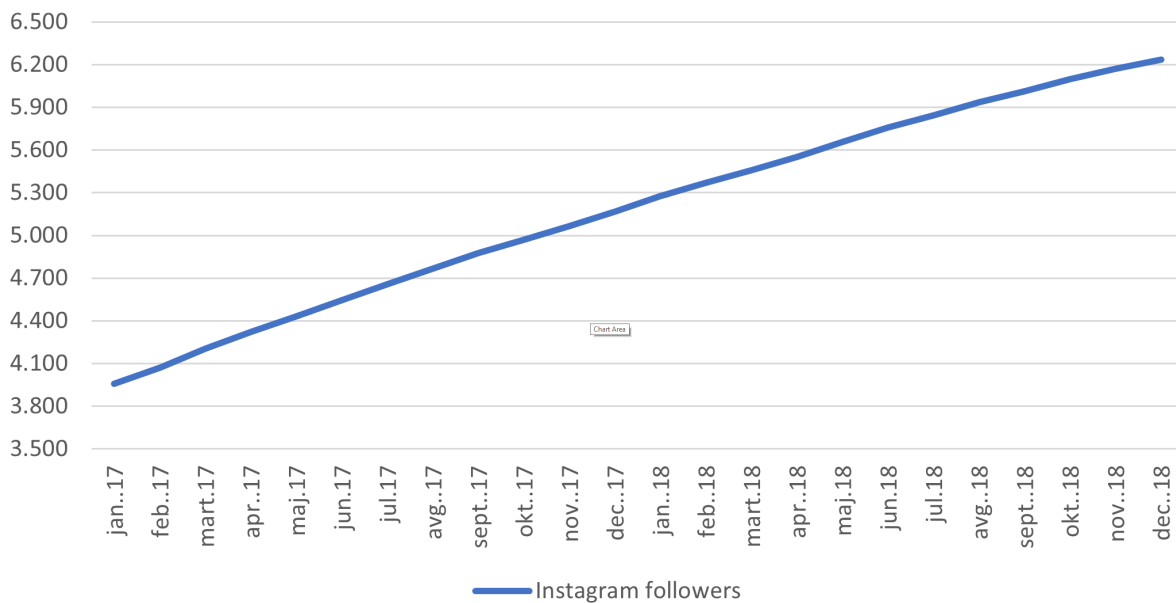
Unlike Facebook, there was also no exceptional growth recorded in Instagram followers with only 109 new follows in the month of January 2018. It may seem that here, the Official Valletta Opening and other major events presented in the previous section, did not have the same impact on page interactions as they did on Facebook. Again, reasons for this could be multiple. However, having said that, the month of January recorded the highest influx of likes for the year with 2,645 and the highest amount of comments with a total of 30 over the 13 posts in that one month.

Larger special events, namely The Official Valletta 2018 Opening, Il-Festa L-Kbira, The Valletta Pageant of the Seas, Orfeo & Majnun – Sfilata fil-Kapitali and The Valletta 2018 Official Closing – L-Aħħar Festa, did not have adverse following differences from other events that happened throughout the year, unlike what was seen with Facebook.

Follower demographics on Instagram are very similar to the Facebook data above. Once again there were 12% more female followers compared to male (56% vs 44%). The most accessible age brackets are also very similar with the most popular ones being 25-34 and 35-44 with 41% and 23% respectively.

The chart below shows an overview of the growth in followers on Instagram.

Chart 5: Instagram followers



Lastly, a word about Instagram advertising. Even though there is a function to create advertising directly through Instagram for Instagram, Valletta 2018's advertising on the platform has always gone through Facebook Ads, meaning the total monetary sum would be divided non-equally between the two platforms and placed according to audience following and even content created.

Although the overall trend is that as a rule of thumb Facebook gets higher reach and is more cost-effective in most cases, a deeper look into around 125 ad campaigns cross-promoted to Instagram during 2018 only, reveals that there were cases when due to either high text content of the video or image or a more active presence on the particular platform, adverts on Instagram became doubly effective on Instagram yielding a higher reach and more cost-effectiveness in terms of reach and interactions per post¹. Instagram performed better in cases where Facebook content regulations hindered optimum advertising conditions.

