

HOW DIGITALIZATION IS CHANGING THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES: ANALYZING THE ASSOCIATION OF ONLINE MARKETING

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Abstract: *The digital transformation of the cultural and creative industries has accelerated significantly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing institutions to adopt new modes of content production, distribution, and audience engagement. This study examines the digitalization process of the Mir Theater as an illustrative case of how cultural and creative industries can leverage online platforms to strengthen economic performance and audience reach. The analysis focuses on implementing digital distribution channels, including YouTube and the proprietary streaming platform MirPlay, as well as developing a comprehensive digital communication strategy across social media. Using descriptive analysis, scenario-based revenue modeling, and Pearson's correlation analysis, the research evaluates the relationship between online audience growth and annual revenue during 2017–2025. The results show a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between the number of followers on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube and the institution's economic performance. Findings indicate that digitalization not only ensured continuity of cultural production during the pandemic but also created new opportunities for long-term financial stability, diversification of revenue sources, and strategic audience development.*

Keywords: *cultural and creative industries; digital distribution; theatre digitalization*

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1 Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented disruption to the functioning of cultural and creative industries worldwide. The closure of theaters, cinemas, and other public spaces has forced creators and organizations to find new ways to communicate with their audiences and maintain the continuity of their activities. This situation has paradoxically catalyzed processes that would otherwise have proceeded much more slowly – the digital transformation of cultural and creative industries has ceased to be just a future but has become an immediate necessity.

The Mír Theater, an established Czech theater institution, represents an interesting case study of digital transformation in the cultural and creative industries. Like many other theaters worldwide, it faced existential challenges during the pandemic. However, its response was not just a crisis measure – it represented a strategic reorientation towards a new content distribution model. The theater has gradually introduced several digital channels, from a YouTube presence to its own streaming platform, MírPlay, to extensive social media activity. The theatre is located in Ostrava, Czech Republic, and focuses primarily on contemporary dramatic productions and improvisational theatre. In response to pandemic-related restrictions, the theatre launched its proprietary streaming platform MírPlay in 2020.

The interest of this study lies in examining how this digital transformation has translated into the theater's economic performance. Specifically, we are interested in the relationship between the institution's growth in followers on social networks and its revenue dynamics. The working assumption of this study is that the development of digital marketing activities and online presence is associated with changes in the economic performance of traditional cultural and creative industries.

The aim of this study is to analyze specific digital initiatives of the Mír Theater, document their technical parameters and financial potential, and, based on available data, examine the relationship between digital performance and economic performance. The research is based on real data from 2017 to 2025, which allows us to assess long-term trends and events in the context of the pandemic and the post-pandemic period.

The relevance of this study extends beyond a single institution. The results

can provide insights into how cultural and creative industries can adapt to the digital environment and what effective strategies are for converting online presence into economic value. At a time when digital transformation has become a permanent reality of the cultural and creative industries, it is relevant and important to understand how and whether such strategies work in practice.

2 Literature review

Digital transformation is currently a ubiquitous phenomenon that affects virtually all sectors of the economy, including culture and the arts. Pererva & Mazorenko (2025) trace digital transformation as a process of fundamental change in how organizations operate, communicate, and deliver value to their stakeholders. In the case of cultural and creative industries, this means not only adopting new technologies but also a deeper change in how content is produced, distributed, and consumed.

The theater industry has undergone gradual technological changes over the past few decades. The pre-digital era was characterized by physical presence in the theater as an irreplaceable aspect of the theater experience. The traditional theater model relied on live performances at a specific time and place, which naturally limited audience size and geographic availability. However, even before the pandemic, there were initial signs of theater digitization – Lerro et al. (2022) trace online broadcasts of opera performances or experimental web projects of theater institutions.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented an unprecedented catalyst for this transformation in 2020. Due to the closure of cultural and creative industries and the ban on mass events, digital content moved from the periphery of the strategy to its center. Many theaters quickly mobilized to publish online content – from simple recordings of performances to specialized productions designed specifically for the digital environment. Digitalization brought unexpected insights: many audiences who previously could not visit the theater physically gained access to content online (Lazzaretti et al., 2025).

Patrickson (2021) points out that digital distribution of cultural content is not just a crisis measure but can also represent a long-term model with its own economic and community benefits. Ryu et al. (2024), in their study on the digital transformation of cultural and creative industries, indicate that

successful adopters of digital channels have experienced a significant increase in the accessibility and diversification of their audiences, although this sometimes did not compensate for the physical numbers of visitors.

