



**LUMSA**  
UNIVERSITÀ

**Department of Human Studies**

Communication, Education and Psychology

**MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM IN MARKETING & DIGITAL COMMUNICATION**

**CLASS LM59**

**EVENTS MANAGEMENT**

**THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON CULTURAL  
EVENTS: HOW DOES IT AFFECT THE CONSUMER  
BEHAVIOR?**

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Academic Year 2019 – 2020

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*To my father.*

*To me.*

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# Introduction

Since ancient times, human beings have participated in large gatherings of people to celebrate certain events or to discuss certain topics: celebrations and political conversations have changed over the centuries becoming complex events, but they have always maintained the main purpose that is feed sociability and conversation among people. Cultural events in particular, still preserve the sense of participation, experientiality and belonging: whether they are concerts, fairs, religious processions or artistic events, they carry with them that sense of conviviality and participation in community life. However, participants, who will be defined as *consumers*, evolve over the years, adapting to the evolution of the society and of the environment around them:

when society changes, consumption trends of these participants follow and consequently events must evolve with them, developing new ways and new topics to be performed.

But what happens when an unforeseen *crisis* occurs and suddenly cultural events are no longer accessible and participants are locked inside their houses for a long period of time?

This thesis aims to investigate this kind of occurrence since the Covid-19 epidemic was identified in early 2020 and successively led to a pandemic. Specifically, this work aims to analyze if and how consumers have changed their consumption habits as the conditions of their external environment altered; moreover, the analysis aims to focus on the fruition of cultural events to see how consumers behave towards this type of activity.

A fundamental part of the study will be the approach to the *digital world* and *online consumption* that derived from this critical historic moment.

The work consists of three main chapters.

The first chapter will introduce the concept of *event* and how it is characterized according to different types; then, *cultural events* will be discussed as the main point of observation of the thesis together with *Consumer Behavior*. In this regard there will be a section dedicated to highlighting the main characteristics of a consumer from a theoretical and generational point of view.

The second chapter will examine two recent studies about Covid-19 and consumer behavior: the first work will analyze some consumption trends that occurred during previous crises; the second one will show how the world of

cultural events could approach digital tools through the example of 100 Italian museums.

The third chapter will observe the results of a questionnaire submitted to a sample of people in the period between February 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 and February 17<sup>th</sup> 2021: the purpose is to understand if the trends and observations described in the previous chapter also occurred in the specific case of cultural events.



# **Chapter 1. Cultural events and Consumer Behavior.**

## **1.1. Events and Cultural events: an introduction.**

### *1.1.1. What is an event?*

According to Getz (2007) events are “an occurrence at a given place and time; a special set of circumstances; a noteworthy occurrence”, while Bladen et al. (2018) affirm that “events are temporary and purposive gatherings of people”. The more we look for an answer to the question “What is an event?”, the more the definitions become detailed and not valid for all types of events. This is because it depends a lot on the point of view from which we are trying to defining it.

Events can be *planned* or *unplanned*. The first type, which is the topic we are covering in this work, are the result of a planning and management process in which a professional event manager (or a group of managers) coordinates all the operations and activities related to the event itself: what will happen, when, where, in which modalities, who will participate, how much budget will be used, what will be the duration of the event and many other aspects related to the creation of an event. Planned events can be for instance a wedding, a concert, a sport championship, an exhibition etc. The second type refers to those events where there is no strategical planning or management process at all. These events are random and spontaneous and because of that many participants might not have the same intentions for participation; therefore, these events result uncontrolled and potentially risky: marches, strikes, random gatherings of people are considered to belong to the latter type.

### *1.1.2 Categorization of events.*



*Figure 1. Departure at Palio of Sienna, Italy*

Events can be categorized based on several factors. Various authors suggest different categories and subcategories so there is no unanimous categorization. According to Bowdin et al. (2011) events can be described on the basis of two main factors: *size* and *type (or content)*.

*Size* is an important feature used to distinguish events “although definitions are not exact and distinctions become blurred” (Bowdin et al. 2011). The concept of size in this case does not refer only to the volume of people attending the event but also to the media coverage, the public attraction it generates as a result and the economic consequences derived.

Four common categories are (from the largest to the smallest): *Mega-events*, *Hallmark events*, *Major (or Regional) events* and *Local events*.



Figure 2. Size and Impact in events

*Type*, or *content* is the other feature events possess. According to Bowdin et al. (2011) events can be categorized in three main typologies: *Sports events*, *Corporate or Business events* and *Cultural events*.

The matrix represented in Figure 3. shows some of the most world-famous events, arranged according to their size and type.

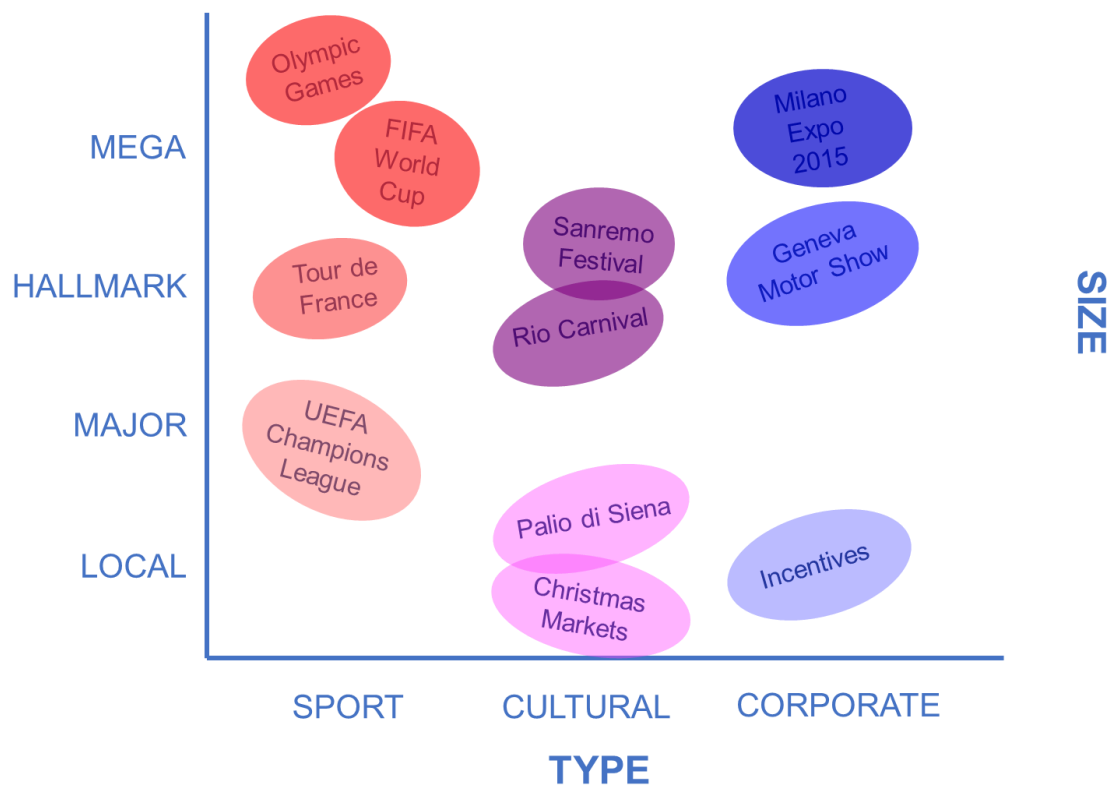


Figure 3. Size and Type matrix

### 1.1.3. Cultural events.



*Figure 4. Character during Día de los Muertos, Mexico*

Cultural events represent nowadays social and symbolic values, beliefs, rituals and traditions of the community. They are strongly connected with tourism and economy therefore they represent a major sector of the events industry and generate business activities and income for the hosting communities. In 2009, the Cannes Festival showed 299 films and 47 short films seen by about 350.000 attendees; according to Grunwell and Ha (2008), the economic impact was of 97 million dollars.

According to Getz (2007) “cultural celebrations are solemn or joyous events that have cultural meaning [...] but are separated from entertainment”; many authors oppose to this definition arguing that it refers only to the anthropological aspect of cultural events and does not consider the aesthetic

elements of cultures. Consequently, Bladen et al. (2018) revised it and defined cultural events “as those that either present a particular expression of culture or aim to represent the cultural expressions of specific groups”.

<i>Anthropological</i>		<i>Aesthetic</i>	
<i>Type</i>	<i>Example</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Example</i>
National cultural	St Patrick's Day in New York	Arts	Wagner Festival in Bayreuth
Religious	Divali in Bradford	Music	Bonnaroo Festival in Tennessee
Ethnicity	Mela in Oslo	Heritage	Festival of the Olive in New South Wales
Sexuality	Manchester LGBT Festival		
Community	Notting Hill Carnival in London		

*Figure 5. Cultural events according to Bladen et al., 2018, p.340*

Cultural events can be carnivals (i.e., Rio Carnival), commemorations, processions, parades (i.e., Gay Pride), festivals (music festivals, film festivals, arts festivals etc.) and can range from small wedding events to international commercial festivals.





*Figure 6. Tomorrowland, Belgium, 2017*

Having defined and described the field that this work is analyzing, it is time to explore the topic applied to it: the so called “Consumer Behavior”.

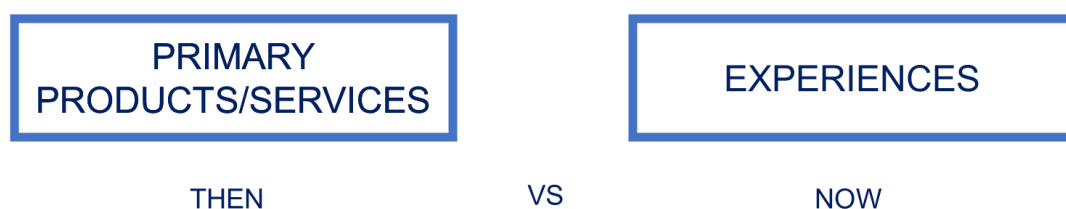
## **1.2. The Consumer Behavior.**



### *1.2.1. Defining the Consumer Behavior.*

Born as a theory, the Consumer Behavior analysis is today at the basis of any marketing activity and it is the main source experts use to investigate markets in order to understand how consumers behave, what their needs are, what they look for, what they buy or consume etc.

Until the 1970's the consumer was someone who used to buy products or services necessary to live. Consumption was primarily about house products, food and clothing: essential things for everyday life. But if we think about consumers' habits during 21<sup>st</sup> century it is clear that something has changed. Consumers do not just buy products anymore; they also look for experiences and services which are becoming more and more specific and required. They analyze what they are looking for, they think about which is the best option for their needs and then they buy or consume. Consumers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century take active part in the process of consumption more than ever (so much so that a new field of study was born as "Customer Experience").



*Figure 7. What consumers looked for then vs now.*

The focus on Consumer Behavior dates back to the 1960's. It quickly emerged that the consumer is a complex individual with its own character, values, tastes



and interests. It interacts with the environment that surrounds it and all the external factors that influence its choices. But what is in concrete the Consumer Behavior? Is there any definition?

There are actually plenty of definitions given by authors throughout the years: Lawson et al. (1999) define the Consumer Behavior as “the decision process and physical activity which the individuals engage in evaluating, acquiring, using or disposing of goods and services”; Bacarella (2002) adds more and says that from a different point of view, Consumer Behavior can be considered as a part of the entire human behavior because all those factors that daily influence individuals in their behavior equally influence their purchasing activities. These factors can be internal, such as learning or motivations, or even external, such as expectations and social constraints.

### *1.2.2. Factors that influence consumers when making the consumption decision.*

If the decision-making process of a consumer is the combination of many factors, then analyzing and understanding the Consumer Behavior means understanding how and why the consumer decides to buy or consume a product or a service.

Based on the cognitive theory, there are three main variables that influence the process: internal factors, external factors and the decision-making process itself.