Twitter

Twitter is a lesser used social network in Malta making it more difficult to establish a local audience, which was the primary target audience throughout Valletta 2018. For this reason, it was decided to use Twitter in cases when there was a further need to engage with international audiences, particularly during the Annual International Conferences that happened during the last quarter of each year. Other singular items were placed on the feed such as, videos from The Official Valletta 2018 Opening, certain bi-monthly event information videos (more commonly referred to as the What's On videos) and advertising leading up to the aforementioned Annual Conference.

The other uses for Twitter include retweets concerning the Foundation from partner entities or individuals. This usually happened close to and around high-profile events, particularly where other public entities were involved.

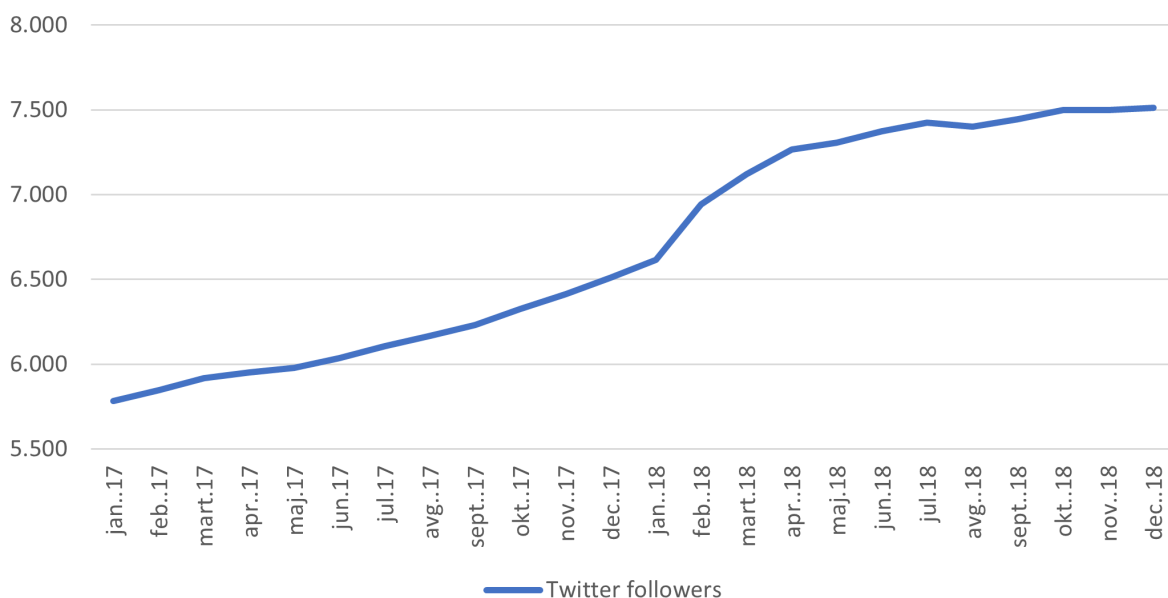
¹ The particular advert campaigns are listed as follows: Años Luz adverts in February (consisting of 2 images and 1 video), Sharing The Legacy image advert in March, U-19 video advert in April, Curatorial School adverts (consisting of 1 image and 1 video), Manchester Reds Game video advert in September, Nisga Exhibition image advert in September, Sharing the Legacy adverts in September (consisting of two videos), RIMA: to be defined exhibition in November, Magna Żmien image advert in November, Constellations video advert in November.

Much like other social networks, Twitter gains and loses followers regularly (weekly, monthly etc.) allowing for a high turnover of audiences. The progression here was more uniform between end of 2016 and end of 2018, with an 807-follower growth by end of 2017 and 1,000 by end 2018. This allows for the assumption that the audience turnover has been fairly regular and balanced between losses and gains.