2.1 Digital Content Economy and Streaming Platforms

The emergence of streaming platforms such as Netflix, Disney+, and others has changed the landscape of consumer content. These models are based on a subscription economy, in which customers pay a recurring subscription fee to access a library of content. The success of such platforms is documented in several studies – Evci et al. (2025) state in their analysis of the streaming industry that subscription models generate predictable, stable revenue and allow organizations to invest in content quality.

Creative institutions, including theaters, have been inspired by this model. They create their own streaming platforms or partner with existing platforms. The benefit of having its own platform is that the institution retains most of the revenue and has more direct contact with its audience. However, the disadvantage is the dependence on its own technical infrastructure and marketing (Dorčák & Pollák, 2011; Birke & Hartl, 2025).

Boh & Adoka (2023), in their study on digital business models in culture, note that the success of such initial initiatives depends on three factors: the quality of the content, the platform's user interface, and effective marketing. Theatres that master these aspects can generate relevant income from digital content, but for most traditional cultural and creative industries, it is an additional source of income alongside physical performances.

2.2 Social Media and Digital Marketing in Culture

Social media has become a key marketing tool for cultural and creative industries. Cultural and creative industries increasingly use social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, as well as other digital platforms, to communicate with audiences and build online communities. In his work on social media and marketing, Tonkoshkura (2022) argues that authentic communication and consistent content build a loyal audience.

Studies focused specifically on the cultural and creative industries show that

social media is the most effective channel for theatres and similar institutions to reach younger audiences and build communities of followers. Brilli et al. (2023) examined the relationship between social media activity and ticket revenues and found a strong positive correlation, particularly among institutions that regularly publish high-quality, relevant content.

Given the specific nature of social media in the theatre sector, it is important to distinguish between different platforms. Facebook has traditionally been the most important channel for older audiences and for direct communication with fans. Instagram focuses on visual content and attracts a younger audience. YouTube, as a video platform, is ideal for distributing longer-form content and live broadcasts. Effective theaters combine all these channels with customized content for each platform (Pollák et al., 2023; Haden, 2023).

Quantitative measurement of digital marketing effectiveness is key to understanding its relation to economic outcomes. Metrics such as follower count, number of interactions, reach, and engagement are traditionally used. However, the relationship between these online metrics and economic indicators, such as revenues or profit, is not always straightforward. Correlation analysis has been used in many studies to examine the relationship between digital marketing and economic outcomes. For example, Simpson (2021), in his work on e-marketing, points out that positive correlations between online activity and revenue are often observed in the e-commerce sector, but in more traditional sectors, such as culture, the results are mixed and depend on the communication method and the quality of the content. For the cultural and creative industries, it is important to understand that the relationship between online presence and economic performance can be more complex. Digital marketing can directly drive ticket or subscription revenue, but it can also contribute to brand building and long-term audience loyalty, which becomes evident over time.

2.3 Relationship between Digital Presence and Financial Performance of Cultural and Creative Industries

There is a growing body of research that seeks to quantify the relationship between digital presence and the financial performance of cultural and creative industries. Bernardi & Busani (2021), in a study focusing on Italian theaters, found that theaters with a more active online presence achieve higher

revenues and more visitors to physical performances. The author argues that the online presence serves as a complementary marketing channel, increasing brand awareness and the institution's attractiveness.

Similarly, MacArthur et al. (2021) in a study of Canadian theaters found a positive correlation between investments in digital marketing and attendance at physical performances, but with a relevant time lag – improvements were seen with a delay of several months.

However, the literature also points to the limits of digital marketing in traditional cultural and creative industries. Boh & Adoka (2023) note in their analysis that a strong community of followers does not necessarily translate into high physical attendance. The quality of content, the relevance of communication, and the authenticity of the relationship with the audience are critical factors that determine whether online engagement converts into economic performance.

3 Methodology

The research method combined descriptive analysis, digital platform revenue modeling, and correlation analysis to identify the relationship between digitalization indicators and the theater's economic performance. The aim was to verify the extent to which the digital transformation – represented by the growth of the online audience and the development of digital distribution channels – is associated with revenue growth.

Secondary data on the development of the number of followers on the social networks Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube in 2017-2025 were included in the analysis. Economic performance was represented by annual revenues for the same period. The data come from publicly available financial statements and statistics of digital platforms.