- a) Internal factors affect *how* consumers proceed through the decision-making. They have strong influence on the process and help the consumer elaborate external factors according to variables such as personality, behavior, motivations and so on.
- b) External factors *influence* the consumer behavior from the outside but they are filtered and managed by internal factors which represent the behavior of that specific consumer: demographics, personal knowledge, social class, society, politics, economics are considered as belonging to external factors.
- c) Decision-making process is the *medium* consumers use to make a decision. It is composed of 5 main stages:
1. Recognition of the problem
  2. Research of information
  3. Evaluation of alternatives
  4. Choice and consumption of the right alternative
  5. Post-purchase behavior.



Figure 8.

Having stated that each consumer is different but also considering that external factors actually influence the Consumer Behavior, is it possible to group consumers who share the same characteristics and identify macro categories with the same drivers of behavior determined by factors linked to society, historical, political and economic period?

We will consider in the next paragraph a study concerning consumers changing their habits during several years according to different types of societies and environmental aspects.

### *1.2.3. Modern and Postmodern consumers: generations compared.*

#### *1.2.3.1. Modern and Postmodern.*

Based on Berner and Van Tonder work, Consumer Behavior has been changing following the events of the transition from the *Modern era* to the *Postmodern era*.

*Modernism* or *Modern era* (begun at the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century) emphasized the technical approach rather than the psychological one and was anti-romantic, futuristic, functional and rational; it gave birth to a Modern Society based on the principles of scientific research, mass production and industrialization. People (and so consumers) were motivated by principles of purity, unity and order.

*Postmodernism* or *Postmodern era* (which become more prominent during the 1970's), represented the *Information Society* which, following the explosion of scientific knowledge and the development of new technologies, was (and still

is) in a constant, rapid and complex change. The result is a society that presents different forms of cultures co-existing and consequently new values and behavioral trends of the people (and consumers).

Berner and Van Tonder describe the consumption during *Modern Society* as purposeful and based on the utility of the products/services purchased, due to the environment based on the principles of conformity and consistency. There is no individualism during this period therefore consumption is linear and without any particular variation. *Postmodern Society* on the other hand, presents the so called “hedonistic consumption” that is, consumption powered by a desire for something different like experiences and sensations.

As a result, the *Postmodern Consumer* is focused on building a sense of self identity in a highly complex and fragmented society; it is more interested in the cultural value of a product/service instead of its content value and builds its identity through the products/services it consumes. It is strongly individualistic in consumption and has no loyalty for just one brand, it is free to decide where to purchase and consume. It is also strongly information-technology oriented and does not conform to the traditional values of society; therefore, its behavioral patterns can be unpredictable.

Modern consumer	Postmodern consumer
<p><b>Consumption</b> was viewed as being more functional and rational and therefore meaningful, consistent and clear in its purpose.</p> <p>Viewed as a <b>passive</b> target group.</p> <p>Essentially <b>conforming</b> and traditional, and consequently homogenous in needs.</p> <p>A wholly analytical and rational being and in terms of consumption and buying behaviour, essentially considered an "information processor".</p> <p>Was predictable and clear in his/her service expectations.</p> <p><b>Preferences</b> were gender-specific and consumption patterns followed from clear role stereotypes (associated with specific gender) – underscoring the sense of collectivism and conformity.</p> <p>Focused on a singular <b>lifestyle</b> concept, founded on the modern <b>values</b> of orderliness and consistency.</p> <p><b>Self-portrayal</b> anchored strongly in the individual's occupation and social status</p> <p>More susceptible to mass-produced <b>products and services</b> (mass markets) that are useful in day-to-day living.</p> <p><b>Loyal</b> to a firm, brand, or product.</p>	<p><b>Consumption</b> is viewed as being more hedonistic, self-affirming, and compensatory.</p> <p>More <b>active</b>, in constant search of stimulation through events and images and, as a consequence, has more power than his/her modern predecessor. Referred to as "Simulated pseudo-explorers in virtual pseudo-realities..." (Thomas, 1997, p. 56).</p> <p>Global, <b>non-conforming</b>, and unpredictable (lacks depth and continuity).</p> <p>Generally open to new experiences and have few preconceptions about service.</p> <p>Many-faceted consumer that has become increasingly sophisticated and is likely to rely on own ability to seek value. Experience and pleasure are important.</p> <p>More humanistic and tolerant.</p> <p>May be unable or unwilling to express the meaning they seek and often have only a vague preconception of what is desired.</p> <p>More individualistic in <b>preferences</b> and <b>needs</b> (genderless/with a blurring of gender stereotypes). Individual taste(s) and meanings are important, and consequently, individuality and sense of style is displayed through choice of goods/products and services ("assemblage" – Featherstone, 1992, p. 63). (An "autonomous micro-particle" – Baudrillard, 1996, p. 106).</p> <p>Engaged in multiple <b>lifestyles</b> and subscribes to multiple and often highly incompatible <b>value</b> systems. Is consequently immune to incoherence and accepts and may even appreciate and enjoy discontinuity.</p> <p><b>Self-portrayal</b> and identity more prominently through imagery (symbolic value) created through consumption. Increasingly seeking, developing, or affirming personal identity through symbols (products and services) consumed.</p> <p>Appreciates individual and unique characteristics of <b>products and services</b> and places an emphasis on the spectacular, the popular, the pleasurable and that which is immediately accessible.</p> <p>Avoids <b>commitment</b> and exercises freedom to move where choice or whim dictates (an unencumbered self – Gould &amp; Lerman, 1998).</p>

Figure 9. Characteristics of Modern and Postmodern Consumer according to Berner and Van Tonder. Table 4, p.5.

#### 1.2.3.2. *Six generations of consumers.*

Taking in consideration the *Modern* and *Postmodern* eras, societies and consumers discussed in the previous paragraph, we will now observe 6 main generations of consumers<sup>1</sup> identified by different authors:

1. *G.I. Generation*
2. *Silent Generation*
3. *Baby Boomers*
4. *Generation X*
5. *Millennials (or Gen. Y)*
6. *Generation Z*

*G.I. Generation*, born between 1901 and 1925, lived through the Great Depression and World War II. This generation was strongly connected to values such as civic virtue, collectivity and camaraderie.

*Silent Generation*, born between 1926 and 1944, inherited the world the *G.I. Generation* fought for and were caretakers of that environment; for this reason, this generation had no desire to change their status. Washburn (2000) affirms that they demonstrated solid allegiance to principles such as law, order, patriotism and faith.

*Baby Boomers*, born between 1945 and 1964, was the first generation which did not live during the wars. They developed a sense of consistency and economic security therefore they began to commit to long term objectives and

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<sup>1</sup> *G.I. Generation*, *Silent Generation*, *Baby Boomers*, *Generation X* and *Millennials* description refer to Washburn's study (2000), while the description of *Generation Z* is taken from the article by Strauss and Howe (2020).

had high aspiration levels. This generations also started to distrust traditional values, authority and institutional principles and began pursuing a need for gratification and realization in life. Baby Boomers were the first generation to approach the Postmodern lifestyle.

*Generation X*, born between 1965 and 1981, kept following their ancestors' behavior, moving from a work-oriented life to an entrepreneurial one (they were very independent). Generation X is also the first generation strongly exposed to technological innovation and media influence and it had the access to a world more and more globalized which led them to be influenced in terms of language, fashion, music, food and so on. The strong exposure to information changed this type of consumers to have a strong sense of immediacy and being in constant search of excitement and new experiences (in fact, it is precisely in this period that the first references to the concept of *Customer Experience* are born).

*Millennials (or Generation Y)*, born between 1982 and 1995, is an ambitious, individualistic, optimistic generation. They are not attached to traditions and have no faith in the way things were done in the past. Indeed, more than 70%<sup>2</sup> of them have access to the world wide web and are used to work and connect using computers, emails and instant tools of communication. Moreover, aspiration and stability are at the basis of their view of work and they are more interested in training, support, good working environment etc.

This generation represents the real Postmodern Consumer.

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<sup>2</sup> Data refer to year 2000.

*Generation Z*, born between 1996 and early 2010's, is described by *The Economist* as a “more educated, well-behaved, stressed and depressed generation in comparison to previous ones”. They rely more on being physically and mentally healthy and on having good relationships with families and friends. Generation Z is also very focused on education and the opportunities it gives in the work field. Plus, their access to social media, website builders, 3D printers, and drop shipping platforms allows them with additional opportunities to start a personal business at a young age.

Due to the constant exposition to an unprecedented amount of technology, this generation has a lifestyle based on online communication which permits them to be always in contact with people (potentially all around the world); as a consequence, speed and reliability are important factors for them.

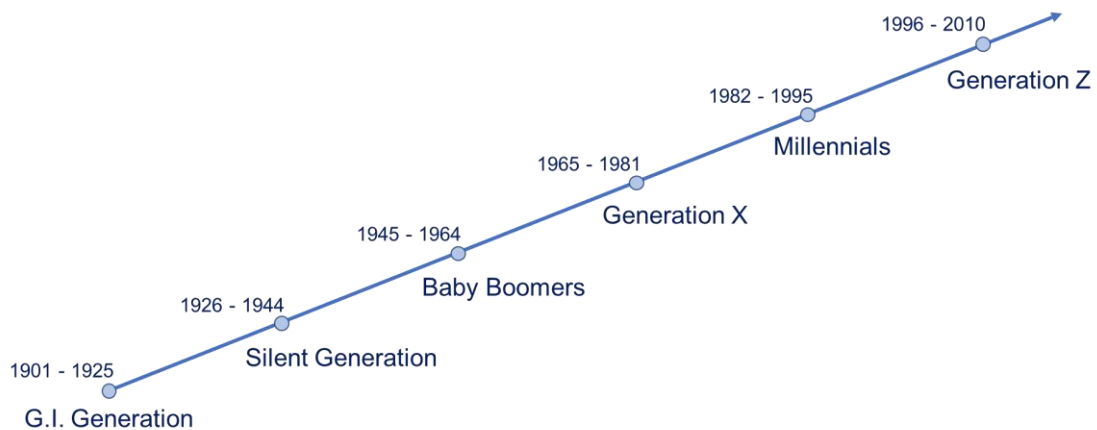


Figure 10.



## **Chapter 2. Consumers in time of crisis: two studies on Consumer Behavior's trends during the Covid-19 pandemic.**

*<< Crisis: an unstable period, esp. one of extreme trouble or danger in  
politics, economics, etc. >><sup>3</sup>*

*<< Crisis: a condition of instability or danger, as in social, economic, political,  
or international affairs, leading to a decisive change. >><sup>4</sup>*

Since the Covid-19 epidemic broke in early 2020, the whole world has seen its habits change drastically. People have been forced to stay closed at home,

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<sup>3</sup> Collins Concise English Dictionary, HarperCollins Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> WordReference Random House Unabridged Dictionary of American English © 2021

limiting physical contact, changing ways of working and inevitably changing social habits. The initial health crisis resulted in an economic, social and political crisis and from that moment on there were consequences from every point of view.

The aim of this work, as it has been said, is to analyze whether and how all these external factors have influenced and/or changed the behavior of consumers, both in general terms and in the specific consumption of cultural events.

The literature of reference is scarce at the moment this analysis is being carried out<sup>5</sup>, and it does not bring definitive results as the emergency of the pandemic is still underway and the final developments have not yet been seen. In this chapter, therefore, we will refer to two studies that have recently been conducted on the Covid-19 topic: with the first work (paragraph 2.1.) we will try to understand what are the general trends that occur in terms of consumer behavior when the consumer finds itself having to make choices of consumption in a potentially risky situation; with the second work (paragraph 2.2.) we will discuss about a possible switch to digital consumption in the field of cultural events.

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<sup>5</sup> February 2021

## **2.1. Changes in Consumer Behavior during different crises.**

### *2.1.1. Introduction.*

This research conducted by Loxton et al<sup>6</sup>. during the first half of 2020 aims to understand how the Coronavirus pandemic influenced the consumer behavior in terms of purchasing activities and, referring to previous crises, if the patterns and trends in consumption appeared previously occurred again during first months of Covid-19 crisis. The study takes into consideration various theories of consumer behavior and behavioral models applied to some crises that occurred in past years such as SARS Outbreak, Christchurch earthquake and Hurricane Irma.