The follower demographic on the Foundation’s Twitter is where there is a slight difference from the other platforms discussed. Male followers on this platform surpass female ones by 4%, totalling 52% and 48% respectively. As discussed in previous sections, the female demographic normally has the higher following. It would be difficult to speculate as to why this could be without an in-depth study of the specific platform.

The chart below illustrates the progression of followers on Twitter.

Chart 6: Twitter followers



If we had to look at 2018 as a whole year on Twitter, we see that out of 42 Tweets throughout the year, there was an average of 29 likes on each post, with 11.3 retweets and 28.3 link clicks on both images and videos. The highest concentration of these were during the three days of the Sharing the Legacy – Annual International Conference which, as identified in previous years, is the event in the year where we gain the most followers and interactions on that particular platform.

During the 2018 conference there were a total of 34 posts with 39 link clicks, 46 retweets and 106 likes. With over 40K impressions over the course of the conference there were an average of 1,198 impressions and 14.5 engagement on each separate post. Most of the audience here, we find, is non-Maltese, reflective of the participation of which also depends on the University, Faculty and country of origin of the keynote speakers. One of the best performing tweets this year was during the ECoC Panel where we had a group of speakers from various past, present and future ECoC cities and the various outlets were retweeting, answering and liking the post.

The chart below illustrates the following during the Sharing The Legacy Conference between 24 and 26 October 2018.

One observation shared across all three social networks is that they each experience strong activity at the beginning of the year.; Twitter started in January with an overall of 32,957 impressions and 462 engagements, however this dwindled in the passing of months.

YouTube

The Valletta 2018 YouTube channel was mostly used as an archive for videos and visual productions in the run up to and during the year of Valletta 2018. These included videos from upcoming projects, running projects as well as audio visual projects throughout the year.

With 165 videos uploaded there have been a total of 1,696,061 views, with an average of 10.3K views per video. After the Opening Ceremony in January 2018, many of these views were aided through Google Ads and YouTube Ads (more data to follow in the next section).

The most watched Valletta 2018 video since 2014 was *Colour The City: Celebrating Our City, Celebrating our Culture* with 542, 023 views. 99% of views were through YouTube Advertising with 0.4% from external sources, which originated from various media outlets sharing the video as part of a nationwide campaign. 20% came through Valletta 2018 Facebook Ads Manager where the video was being advertised in tandem with the other Social Media platforms.

During *The Official Valletta 2018 Opening* advertising campaign, a number of videos were being advertised through multiple channels working in tandem. These videos garnered a total viewership of 110,164 views with an average of 13,770 views per video. In this case Facebook was not engaged directly with YouTube and all Facebook advertising was being done natively on that platform. Throughout the campaign there was an average of 92% traffic from YouTube Ads, while YouTube Search yielded 21%. The most effective external resources that yielded the most traffic was Google Search with 31%, while Facebook Advertising showed 28% traffic.

The Opening Ceremony on 20th January 2018 was livestreamed, garnering 21,046 views on its own for over 8 hours of streaming while two other shorter livestreams yielded 1,287 and 2,557 views respectively.

Another notable campaign on YouTube was the *Dal-Baħar Madwarha* campaign with two videos, that advertised the first major Valletta 2018 visual arts exhibition and garnered close to 39K views. An average of 97% of traffic came from YouTube advertising, while an average of 49% of external traffic was diverted through the Valletta 2018 website.

Later in the year a campaign ran for *Aħna Refuġjati*, a Maltese-language opera that took place during the last week of August and the beginning of September. This saw the publication of six videos on YouTube with a total 82,594 views, which equates to an average of 13,766 views per video over the period of just over one month. Like other YouTube campaigns, the highest number of views were driven through YouTube Ads which amounted to an average of 98% per videos advertised (three out of the six videos), with Facebook being the source for an average of 40% of views. YouTube Search yielded 31% views, while Google Search contributed 24% of total views.

As one can see, this YouTube traffic information only concentrated on four sources in particular (YouTube Ads, YouTube Search, Google Search and Facebook) as they were the most uniform throughout all the stats recorded as well as the most effective sources.