Before statistical processing, all time series were transformed into a uniform format and visually examined to identify possible anomalies or outliers that could affect the test results.

Before applying the correlation analysis, it was necessary to assess whether the variables under analysis showed approximately normal distributions. Normality was assessed using graphical methods (Q-Q diagrams) and

supporting statistical indicators. Given the small sample size and the time-series nature of the data, this assessment should be interpreted as exploratory and indicative rather than as a formal test of distributional properties.

The Pearson correlation coefficient r expresses the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables. It takes values in the interval from -1 to 1, with a value close to 1 indicating a strong direct relationship, a value close to -1 indicating a strong indirect relationship, and a value around 0 indicating the absence of linear dependence.

- $|r| < 0.1$ – no observable correlation
- $0.1 \leq |r| < 0.3$ – weak correlation
- $0.3 \leq |r| < 0.5$ – medium strong correlation
- $|r| \geq 0.5$ – strong correlation

Given the nature of the relationships under study, correlation coefficients were calculated between revenues and the number of followers on individual social networks.

To assess whether the observed correlation was not due to chance, an inferential analysis was also performed. Statistical significance was tested using the t-statistic, which is calculated according to the formula:

$$t = \frac{r\sqrt{(n-2)}}{\sqrt{(1-r^2)}} \quad (1)$$

where n represents the number of observations in the time series.

The resulting t-value was compared with the critical value at the significance level $\alpha = 0.05$. At the same time, a p-value was determined for each calculation. The indicative revenue scenarios for the MirPlay platform were constructed using transparent, simplified assumptions. The model assumes a fixed monthly subscription fee of 90 CZK and a stable number of subscribers over a twelve-month period. Seasonal fluctuations, promotional campaigns, and subscriber churn are not explicitly modelled.

The number of subscribers in each scenario reflects different levels of platform adoption. The pessimistic scenario represents a conservative estimate corresponding to limited uptake. The realistic scenario assumes moderate

adoption, while the optimistic scenario reflects high adoption approaching the publicly communicated maximum subscriber capacity. The scenarios, therefore, serve as illustrative benchmarks rather than precise revenue forecasts.

- If $p > 0.05$, there is no reason to reject the null hypothesis, according to which there is no linear relationship between the analyzed variables.
- If $p \leq 0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis of the existence of a statistically significant linear association is accepted.

An additional part of the methodological procedure was the indicative modeling of the MirPlay platform's potential revenues. The model was based on the publicly stated maximum number of subscribers and the expected monthly subscription amount. Three scenarios were created – pessimistic, realistic, and optimistic – which made it possible to illustrate the scope of the possible economic benefit of the digital platform. Although these are rough estimates, the scenario approach provides a relevant framework for identifying the potential of digital distribution.

4 Results and Discussion

From a descriptive perspective, revenue development over the analysed period 2017–2025 shows a relatively stable trajectory, with a gradual upward trend. Importantly, the revenue time series does not indicate a pronounced decline during the COVID-19 period, despite severe restrictions on live performances.

The pre-pandemic functioning of the theatre was characterized using the traditional model of presenting artistic creation through live performances in a stone building, which naturally limited the scope of audience reach and geographical possibilities for content dissemination. The COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 disrupted the theatre's traditional operational model and posed a major economic challenge due to restrictions on live performances. The closure of cultural and creative industries required immediate adaptation, with the digitalization of content distribution becoming a decisive strategy. The transformation was aimed at maintaining the continuity of creation, maintaining contact with the audience, and ensuring economic stability. The first step in the digital transformation was the creation of its own YouTube channel, which became the primary platform for content distribution during

the pandemic. Various formats were published – improvisation recordings, sketch content, podcast formats, and short videos. The performance indicators indicated high acceptance of digital content, with total views exceeding 1.2 million. A notable feature was the parallel operation of a separate channel, "Tři Tygři", which accumulated more than 7 million views and 15,000 subscribers. Live streams of improvisations averaged approximately 2,000 viewers, while archive recordings generated tens of thousands of additional views. These results indicate that digital distribution significantly expanded the audience and created a stable base of supporters already in the first phase of the transformation. The initial success of YouTube distribution initiated the strategy of creating its own streaming platform, MírPlay, launched in 2020. The platform provides a comprehensive system for online distribution of theater, film, and additional audiovisual content. It is available via a web interface and mobile applications (Android, iOS), and is optimized for various types of devices. The content offering includes professionally recorded theatre performances, hybrid theatre-film productions, episodic series formats, sketch comedies, and behind-the-scenes audiovisual content. Streaming is provided in high technical quality; the platform uses standardized security protocols and reliable payment gateways.

