

Resilient cultural communication in the age of AI: how specialists navigate audience engagement and technological transformation

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Abstract

In a time when digital communication dominates marketing efforts and personal interactions, we need to ask: what role does artificial intelligence (AI) play in building resilience through communication strategies? Undoubtedly, AI offers efficiency. But what about authenticity and creativity – “trademarks” of cultural manifestation? This study explores how AI could improve communication strategies for cultural events by examining the perspectives of cultural communicators and managers, focusing on their audience engagement strategies, challenges, and views on AI’s usefulness, limits, and ethical implications. My qualitative analysis of nine interviews with specialists in cultural events communication and organization revealed cautious adoption of AI, mainly used for research and task automation. Experts emphasized that AI cannot replicate human emotional storytelling, vital for audience engagement. Their ethical concerns regard content credibility and impact on artistic integrity. Still, participants expressed openness to using AI for tedious tasks, allowing focus on creation, strategy, and personal engagement.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, cultural marketing, communication strategies, emotional engagement, AI ethics

Introduction

The cultural realm is known to struggle with obtaining and managing resources, as well as the attention of the public. On the list of people's priorities, especially in the modern era, cultural activities do not occupy the top ranks. Since the growth of online access to various types of entertainment, it has become increasingly difficult for cultural managers and communicators to attract the public, who, in addition, would remain loyal. Classical cultural events (art exhibition, theater play, opera show, book launch, etc.) have a strong competition in other forms of leisure - most requiring significantly less effort - for the time, attention, and budget of modern people. This is why communication for cultural events or products plays a vital role. The mission of cultural communicators and managers seems more challenging than ever in a race to reach their target audiences and convince them to attend an event.

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Culture is a domain that has its particularities; it addresses both the intellect and the emotional spectrum of an individual. Quantitative research is very efficient in presenting the factual coordinates, but the subtleties in how culture is perceived, communicated, and consumed can elude the most rigorous statistics.

Researchers' interest in AI applications appears to be increasing, but their focus is mainly oriented towards commercial areas, such as e-commerce, service chatbots, or AI-driven consumer goods, leaving a gap in understanding its role and potential in the cultural and artistic realm. Specifically, little is known about how AI can support communication efforts in cultural events while respecting their emotional and creative dimensions. My study addresses this gap by exploring the perspectives of cultural communicators and managers, identifying the strategies they use, the challenges they encounter, and their views on the usefulness, limitations, and ethical implications of AI.

For a more in-depth understanding, I conducted qualitative research to explore communication strategies for cultural events, with a particular focus on the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI). As research literature reveals, AI has been embraced in marketing from data analysis, task automation, to marketing content generation. Consequently, cultural communication is a domain that might also benefit from the advancement of this technology. While AI's uses in marketing are widely studied, its integration into cultural communication remains underexplored, particularly in understanding how it aligns with the unique characteristics of cultural events. One significant limitation lies in AI's capacity to evoke and stir emotions, which is a cornerstone of cultural events. Unlike other domains where efficiency and precision are paramount, cultural communication must resonate on a deeply emotional and human level, engaging audiences in ways that inspire creativity, reflection, and connection. AI tools, despite their sophistication, often lack the nuanced understanding of human emotions needed to craft messages that fully capture the essence of cultural experiences. Emotional AI, for instance, relies heavily on algorithms trained on datasets that may not adequately reflect the diversity or complexity of human emotional expression, particularly in a cultural context. Furthermore, the perception of AI in cultural communication introduces an additional layer of complexity. Culture is widely seen as a mirror of human creativity and authenticity, elements that are inherently tied to the human experience. The use of AI in this domain may raise concerns about the dilution of these values. This perception could create resistance among both cultural consumers and professionals, particularly when authenticity is a critical component of brand identity.

In order to understand how AI technology could adapt and work for the specificities of culture (and the professionals working in this domain), I conducted interviews with specialists involved in organizing and communicating cultural events of various types and extents. The research gap that I

identified guided me to address, in my study, the following objectives: to examine how cultural communicators reach and engage audiences, to explore the challenges they face and how these audiences look like, what motivates them, and, ultimately, to analyze the experts' perceptions of AI's potential, limitations, and ethical implications in cultural communication. This paper presents the main findings in relation to the opportunities and challenges of integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into cultural communication strategies, as revealed through the perspectives of these specialists. It begins with a review of relevant literature, followed by a description of the qualitative methodology used, an analysis of the findings, and a discussion of their implications for cultural communication strategies.

1. Literature review

Researchers continually examine audiences' reactions to marketing efforts, digitization, and the integration of Artificial Intelligence. The cultural sector, though less frequently studied than consumer goods and various types of services, still stirs the interest of scholars, who seek to understand the role of cultural manifestations in society and how professionals can more effectively reach broader audiences. This literature review examines previous studies on cultural consumption, in Romania and internationally, in relation to other services competing for people's attention and leisure time.

1.1. Overall context of cultural consumption

To understand cultural consumption, it is indispensable to grasp an understanding of the wider context: cultural products are mainly consumed for entertainment purposes and compete with various other entertainment sources. The Internet is the most accessible environment for leisure and passing the spare time. Out of more than 8 billion people on Earth, 5,52 billion use the internet (Kemp, 2024). The same report shows that there are also over 5 billion social media identities. Over 97% of internet users own a mobile or smartphone. Looking closer to home, in Eastern Europe, the same report shows that there are still 30 million people who do not use the Internet. Going back to cultural consumption, over half of the internet users seem to watch videos, movies, and TV shows online, and 47% access and listen to music on the Internet. In Latvia, for example, movie watching is the most used digital cultural content by youths between 18 and 25 years old, followed by seminars and courses about culture, watching conferences on culture topics, virtual tours in world museums, and, on the last rank, studying

books (Budanceva and Svirina, 2023). The authors of the study on Latvian young cultural consumers found that half of the respondents spent 25% of their online time consuming cultural content.