From this analysis the authors identified 4 main behavior patterns that they researched and observed during the very first period of the Covid-19 pandemic:

1. Panic buying
2. Herd mentality
3. Changes in customers' decision-making process
4. Role of the Media in influencing Consumer Behavior

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<sup>6</sup> *“Consumer Behavior during crises: preliminary research on how Coronavirus has manifested consumer panic buying, herd mentality, changing discretionary spending and the role of the media in influencing behavior.”*

### *2.1.2. Panic Buying.*

Panic buying is an identified behavior where consumers purchase unusual large amounts or unusual varied products previously/during/after a crisis or a perceived one. Factors such as personal perception or fear of the unknown could influence this type of conduct; as a consequence, consumers perform self-protect activities to minimize the perceived risk and alleviate stress. Moreover, panic buying can also lead to changes of the traditional patterns of spending.

In the US, during March and April 2020, there was a drop in retail sales of 8.3% and 16.4% respectively; supply shortages occurred due to opportunistic behaviors of consumers such as purchasing excessive volumes of non-discretionary household items and medical supplies increased prices. Following the latter issue, in Australia, supermarkets like Woolworths and Coles (the most famous ones) had to set limits on item purchasing including toilet paper, mincemeat, eggs, milk, pasta, flour and liquid soap.

### *2.1.3. Herd Mentality.*

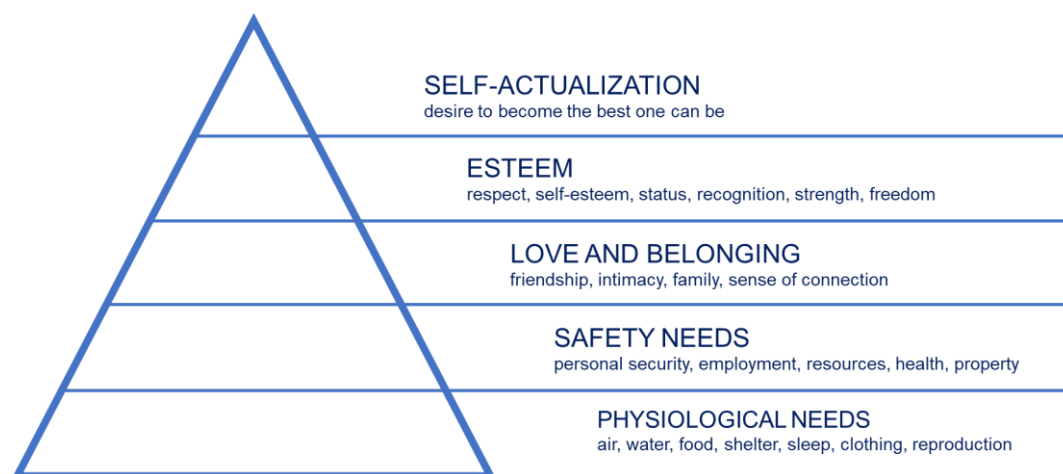
Herd mentality is defined as “an alignment of thoughts and/or behaviors of individuals in a group, that emerges without purposeful coordination by a central authority or leading figure, and instead through local interactions among agents” (Loxton et al., 2020). This behavior appears during period of shock or stress and can lead to different consumer behaviors and societal anxiety. For instance, after Japan’s Fukushima Plant nuclear leak in 2011,

consumers all over the world began buying products rumored to prevent or reduce radiation poisoning.

Covid-19 pandemic has brought fear of scarcity and loss of control over one's life and people irrationally moved towards this behavior. A study conducted by NC Solutions found that US toilet paper purchases increased 51% between February 24<sup>th</sup> and March 10<sup>th</sup> 2020. Additionally, on March 12<sup>th</sup>, US consumers nearly doubled their purchases compared to the previous week by increasing household packaged goods sells by 55%.

#### *2.1.4. Customer decision-making process.*

To analyze this aspect, Loxton et al. took in consideration the *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs* theory. This theory, described in 1943, investigates how consumers prioritize their needs and therefore, how they decide where and what to purchase depending on the context.



*Figure 11. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.*

According to Maslow people build their lives satisfying their needs, usually starting from the most vital and then moving to the upper ones; but when periods of stress or anxiety come, such as the pandemic we know, people (and so, consumers) tend to focus on physiological needs first, before switching to the others. Moreover, it must be taken into consideration that during periods of crises, there is usually an economic decline that leads people to re-evaluate consumption behavior due to the economic environment.

Loxton et al. work confirms that, in line with the Maslow's Hierarchy, "the Covid-19 period has demonstrated a shift in consumption of basic needs and non-durable goods items, prioritizing the base layer of the pyramid". For instance, in May 2020, Australia's unemployment rate jumped to 6.2% and the economy went towards a recession; consequently, the individual wage growth fell and spending prioritized basic needs. Essential stores such as Woolworths increased revenue of non-durable goods by 10.7% to 16.5 billion in the March quarter. Likewise, Amazon reported a decline in durable goods sales (i.e., luggage -77%, briefcases -77% and cameras -64%). On the other hand, medical necessities increased by 535% for cough medicine, 190% for toilet paper, 166% for vitamins and 99% for painkillers.

The authors assert that "during the current crisis, consumers will continue to satisfy lower order needs until they are confident the threat of Coronavirus has subsided".

### *2.1.5. Role of the Media in influencing Consumer Behavior.*

In today's *Information Society*, mass media have a crucial role in informing and leading public opinion; they have the capability to inform or spread misinformation, risking to generate reactions of mass hysteria and confusion among people, creating stressing environments that could lead to states of fear. To give an example, at the beginning of the Ebola crisis (first months of 2014), the disease was labelled as "regional crisis" and was not linked to any consumer behavior change. But when media began to report the virus as an "outbreak" and "pandemic", consumers began to panic: by October 2014 hazmat suits were selling for USD1.300 on Amazon and the US Centre for Disease Control (CDC) received 135% increase in phone calls about home remedies and concerns about products from Africa.

Similarly, the analysis conducted by the authors of this study, suggests that mass-media attracted significant attention during the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic. The news outlets in the US increased web-traffic by 30% between February and March 2020; in the same period, Australian news outlets increased by an average of 54%.

## **2.2. Italian museums and online openness: a new way of consumption for cultural events?**

### *2.2.1. Introduction.*

This study, conducted by Agostino et al.<sup>7</sup> during the first half of 2020 investigates the 100 largest Italian state museums and how they carried on their cultural activities through social media; the aim is to reflect on how digital approaches could become the new direction for the future of museums and cultural events more in general.

The analysis relates to the period from the 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 (when museums closed all their onsite operations), to the 30<sup>th</sup> of April 2020. Of the 100 museums considered, 44% is located in the Centre, 26% in the South and the remaining 30% in the North of Italy; in particular, 63 out of 100 museums are located in the province of Rome.

### *2.2.2. Results.*

From the investigation, it resulted that Facebook, Twitter and Instagram have become the museums' preferred channels to connect with consumers.

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<sup>7</sup> *"Italian state museums during the COVID-19 crisis: from onsite closure to online openness."*



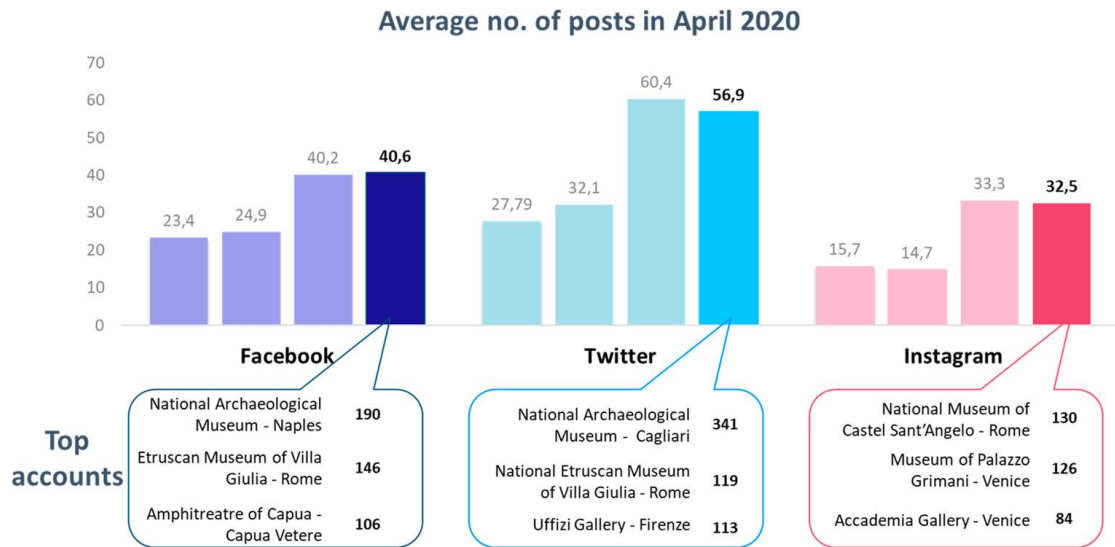


Figure 12. Agostino et al. (2020), p.6.

Moreover, the authors highlight that museums have also changed what they are communicating through these channels: “from mere tools of communication, social media have evolved into tools of spreading knowledge. For instance, some museums are now using Facebook to share information about an art piece and reveal some or other unknown aspects about it. Other museums have arranged interviews with experts or guided tours in the company of museum’s director. Others have chosen a more ‘playful’ approach, running virtual treasure hunt among the museum’s collections or organizing quiz events.”



Figure 13. Poster created for the "ArtYouReady" flashmob organised for Sunday March 29th. Users were asked to post photos of their favourite places of culture. The initiative then became a regular Sunday event.

The study illustrates that the public showed an increased interest in places of culture.

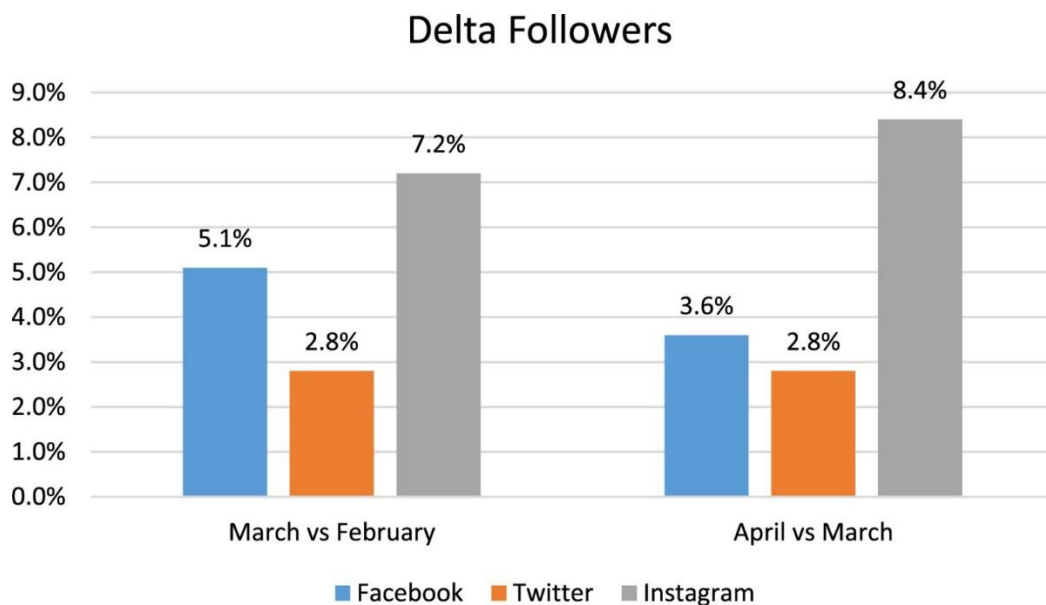


Figure 14. Agostino et al. (2020), p.8

In conclusion to their study, the authors propose two main observations useful for our analysis:

- I. Before the Covid-19 lockdown, social media were complementary tools to onsite visits. During the lockdown they became *the* tool for spreading information and share art; therefore, they also became necessary tools to access cultural material. “If we look forward, we will probably be facing a physical environment with an increasingly hybrid use of online applications blended with the physical world.”
- II. Virtual visitors got used to selecting the right cultural offers for them; the authors suggest a new way on how, in future, museums could propose customized content for their visitors, maybe using Artificial Intelligence systems that, “by profiling individual people, could create a personalized itinerary or selection of artworks that are most likely to mirror their interests.