Other Advertising

The AdWords platform was used for other advertising such as Google Ads and YouTube Ads and includes other placements. Throughout Valletta 2018 there were approximately 46 advertising campaigns that garnered close to 17M impressions and 24K clicks.

One of the bigger campaigns through AdWords for *The Official Valletta 2018 Opening*, ran for a month starting on the 20th December 2017 until 20th January 2018. The overall campaign had 2.01M impressions and 4,540 clicks. This campaign was placed and done by a private entity.

For the Google Display Campaign for the same run accumulated 1.89M impressions with approximately 4,280 clicks. The audience demographics here were very similar to other social media platforms; the most popular age brackets being 25-34 and 35-44, with the latter having the highest audience. In the statistics there were also a high number of Unknown Age present. No gender information was present. Here, as well, mobile phones and devices were the most popular in delivering adverts to the audience.

The Google Video Campaign for the same event had 2 videos in one advert group and garnered a total of 34,000 views and 122,000 impressions. The demographics were more pronounced here with the 25-34 to 35-44 age-brackets being the most pronounced, while Unknown and other ages were much lower. No information about audience genders was present here either. For this particular campaign, mobile phones and tablet devices came very close in advert delivery, with mobile phones still being the most popular.

The rest of the campaigns for 2018 (44 in total) were all created in house, also through AdWords by the Valletta 2018 Marketing team, so the information available is less detailed and GoogleAds and YouTube Video Campaigns are grouped under the same numbers, which added up to 14,537,962 impressions and 19,178 clicks.

The top-performing campaign was the Curatorial School Ad 1 Campaign with 6,996,603 impressions with Dal-Baħar Madwarha at 958,276 in second and Nisġa with 827,192 impressions in third. However in terms of clicks, the top performing ad campaign was the Sharing The Legacy Annual Conference campaign with 5,584 clicks and 293,403 impressions, giving it one of the best CPC (cost per click) for the whole year.

Online Mentions

A real-time brand-monitoring online tool was used throughout the years to keep track of the Valletta 2018 brand exposure through online mentions on certain social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, online blogs, and other channels. This allowed for a more holistic view of the different audiences interacting with Valletta 2018 on their respective social profiles.

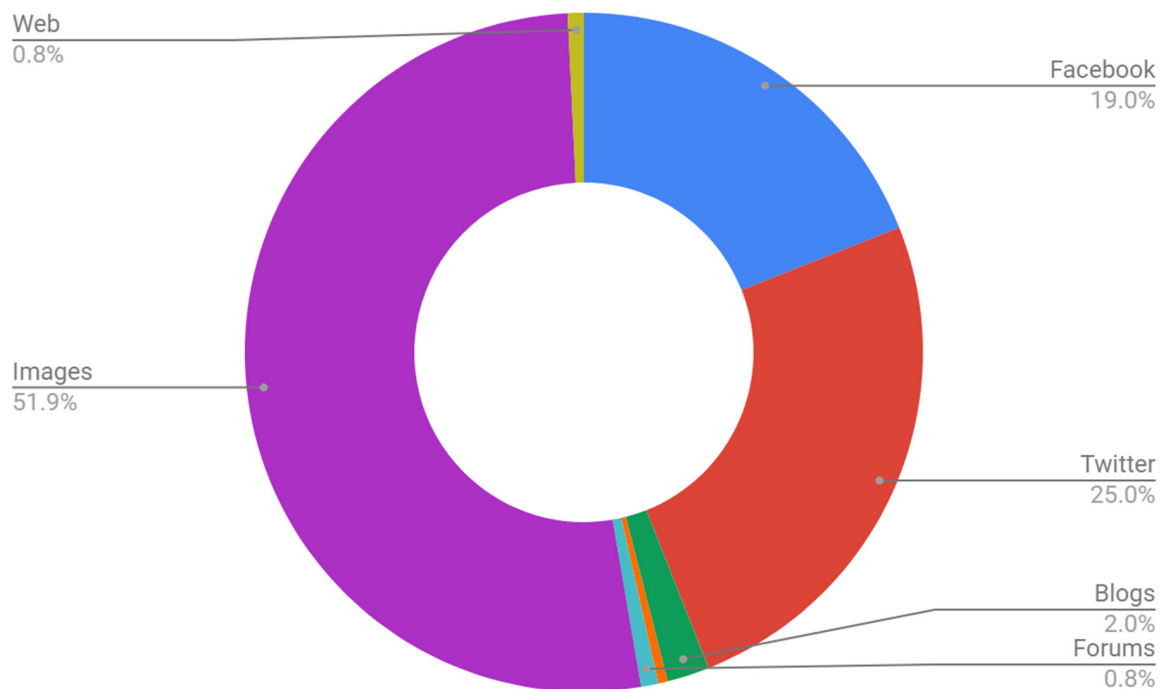
During the first recorded year in 2016, there was a total of 1,893 mentions of the term "Valletta 2018". This grew to 7,931 by the end of 2017 with a concentration of 1,700 in December alone. This also reflected in data recorded during 2018, which grew to 37,734 mentions by the end of the year.