MírPlay represents a strategic step towards distribution autonomy and elimination of dependence on external intermediaries, which creates a prerequisite for long-term financial sustainability. Although the theatre has not published detailed internal financial data, publicly available subscriber information allows for indicative revenue modeling. Assuming a monthly subscription of 90 CZK and a maximum number of subscribers exceeding 10,000, three scenarios were developed:

Table 1: Three Scenarios

Scenario	Number of subscribers	Monthly income (Kč)	Annual income (Kč)
Pessimistic	3 000	270 000	3 240 000
Realistic	5 000	450 000	5 400 000
Optimistic	10 000	900 000	10 800 000

Source: Authors.

The calculations represent a theoretical estimate based on a stable subscriber base, with no seasonal fluctuations, promotions, or temporary drops. Despite its

limitations, the platform has significant revenue potential and could contribute to the theater's long-term financial stability.

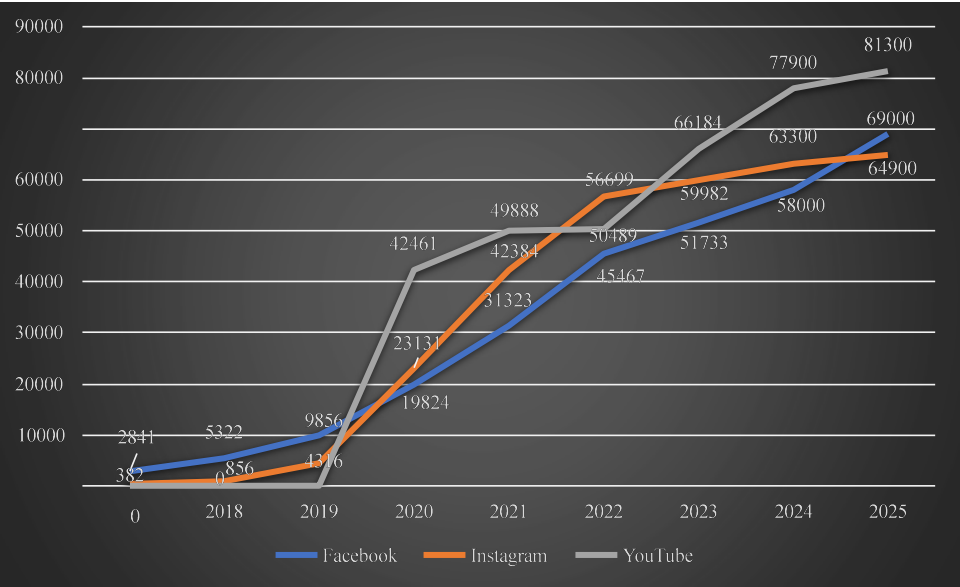
Digitalization of marketing and communication

The digitalization of marketing occurred in parallel with that of distribution. Traditional forms of communication based on personal contact, printed materials, and offline PR were supplemented and partially replaced by intensive online communication. The result was the emergence of a mixed model that combines personal interactions during performances with continuous digital presentation of the work.

In 2022, the MírCast podcast was introduced and published on multiple audio platforms. Its production uses the theater's existing technical and spatial capacities, minimizing variable costs. The podcast supports brand building, strengthens relationships with the audience, and functions as a complementary marketing channel that increases the visibility of other digital products.

Social networks (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) have become an essential tool for communicating with the audience, especially during the period of pandemic restrictions. Publishing behind-the-scenes materials, promotional visuals, teasers, or links to streaming content has led to steady growth in followers.

Figure 1: Evolution of the Number of Followers on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (2017 – 2025)



Source: own processing.

The development of social media audiences from 2017-2025 shows stable, progressive growth across all platforms, reflecting a consistent digital strategy and increasing audience engagement.

Pearson’s correlation coefficient was applied to verify the relationship between online audience growth and revenue. The analysis included time series of Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube followers and annual theater revenue for the period 2017-2025.