## **Chapter 3. Covid-19 pandemic and cultural events in Italy: preliminary analysis on how the crisis affects Consumer Behavior.**

### **3.1. Introduction to the analysis.**

The final purpose of this thesis is to take a preliminary look on Consumer Behavior patterns in the particular field of *Cultural Events* in Italy.

In the previous chapter we have acquired some useful information about Consumer Behavior and how crises of various type have previously influenced it. We have also pondered on how new technologies and new media could affect or help the consumption of some kind of cultural events.

In this third chapter we will try to observe in more detail if those behavioral changes occurred also in this field and what kind of evolution we could expect from the future about the fruition of this type of experiences.

## 3.2. Methodology.

The investigation is based on 477 questionnaires collected between February 6<sup>th</sup> 2021 and February 17<sup>th</sup> 2021 all over the country.

Lazio	286
Puglia	40
Lombardia	34
Emilia Romagna	27
Toscana	17
Piemonte	16
Campania	13
Abruzzo	11
Veneto	8
Umbria	7
Sicilia	5
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	4
Molise	2
Sardegna	2
Liguria	1
Trentino-Alto Adige	1
Marche	1
Basilicata	1
Calabria	1
Valle d'Aosta	0

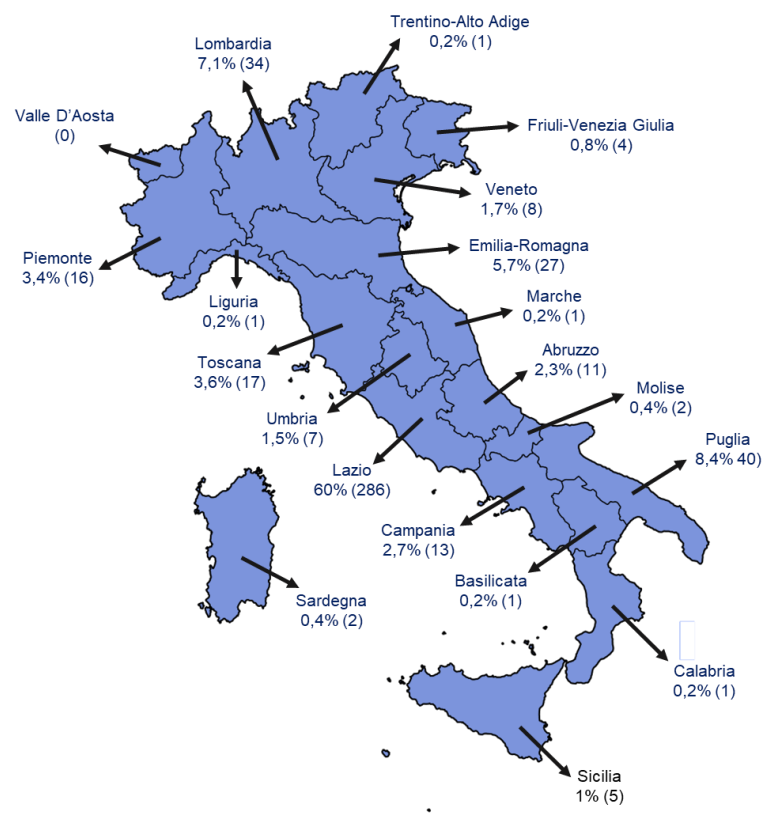


Figure 15. Distribution of the questionnaires in the Country.

The sample is composed as follows:

- Gender: 67% women, 32,5% men, 0,2% not specified.

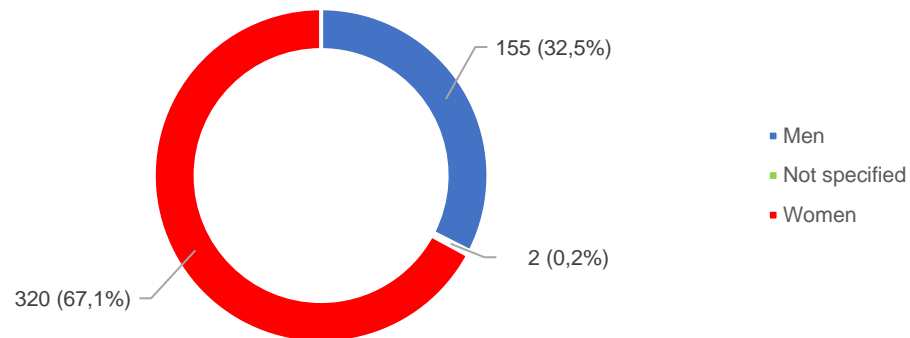


Figure 16. Gender distribution.

- Age: 0,2% of the sample was born between year 1926 and 1944; 10,3% was born between year 1945 and 1964; almost 14% of the sample was born between year 1965 and 1981; 49% was born between year 1982 and 1995; more than 26% was born between year 1996 and 2021.

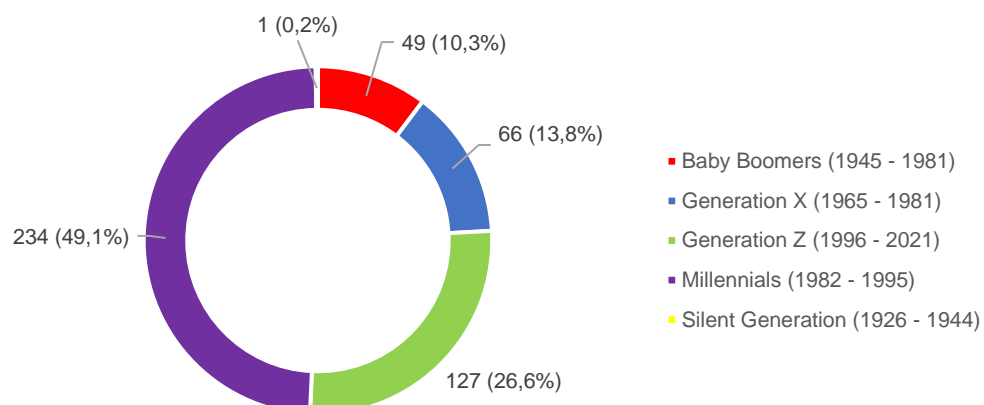


Figure 17. Age distribution.

- Employment: almost 27% of the sample is represented by students; 52% works; almost 7% is unemployed; 2,3% represents stay-at-home parents and 3,3% is retired; moreover, almost 6% of the sample is represented by students who work too.

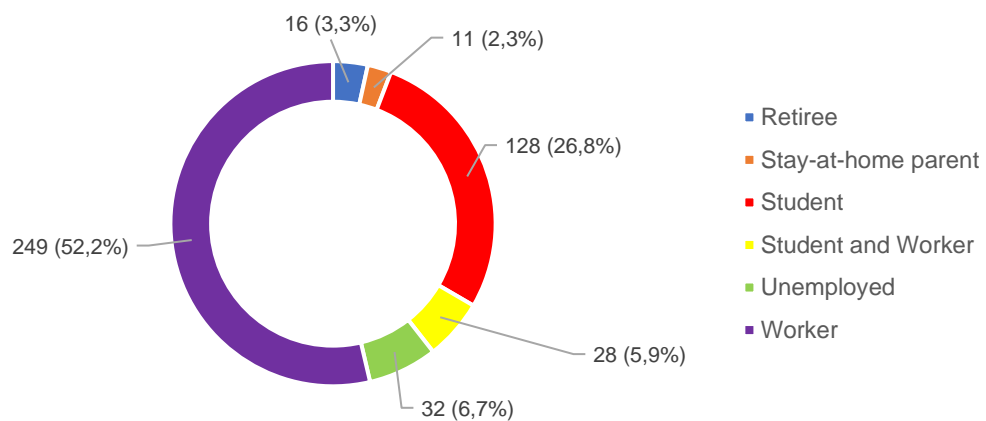


Figure 18. Employment distribution.

The questionnaire covers a period of analysis that goes from pre-Covid19 period (that is, until March 10<sup>th</sup> 2020) to the first Lockdown period (between March 10<sup>th</sup> 2020 and May 18<sup>th</sup> 2020) and again, from the end of the Lockdown period to the present day (which means the period between May 18<sup>th</sup> 2020 and February 17<sup>th</sup> 2021, the last day available to fill the questionnaire).

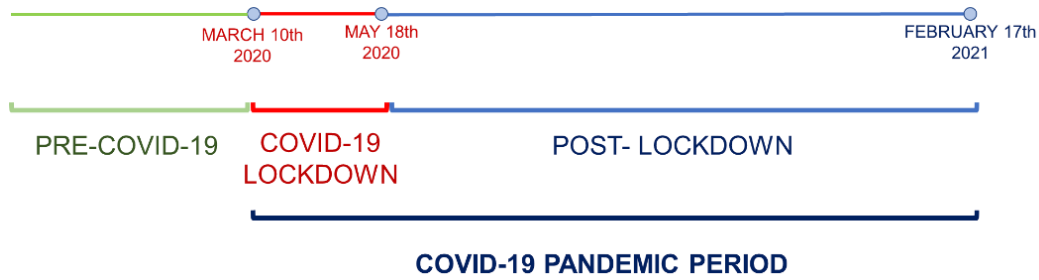


Figure 19.Period covered by the analysis.

Questions in the survey are organized into 3 main sections:

1. Specific habits over time as consumers in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Personal fruition of cultural events during the pre-Covid19 pandemic period.
3. Personal fruition of cultural events during the Covid-19 pandemic period; furthermore, at the end of the section some questions are asked about digital and online experiences of cultural events.

### 3.3. Results.

#### 3.3.1. Consumer Behavior before Covid-19 pandemic period.

From a general Consumer Behavior's point of view, the analysis shows that, during pre-Covid19 pandemic period, 87% of the sample participated in cultural events at least once, while 13% said they never participated in one. Moreover, the questionnaire reports that more than 52% of the people used to



participate in cultural events with a frequency between 1 and 5 times per year and only the 16,6% used to participate more than 10 times in a year.

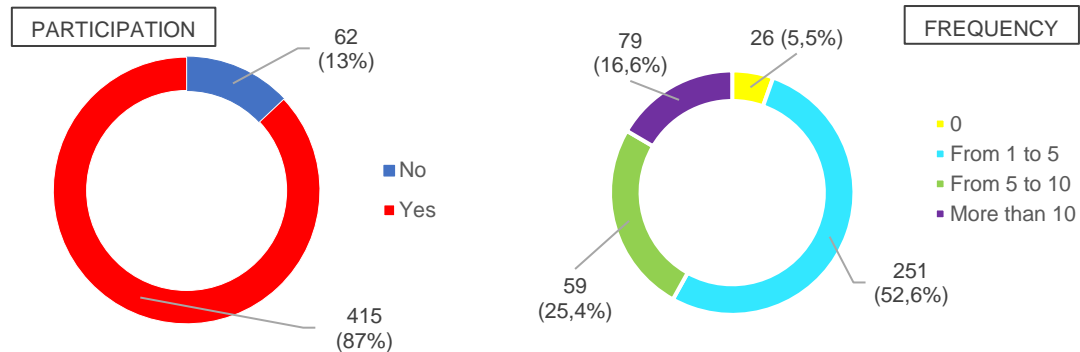


Figure 20. Participation in cultural events during pre-Covid19 pandemic period (left); frequency of participation (right).

Data also point out that the top three most popular cultural events are concerts, exhibits and country festivals, followed by fairs and museum tours and other types of cultural events.