The greatest concentration of mentions took place in January of 2018 which showed 10,579 mentions in total. This goes in line with data for other social media channels, as discussed earlier in this report, where an exponential growth was seen in the immediate run up to the *The Official Valletta 2018 Opening* as well as in the aftermath.

The total mentions during 2018 came from various sources. Facebook yielded 6,791 mentions², while Twitter garnered 8,927 mentions in just one year. News portals and blogs were captured separately and these accumulated 2,011 and 722 mentions respectively based on news articles, press releases, and other material about the Valletta 2018 Foundation or its events. Videos brought about 160 mentions, with Forums and Web garnering 295 and 274 mentions respectively.

The highest yielding source of mentions was in the Images category which yielded 18,554 mentions. The Image category could refer entirely to Instagram posts and the #valletta2018 #valletta and @valletta2018 tags on the platform. These were not necessarily all Valletta 2018-centric posts; many posts recorded under this category related broadly to the city of Valletta, rather than specific Valletta 2018 events, however would contain hashtags or tags related to Valletta 2018.

The table below gives a better idea of the sources of mentions related to Valletta 2018 during the ECoC year.



The Valletta 2018 Website

The Valletta 2018 website served to inform users about events taking place during the European Capital of Culture year as part of the Cultural Programme. Apart from having a vast events calendar, the website also provided users with news, an informative blog, information about the Foundation and various resources.

During 2017, the year during which Valletta was preparing its Cultural Programme for 2018, the website was visited by a total of 141,241 users. A significant spike in page visits is noticed on September 27th, 2017, when the Valletta 2018 Foundation launched its Cultural Programme (1529 users). Another significant spike can be noticed on December 31st, 2017, when the Foundation held its annual New Year's Eve event; this time ushering in the European Capital of Culture year 2018 (2768 users).

² Although the brand monitoring utilised tracks Facebook mentions that are made through publicly-accessible Facebook pages, it does not track mentions on private profiles. Therefore, it is estimated there may be a higher incidence of Facebook mentions than those which are recorded in this data.

During 2018, the Valletta 2018 website reached a total of 397,747 users, with 578,310 sessions and 2,020,364 page views in total. The majority of users hailed from Malta (53.91%), however users also hailed from the United Kingdom (10.17%), Germany (5.19%), the United States (4.11%), Italy (3.67%) and France (1.89%), amongst others.

The age range of the majority of users was between 25-34 (28.57%), while the rest of the age groups ranked as follows: 35-44 (17.2%); 65+ (15.62%); 55-64 (15.01%); 45-54 (14.95%); 18-24 (8.65%). The website was visited by a majority of females, totalling 60.79%, while males ranked at 39.21%.

Most users viewed the Valletta 2018 website via the Google Chrome browser (47%), while Safari ranked second (22.38%) and Android Webview ranked third (8.64%). The most popular method of accessing the website was through mobile (47.7%), while desktop ranked at a close 41.55% and tablet ranked at 10.75%.