Table 2: Pearson’s Correlation

Platform	Pearson’s coefficient (r)	p-value
Facebook	0,9596	0,0006
Instagram	0,9186	0,0035
YouTube	0,9427	0,0015

Source: own processing.

The results indicate a very strong positive linear relationship between online audience growth and revenue growth. All p-values are below the 0.05 threshold, indicating statistical significance of the findings.

The theatre's digital transformation followed a gradual timeline. Initial social media activity and the establishment of a YouTube channel preceded the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, in response to pandemic-related restrictions, the theatre launched its proprietary streaming platform, MírPlay, and intensified its digital content production. In subsequent years, digital activities were consolidated and expanded alongside stable revenue development.

The correlation analysis indicates strong positive associations between online audience growth and revenue development. All calculated p-values were below the 0.05 threshold, suggesting statistically significant relationships between the analyzed variables. However, these results should not be interpreted as evidence of a causal relationship. Rather, they indicate that digital presence and economic performance evolved in parallel during the analyzed period.

A particularly important finding of the analysis is the absence of a substantial decline in revenues during the COVID-19 period. In a context where many cultural and creative industries experienced severe economic disruptions, the theatre's ability to maintain revenue levels is a relevant empirical observation.

The research results indicate that the digitalization of distribution and communication represented a decisive adaptation step for the theater during the pandemic. YouTube enabled rapid response to crisis situations and laid the foundation for building a digital audience, while the MírPlay platform provided a long-term, autonomous, and economically relevant content distribution model. The parallel digitalization of marketing strengthened relations with the audience, reflected in revenue growth. Overall, it can be stated that digitalization contributed not only to overcoming the crisis period, but also to creating new opportunities for development, diversification, and stabilization of income.

The analysed period includes significant external shocks, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent inflationary pressures. These factors complicate the interpretation of correlation results, as they may simultaneously affect both digital activity and revenue development.

5 Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the digital transformation of cultural and creative industries represents not only an emergency response to external constraints but also a viable long-term development strategy. The case of the Mír Theater shows that a well-designed combination of digital distribution, platform-based content delivery, and data-driven online marketing can lead to measurable improvements in economic performance. The analysis confirms a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the growth of the online audience on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube and the institution's annual revenues. These results suggest that digital channels have become an integral part of value creation in the cultural and creative industries, with the potential to expand reach, diversify income streams, and enhance financial resilience.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature on digital transformation in the creative industries by providing empirical evidence of how online visibility can be converted into economic value. The findings support existing concepts of digital content economies and highlight the importance of integrating distribution autonomy and audience-building strategies. In practical terms, the analysis shows that investment in digital presence—whether through streaming platforms, social media engagement, or multimedia communication—can generate returns that extend beyond immediate audience engagement by strengthening brand loyalty and long-term audience relationships.

However, the study is subject to several limitations. The results of the correlation analysis are based on a relatively small sample size ($n = 7$) and should therefore be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive. Research relies on secondary data, and the absence of detailed internal financial records restricts the depth of economic analysis. The revenue model of the MírPlay platform is based on indicative scenarios rather than verified financial statements, which limits the precision of financial estimates. The time series covers a relatively short period and includes years significantly affected by the pandemic, which may have amplified the role of digital channels in atypical ways. Analysis primarily focuses on follower counts as a proxy for digital engagement, though engagement metrics such as interactions, watch time, or conversion data may offer a more nuanced view of digital performance.

Finally, the study does not incorporate control variables such as marketing expenditure, number of live performances, or content production costs, which may also be linked to revenue trends.

Future research could expand on these findings in several ways. First, incorporating richer digital metrics—such as engagement rates, sentiment analysis, and behavioral analytics—would enable a more precise assessment of how audiences interact with cultural content online. Second, comparative studies across multiple theaters or cultural and creative industries would enable generalization of results and identification of differing digitalization trajectories within the creative industries. Third, further research could examine the long-term sustainability of digital subscription models in the cultural and creative industries and investigate factors affecting subscriber retention, such as platform usability, content quality, and pricing strategies. Finally, mixed-methods research combining quantitative data with interviews or ethnographic insights could deepen the understanding of organizational decision-making, audience motivations, and the internal processes that shape successful digital transformation.

Overall, this study confirms that digitalization has become a structural component of the creative industries. Institutions that strategically invest in digital channels and systematically build online communities are better positioned to navigate uncertainty, strengthen their market position, and develop new pathways for sustainable growth.

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