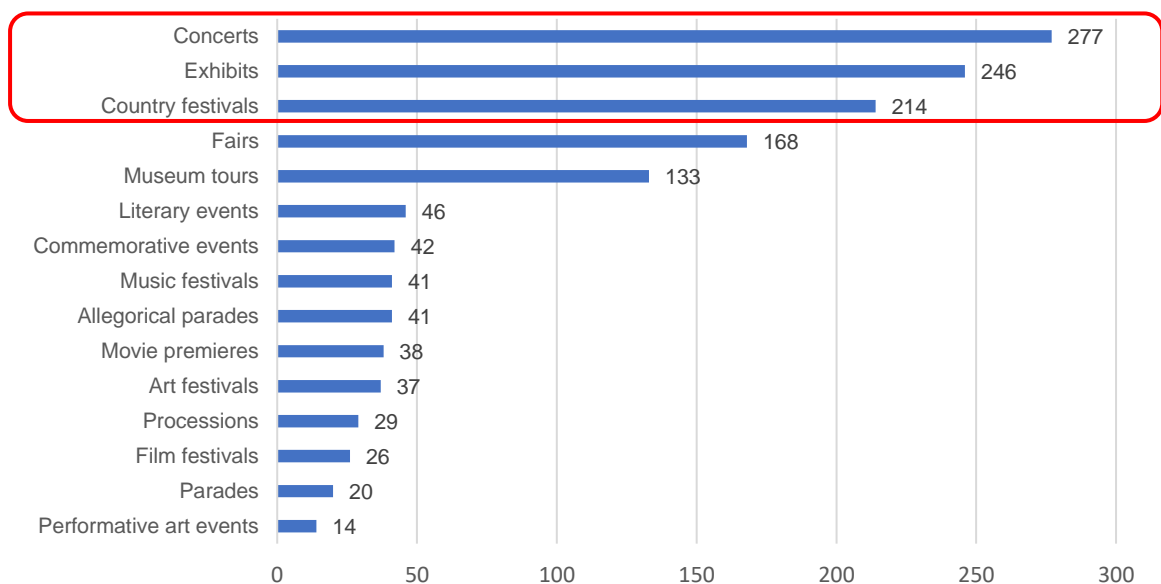


Figure 21. Most popular cultural events chart.

Examining the same question, two groups of consumers were considered from a generational perspective: Generation Z (the youngest one, born between 1996 and 2021), and Generation X (which should represent the parents of Generation Z, born between 1965 and 1981). We can notice that concerts, exhibits and country festivals still hold the top positions in the ranking but they are in different order; the rest of the classification instead, shows a diverse order, especially in lower positions.

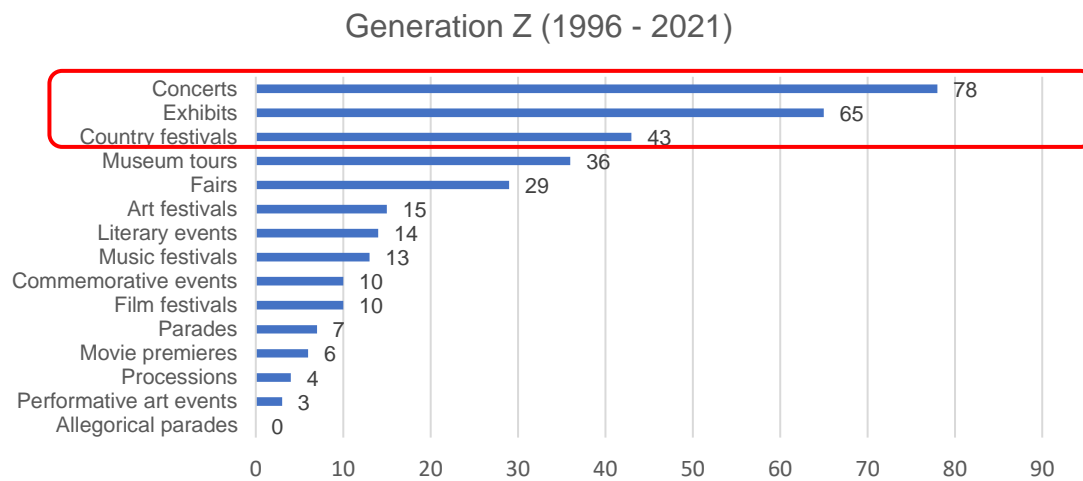


Figure 22. Gen. Z's most popular cultural events.

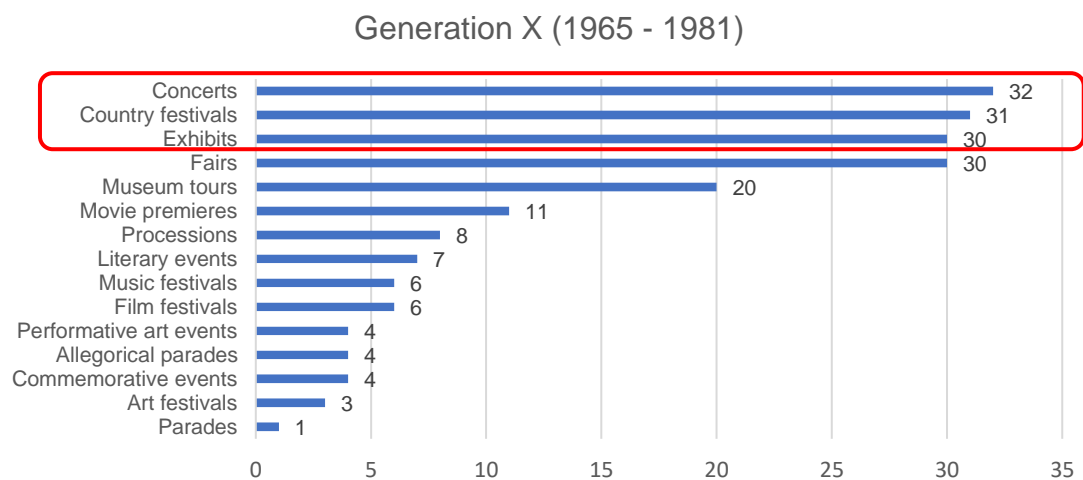


Figure 23. Gen. X's most popular cultural events.

That confirms that, even if slightly, Consumer Behavior actually changes according to different generations as well as according to the factors that influence the decision-making process. To make one clear example concerning the influence of external factors, we can take into consideration the answers given to the question “According to what reason you used to decide to participate in a cultural event during pre-Covid19 period?”

The whole sample gave the following answers:

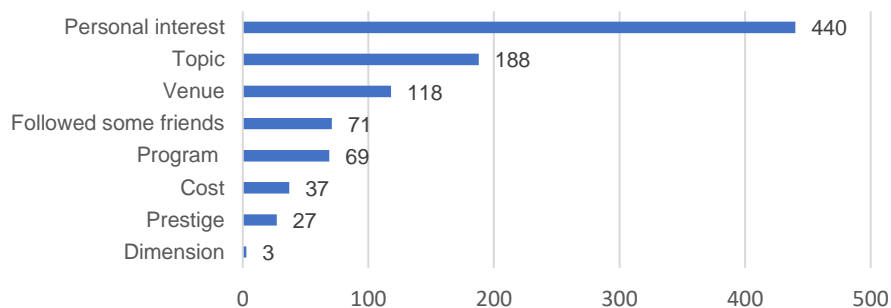


Figure 24.

But Generation Z and Generation X responded as follows:

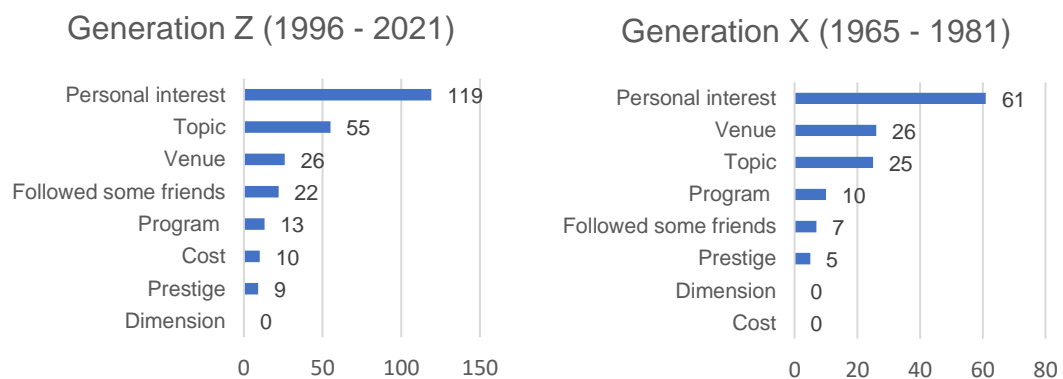


Figure 25.

Personal interest remains the main decision factor but if Generation Z gives more importance to the topic of the event rather than its place, Generation X shows more interest in the program of the event and does not consider factors such as the cost (probably due to the economic independence they have).

### *3.3.2. Consumer Behavior patterns during Covid-19 pandemic period.*

Analyzing data in the Consumer Behavior section, a coincidence was noted with the study by Loxton et al. (2020) described in the second chapter of this thesis: the first behavior that also occurs in our questionnaire is a change in the priority of the purchase and consumption of goods/products/services<sup>8</sup> that are common in everyone's lives (Fig. 26, 27, 28).

The questionnaire asks, among a list of products and services, which are the ones that participants consume or buy more in the three periods of analysis we have already mentioned (pre Covid-19 period, period of the first Lockdown in Italy, post Lockdown period until the present day).

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<sup>8</sup> Paragraph 2.1.4: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

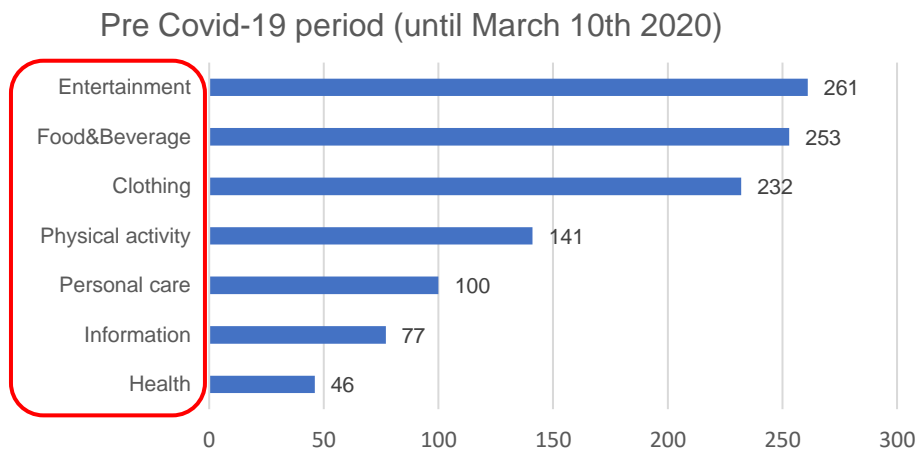


Figure 26.

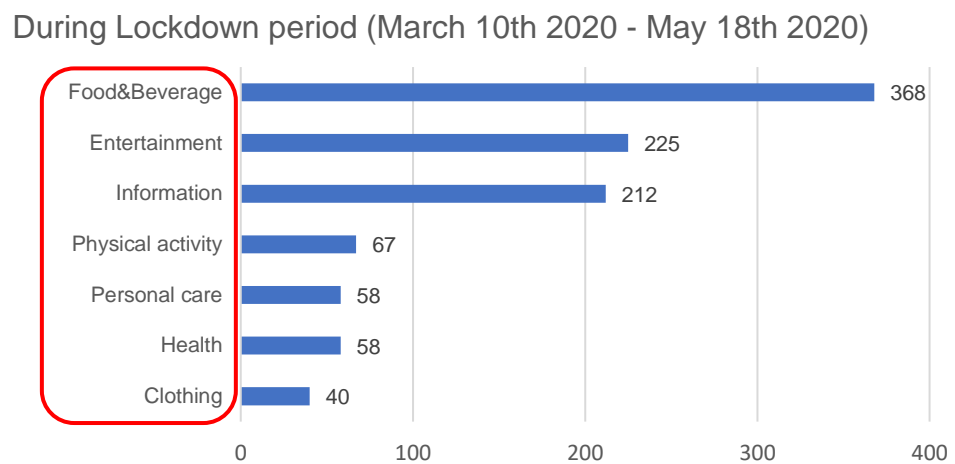


Figure 27.