The highest number of users ever registered on the website in one single day was during the Valletta 2018 Opening Ceremony event – amounting to 11,213 unique users on the day. The Opening was preceded by a week of fringe activities around Valletta – this also generated the public's interest. One can note a surge of activity starting from the 13th January 2018 (2987 users) going up to 3856 users on the 15th January 2018 and 5965 users on the 17th January 2018.

Other noteworthy mentions for 2018 include: the 7th April 2018 (Il-Festa l-Kbira event – 2935 users); the 7th June 2018 (Valletta Pageant of the Seas event – 6589 users); 27th October 2018 (Sfilata fil-Kapitali event as part of Orfeo & Majnun – 2081 users); 15th December 2018 (The Valletta 2018 Closing event – 2728 users).

The Valletta 2018 App

The Valletta 2018 App functioned in tandem with the Valletta 2018 website, meaning information stored in the Valletta 2018 website was automatically added to the App in the form of an events calendar. The App was also used to purchase tickets to events. Users could login either through Facebook or by creating an account through the App itself.

The App allowed users to select categories they were interested in, select events by browsing a map, add events as favourites, sign up for the Tal-Kultura volunteer programme, change language (App was available in English and Maltese) and give feedback, amongst others.

The App was downloaded by a total of 4656 users throughout 2018. The most popular language version used was English (this was the default language when downloaded). Amongst the most popular events marked as favourites, one can find the Valletta Pageant of the Seas, Carnival 2018, the Malta Jazz Festival 2018, Solar Cinema, Erba' Pjazez (the Valletta 2018 Opening), Earth Garden Festival 2018, Notte Bianca 2018, Science in the City and the Valletta Green Festival 2018.

Concluding Remarks

While Social Media was a big part of the Valletta 2018 Foundation's advertising and visibility, there is still much work to be done in reaching certain audiences, and in utilising some social networks to their full potential.

While older audiences were targeted through outdoor visibility, traditional media (television, radio, newspapers) and face to face interaction, the younger audience, particularly those in the 13-17 bracket

were significantly less engaged. More innovative and dynamic means need to be adopted to engage with this demographic.

With the range of social networks that were used, Facebook and Instagram may have been overused during 2018, causing a saturation and, in some cases, losses of followers and likes due to a large output of advertising material over a short period of time. A significant decrease in follows and interactions was observed as the year progressed, which may be an indication of an oversaturation of the target audiences.

Twitter on the other hand, was fiercely underused throughout the year – although less popular in the local context, it could have been very useful in interacting with international operators, academics and media houses, as well as other ECoCs and international cultural entities. Doing so would have enabled Valletta 2018 to engaged with completely new audiences. The success of Twitter engagement during the annual conferences can be taken as an indication that this channel could have been used in a more productive manner.

As indicated by the data related to AdWords, YouTube advertising and GoogleAds, these channels should continue to be utilised as they proved to be very useful in delivering content, images and videos to a wide audience. The cost per advert may also be more cost-effective than Facebook because even though Facebook is popular and more widely used, the change in algorithms could mean an increase in pricing with diminished performance overall.

So looking forward, one may look into targeting different age groups separately and engaging them differently to ensure a better reach for all audiences, and also better use of more social media networks without the specific and heavy use of Facebook and Instagram to ensure better and more efficient use of various networks to target a variety of audiences.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

European Capitals of Culture have often been perceived as unique opportunities for the rebranding of a city. This goes hand-in-hand with the branding of the ECoC title itself, and the ways in which the ECoC programme engages with its diverse audiences. The studies in this theme shed further light on this engagement strategy and the degrees to which the Valletta 2018 programme has succeeded in capturing the attention of different audiences.

The data within these theme provides valuable insight into how large-scale public initiatives - in particular those within the cultural sector - can nurture and maintain an audience over an extended period of time. The different marketing strategies adopted throughout the run-up to 2018 and, more pertinently, throughout the year itself have yielded successful engagement with some sectors of society, although not necessarily with others. The findings within this report enable stakeholders to explore these issues in more detail and trace a comprehensive engagement strategy for their own future initiatives.