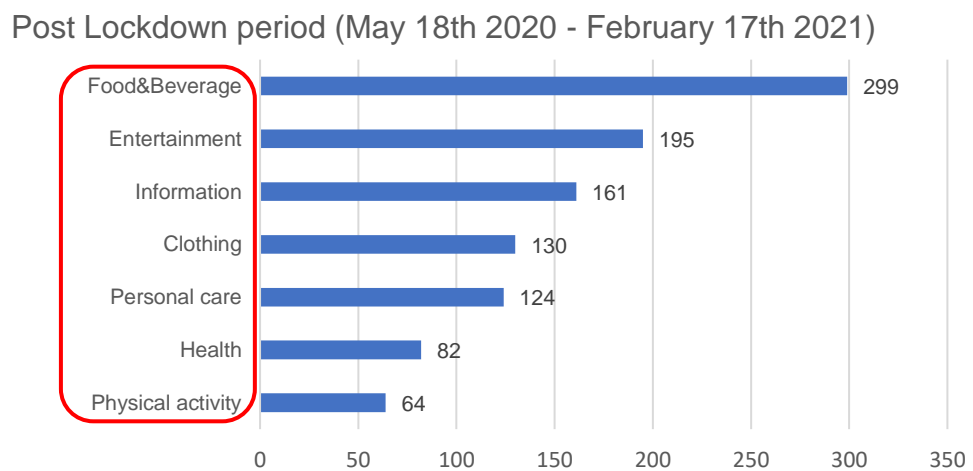


Figure 28.

It is evident that, compared to the pre Covid-19 period, the element *Clothing* drops to the last position due to the fact that people could not go out and social life was reduced to zero. However, we note that *Information* rises significantly in the ranking and is placed among the top three main purchasing activities along with *Food&Beverage* and *Entertainment*; this is because the high-risk perception leads the consumers to seek as much information as possible to manage the feeling of not being able to control the environment and alleviate the stress due to the fear of the unknown.

The new behavior remains basically stable in the post Lockdown period since the pandemic emergency is still active and has not returned to a normal lifestyle.

Going deeper in the investigation, two generations were compared again to see if this type of change in consumers behavior has occurred the same way: this time, along with Generation Z, the Boomers were observed (those born between year 1945 and 1964) (Fig. 29 - 31 and 32 – 34).

It is interesting to see that there is a totally different consumption pattern in the pre Covid-19 phase already. Due to factors such as age and habits we note that *Information* is already among first places for Baby Boomers and stays there throughout the pandemic phase; for the same reason *Health* rises in the ranking during the Lockdown period and remains still. On the contrary, *Entertainment* is relatively less considered compared to Generation Z, while *Food&Beverage* represents a primary element of survival and stays in first place in any case, reconfirming Maslow's Theory as well.

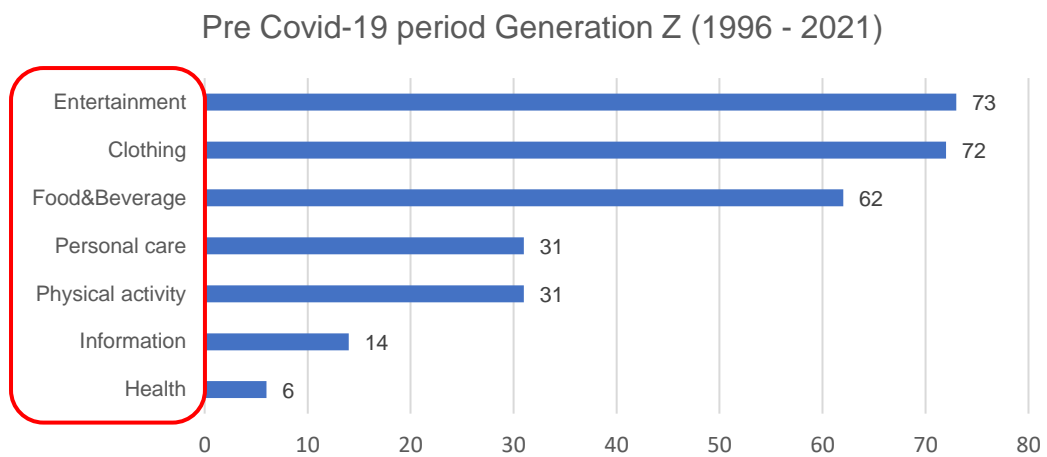


Figure 29.

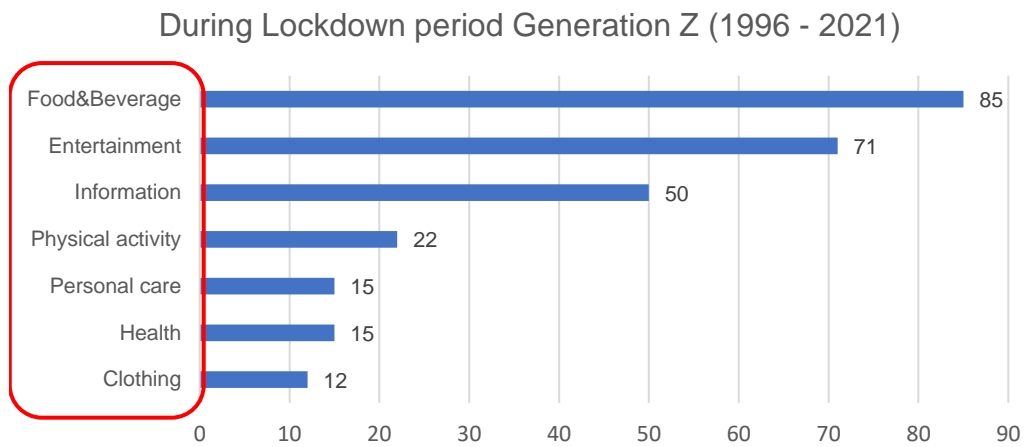


Figure 30.

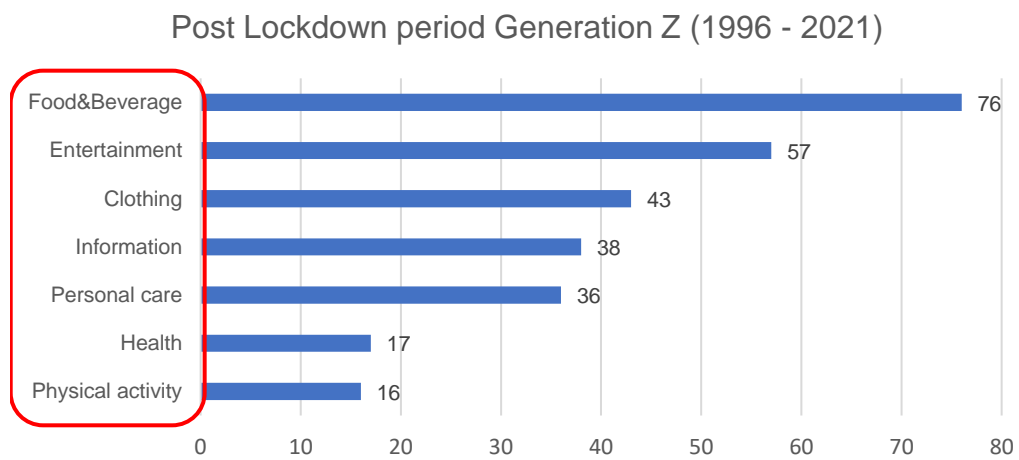


Figure 31.

Pre Covid-19 period Baby Boomers (1945 - 1964)

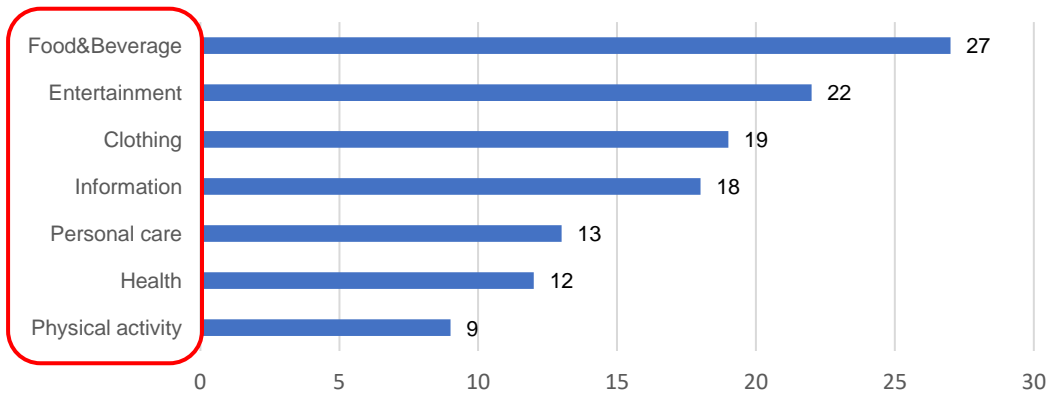


Figure 32.

During Lockdown period Baby Boomers (1945 - 1964)

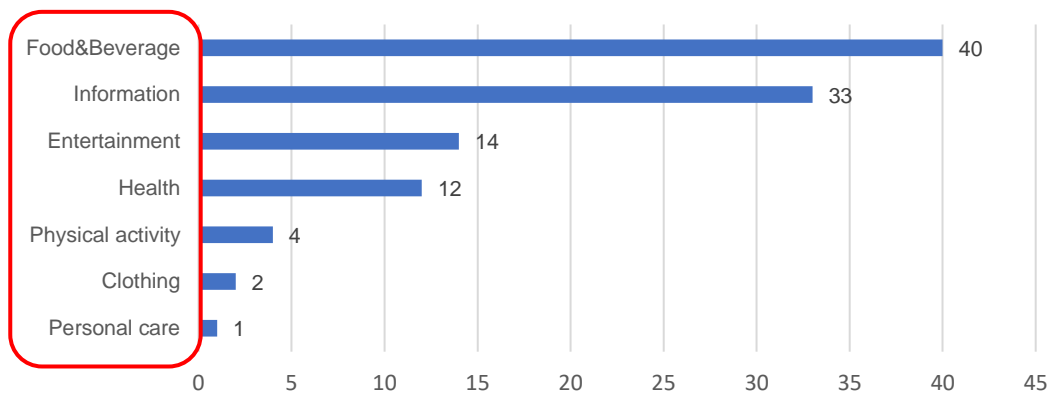


Figure 33.

Post Lockdown period Baby Boomers (1945 - 1964)

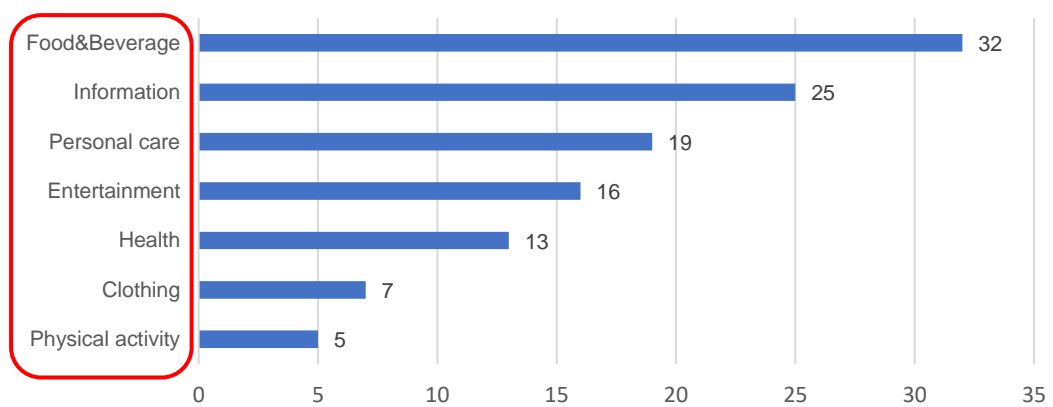


Figure 34.



Another behavior underlined is that of Panic Buying which represents the increase in consumption/purchase of certain products. Following Maslow's Theory, the trend of *Food&Beverage* and *Health* was analyzed (Fig.35). The consumption actually increased in the lockdown phase and slightly decreased in the subsequent one but it maintained a higher value than the pre Covid-19 phase indicating however a growth in consumption.

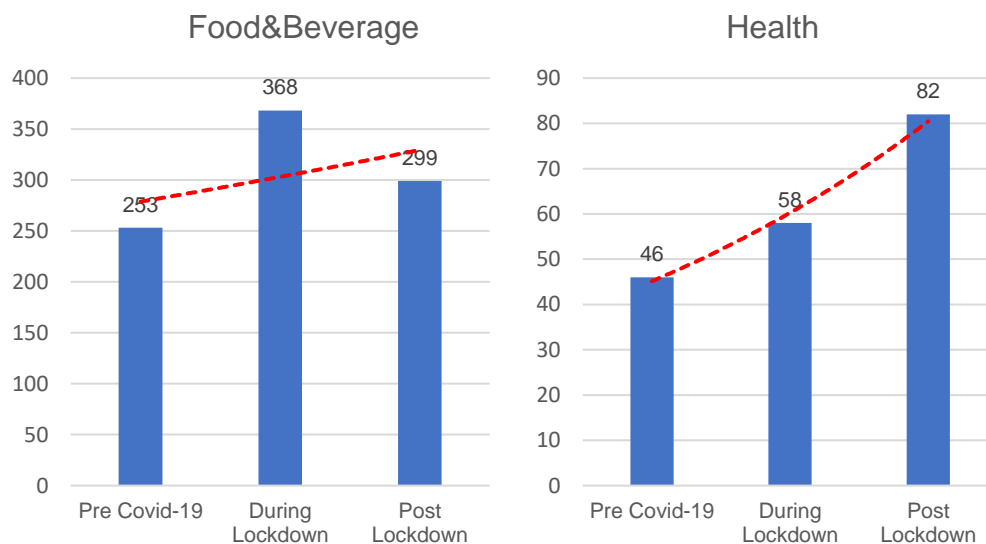


Figure 35. Panic Buying behavior in Food&Beverage and Health factors.

Finally, the study identified what is called a Herd Mentality behavior<sup>9</sup> (Fig.36). Consumers were asked to indicate among various factors which ones are those that make them feel safe when attending cultural events on site. The behavior occurs since we see that when it comes to factors related to the contraction of the virus (use of safety devices by staff and attendees, safety

<sup>9</sup> For further explanation see paragraph 2.1.3.

distance, limited number of participants and limited entries) consumers have always responded with the highest values among those proposed.

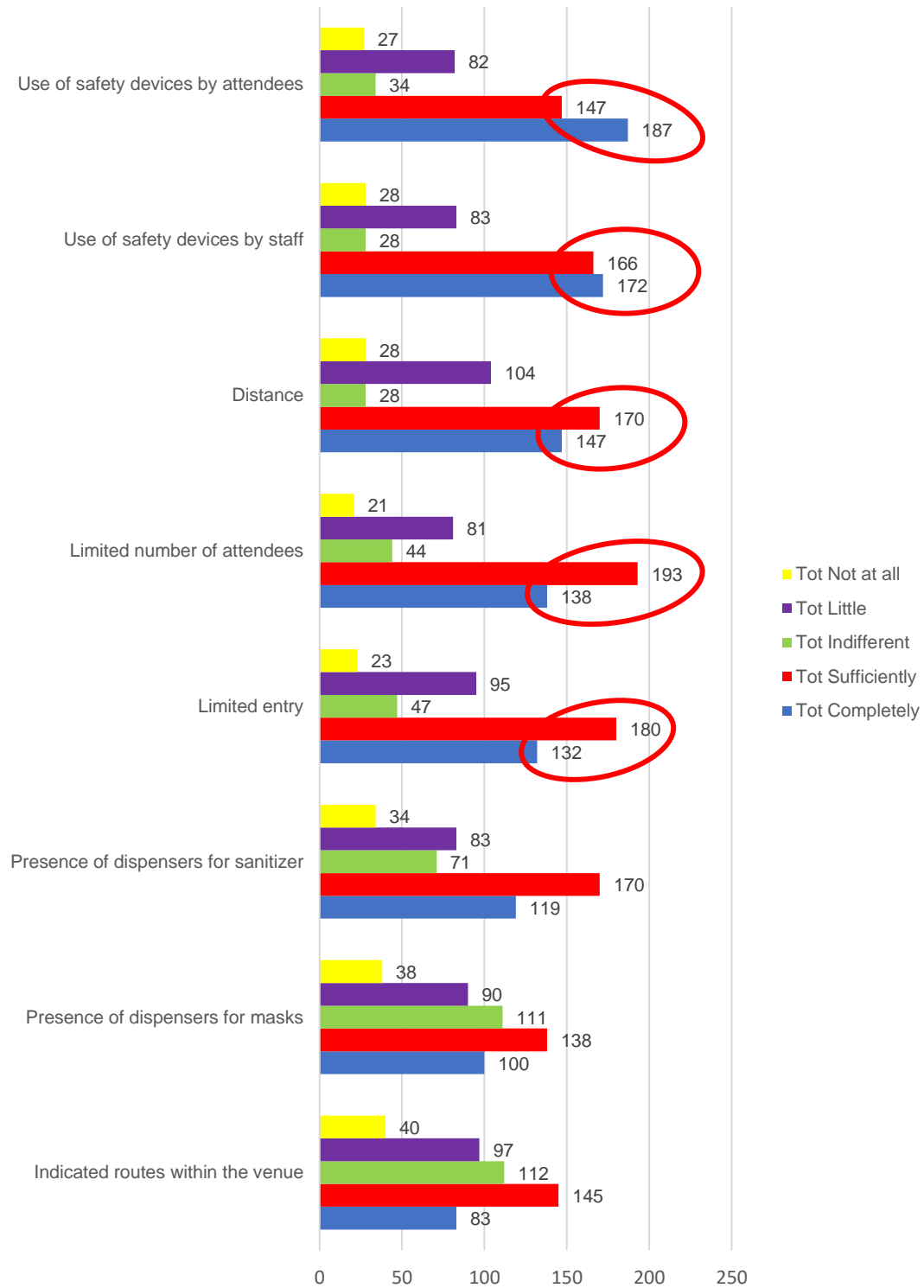


Figure 36.

The same behavior occurs when consumers are asked if they have participated in cultural events on site during the period between the end of Lockdown and the present day; *No* reaches 67%, 47% of which say they do not feel safe to participate.

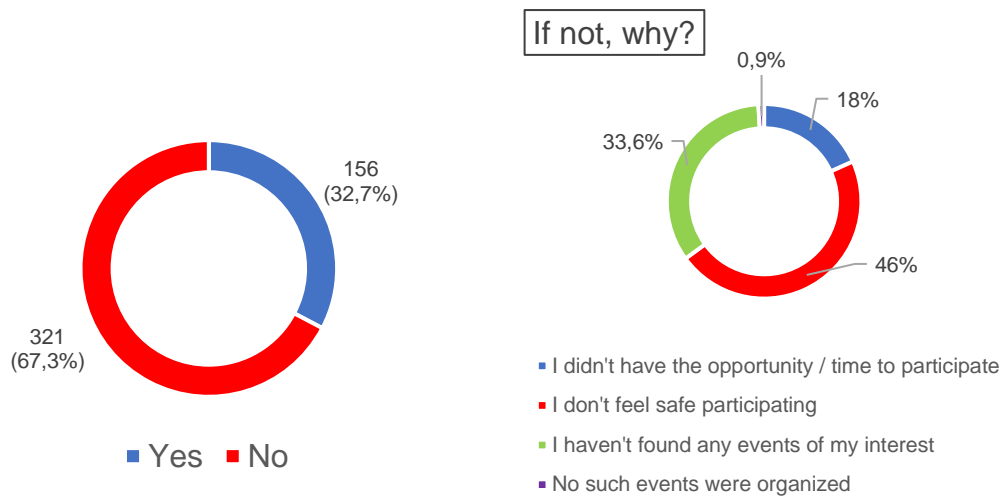


Figure 37. People participating to cultural events on site (left); reasons why some did not participate (right).

### 3.3.4. Digital behavior.

We know that, especially during the Lockdown period, there was a further boom in the usage of digital devices and platforms used for various reasons: work, study, stay in touch with loved ones but also take advantage of online entertainment. From the point of view of cultural events, 81% of the sample affirm they had never participated in online cultural events before the pandemic, while almost 19% did (also in this case concerts and exhibits are in the first places as major events attended) (Fig.38).

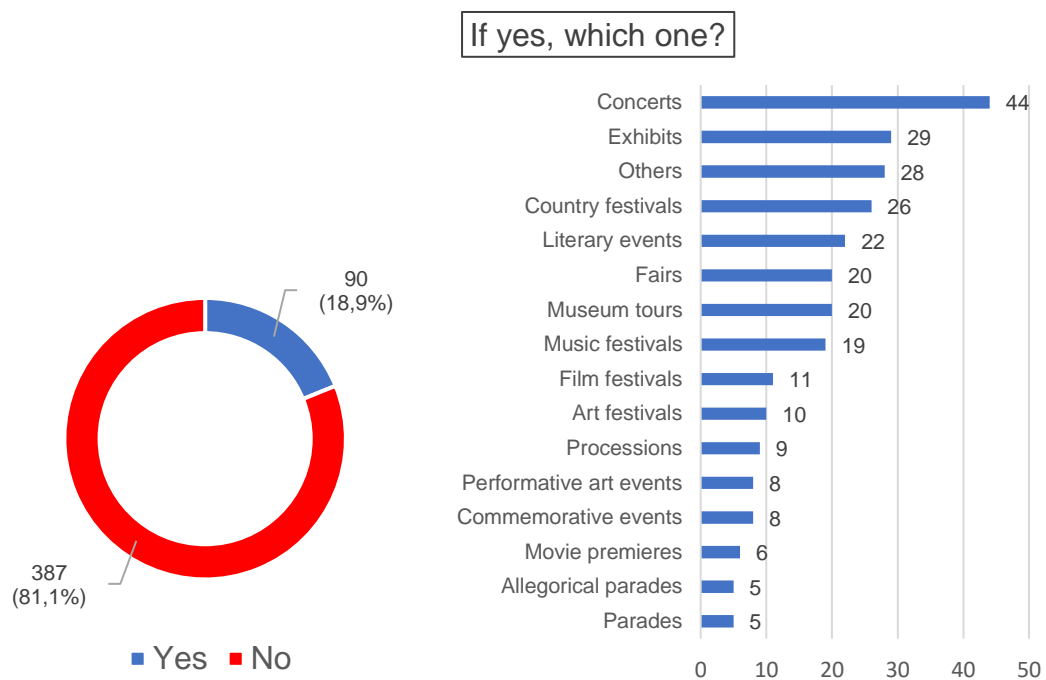


Figure 38. People participating in online cultural events before pandemic.

Results change when the same question is asked in relation to the Lockdown period where the consumers who approached online cultural events increased to 45,5% (Fig.39).

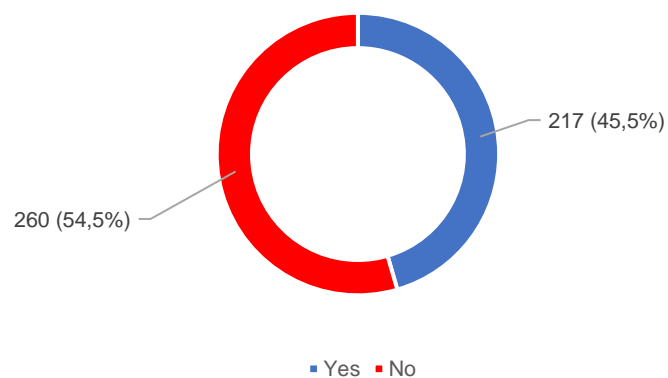


Figure 39. People participating in cultural events during Lockdown period.

Furthermore, the percentage of consumers who would participate in totally digital events during the current pandemic period rises to almost 56% (Fig.40): the main motivation indicated by 61,6% of the section is that this mode of consumption is a way to stay in touch with personal interests in this time of emergency and low mobility, while 26,7% says it is a great way to expand the entertainment from home. The remaining 44% says it would not participate in such events mainly because it does not like online fruition (Fig.41).

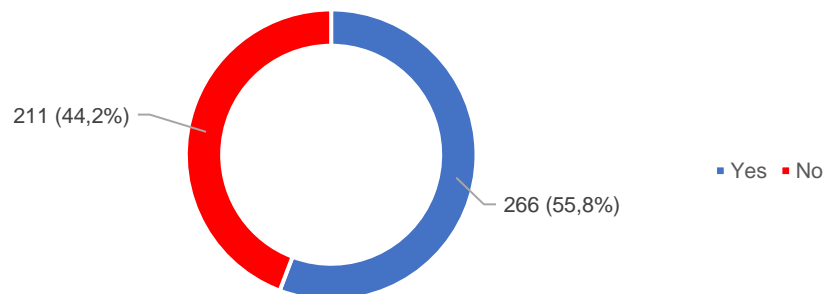


Figure 40. People willing to participate in online cultural events during current pandemic period.

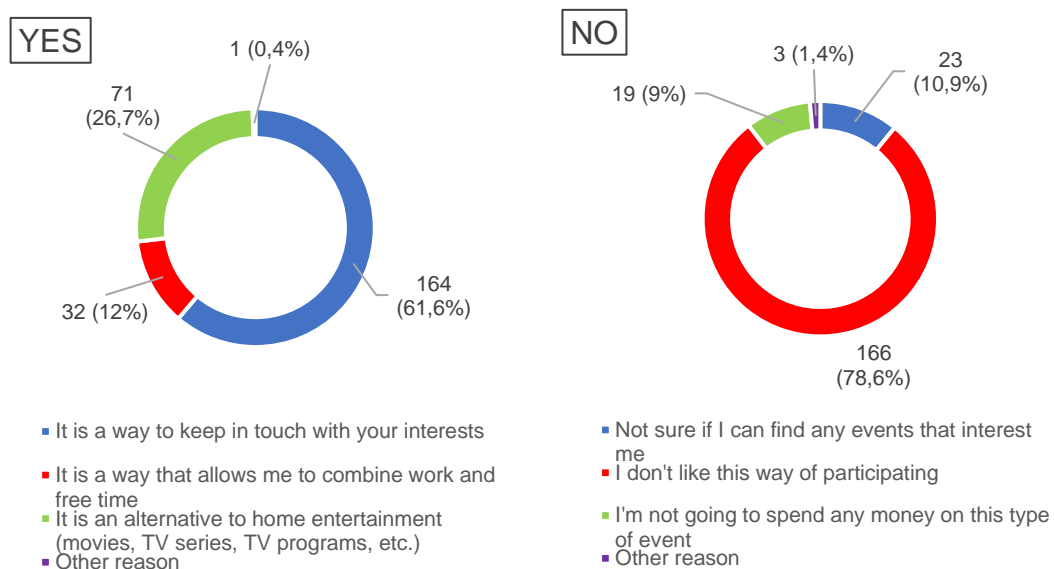


Figure 41.

Lastly, consumers were asked if they would be willing to participate in fully online cultural events after the current pandemic period is over (Fig.42).

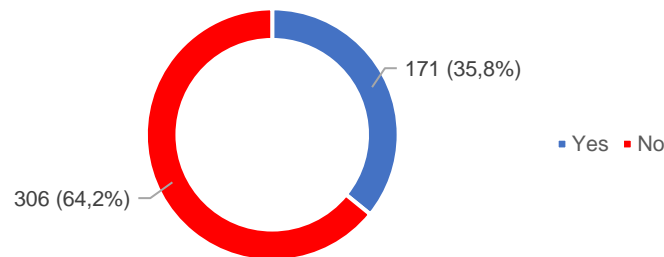


Figure 42. People willing to participate in online cultural events after the pandemic emergency.

In this case data show that only 35,8% would continue to participate as they believe that this modality is complementary to live experience; 1,1% also suggest that this mode could be a great way to attend events that take place far away from where they live. The remaining 64% affirm that they will return to participate exclusively live instead, as the online experience loses value and fails to remain as impressed as a live one (Fig.43).

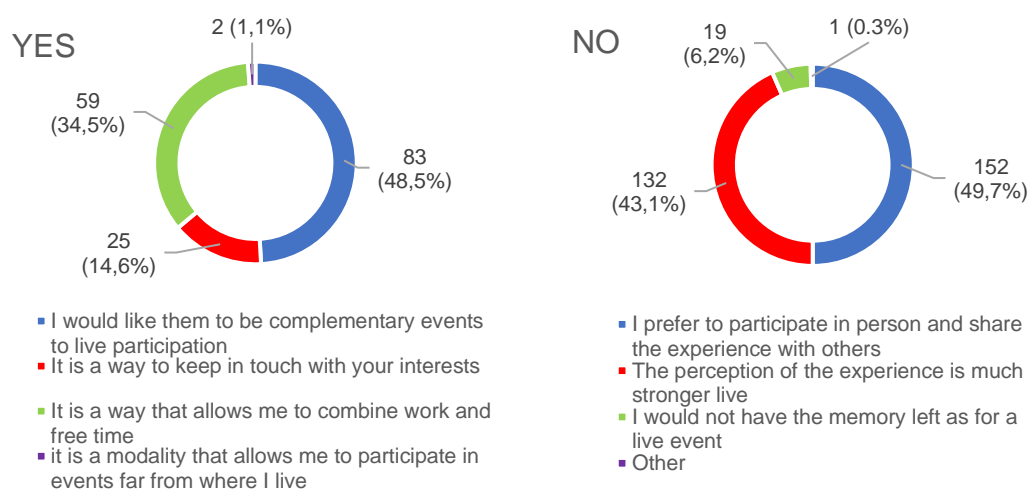


Figure 43.

From a generational perspective (Fig.44), the investigation points out that the consumers most likely to support this type of consumption are predictably the younger generations of Millennials and above all Generation Z, who will be the future attendees of cultural events and the reference point for new and more detailed studies.

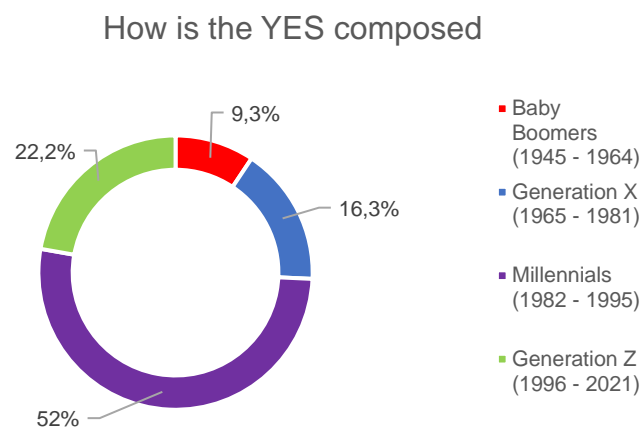


Figure 44.

From a fruition point of view (Fig. 45) we note that, if on one hand there is a general increase in participation in online cultural events that peaks in the period between the Lockdown and the current restricted pandemic moment, on the other hand there is a decline in affirmative answers in the question regarding fruition in the post-pandemic period which, however, remains higher than the affirmative answers of the pre Covid-19 period: this could mean that, although most people still do not feel ready to participate in experiences of this kind completely online, the pandemic has opened a new chapter for this field that must not be ignored.

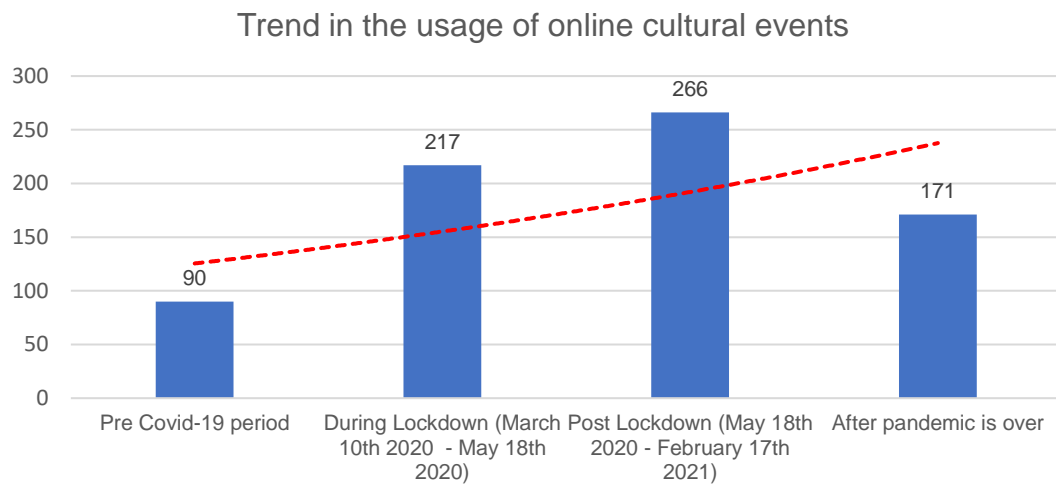


Figure 45.



## Final considerations

Throughout this study we have analyzed various aspects: what is an event and what is a cultural event; who is the consumer and what factors influence its choices, as well as what are the various types of consumer in the current historic moment; at last, we have seen examples of how external and internal factors to the consumer generate changes in its consumption of products and services in a moment of severe crisis such as that of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although cultural events are part of a broader concept of consumption related to the experience, social relations and physical participation of attendees, it is clear that significant changes have occurred in this field since the pandemic broke out. Processes such as *Herd Mentality* or *Panic Buying* have occurred

adjusting to the cultural events sector and to the generation of consumers taken into consideration.

In the final part of the investigation attention was brought towards a pivotal element of our lives: *digital* and *online* world. The pandemic has forced all of us to fall back on digital tools and environments in order to pursue daily activities such as working, studying, socializing. If on the one hand this scenario made clear how much human beings need to be in contact with their fellow men, on the other hand it highlighted even more the potentiality the digital world owns.

In the field of cultural events, we have seen that the Italian population is not completely ready yet to attend totally online experiences, but this is certainly a starting point for further reflections on how to include digital elements into this environment in the most natural way possible: this should not be considered as a forcing but as a natural continuum in the consumption of cultural events, as *digital* will increasingly become an integral part of every aspect of our lives. Above all, it must be taken into consideration that generations such as Generation Z and, even more, subsequent ones will be digital native consumers par excellence and therefore their lifestyle will be based exponentially more than ours on screens, virtual activities, artificial intelligence, virtual interaction with machines and so on. Consequently, the whole World and digital events will have to adapt to this new scenario and be able to give consumers the right experience according to their needs.

Finally, this analysis could be a starting point for future crises similar to the one we are going through now: in our case the world of cultural events found itself totally disoriented by the Covid-19 pandemic and without previous experiences to relate on in order to adjust quickly and continue its activities. In the future we will have to be able to activate plan B immediately and not undergo the damage another crisis will bring: *digital* will be for sure the solution.

## Acknowledgements

I do not usually give thanks when I reach personal goals because I always do 100% of the work and I am my own first supporter.

But not this time. This time I feel the need to thank some people.

I want to thank all those who put up with me during these two and a half years, especially in the last period in which, due to Covid-19, I have struggled a lot to find the motivation to conclude my studies.

I thank my mom who put up with me during my moments of stress, understanding my situation.

I thank my closest friends Alice, Erica, Marta, Ylenia, Ilaria and Martina for all the times they had to cope with my complaints.

Lastly, I thank any relative or friend or person who addressed me with words of support and motivation, I needed all of them.

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