Zooming in on the Romanian cultural landscape, the latest Cultural Consumption Barometer (Croitoru *et al.*, 2024) shows a relatively modest interest of the adult population in cultural events in 2023, as I will explain further. It is worth mentioning that the above mentioned report focuses on the consumption of public events, in the offline environment. As the research shows, in 2023, 25% of the population attended at least one theater play or classical music concert. Among the young population aged between 18 and 35, only 18% attended a literature festival and 20% a film or theater festival. The interest in music and gastronomic festivals, however, seems higher, with an attendance of half of the young respondents. Museums, exhibitions, and art galleries attracted, in 2023, 45% of the respondents, compared to 30% in 2022. The researchers concluded that a quarter of the consumers in Romanian cultural communities show interest in culture in public spaces. At the same time, half of the participants in the study do not consume cultural or artistic products.

Regarding the limits of cultural consumption in Romania, the Institute for Cultural Research and Formation (Institutul pentru Cercetare și Formare Culturală) conducted ample research between 2020 and 2022 on the cultural and creative sectors, both public and private, in Romania. The study found that the main barrier in the development of cultural consumption is the capacity of understanding and connecting cultural symbols and metaphors to cultural identity values (Arsene *et al.*, 2020). The study stood as a foundation for the “Strategic Vision on Culture in Romania 2023-2030 (SSDC 2023-2030)”, in which the authors underline the necessity to focus on local communities and on building the cultural offer in alignment with the interests and expectations of the local audience. Moreover, the strategy emphasizes the need for cultural education among all consumer categories, with a highlight on children and youngsters. The authors also consider that contextualizing the role of culture in the development of the society and economy is an important element that could lead to larger adoption of cultural products.

In this aspect, the European Capitals of Culture (ECOC) program is a good example of a strategic effort to bridge cultural and economic development, pointing out the role of culture in developing communities through cultural tourism. The program brings benefits on multiple levels: economy, city image, urban regeneration, cultural production, and consumption (Liu, 2014). However, after studying the cases of European Capitals of Culture over 20 years from the perspectives of experience economy, image shaping, urban regeneration, cultural impacts, and partnerships establishment, the author concludes that it is difficult to establish patterns in the long-term cultural development of those communities. What he found as a common element is the need for a strategy to

continue to engage the public (local and international) with the cultural life of the respective city, after the end of the European Capital mandate. Such one-time efforts, as complex as they are, do not suffice to produce a regular increase in cultural consumption, unless maintained by strategic, consistent, and constant actions.

1.2. Challenges in attracting new public categories

Culture is not a general consumption product. It requires some level of education, general culture, the capacity to conceptualize, an aesthetic education, an open mind, curiosity, and inner reflection. As the Barometer of Cultural Consumption in 2022 Romania showed, the level of education is a serious challenge in increasing the interest for cultural events and products. Considering the consumption behavior of the younger generations defined by the use of digital devices and more than 6 hours/ day spent online by people aged over 16 (Kemp, 2024), convincing new public categories to take part in offline cultural events is a challenge in itself. While in the 1970s the cultural marketing was unidirectional, promotional-tailored, just offering factual information (Kolb, 2013), the new digital era requires a new, digital approach for cultural communication. Meeting people where they consume information means, for cultural organizations, being present online, especially on social media. But mere presence is not enough. The new audiences expect personalized communication. They expect to be able to engage. They expect experiences, due to the emergence of an “experience economy” (Pine and Gilmore, 1998), according to (Liu, 2014).

Social changes lead by the general access to social media is also a challenge. The public doesn't regard art as devised between “high art”, with intrinsic value, and “popular culture”. Social media brought a uniformization of social categories, including in how culture is viewed and consumed (Kolb, 2013); the attribute of “artist” is no longer reserved for the “chosen ones”.

Earlier, I showed how the study conducted by the Romanian Institute for Cultural Research and Formation found that the lack of education was a serious barrier in cultural consumption. Viewing that a small part of the population engages in public cultural events in Romania (Croitoru *et al.*, 2023) I could draw the conclusion that the level of education of the current society is problematic and represents a serious challenge for attracting new audiences for cultural products and events. One may even say that the current quality of cultural products (movies, music, TV shows, theatre plays, paintings, or sculptures, fashion, etc.) reflects the rather precarious level of education in the society. However, Steven Johnson would disagree. He thinks that, despite the general perception that the popular cultural outputs are losing in depth and complexity, with a “dumbing effect”, the pop culture

is, actually, more demanding from an intellectual point of view (Johnson, 2006). He states that there are environments that encourage cognitive complexity and others that do not. Cultural products are seen as outputs, not metaphors for the system that produced them.

Brand image and reputation are also challenges to consider. A big, well-known festival or a popular artist's concert will have less trouble in attracting new audiences than a small, local event like poetry recitals, independent theater plays, less-known artists' concerts, or exhibitions.

1.3. Digital and social media in cultural marketing

As emphasized by Bonita Kolb (2013), cultural organizations need to move from unidirectional communication to audience engagement. Any cultural organization and event organizer who wants to be present in the conscience of its audience needs an online presence, including or especially on social media platforms. This is where the audience engages and the young audience spends most of their time. Organizations need to allow their audiences to experience the cultural act, to be “part of the creative process”.

In 2010, Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein researched the social media usage at the time, grouping the applications by characteristic in “collaborative projects, blogs, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds” (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Following their analysis of the specificities of social media applications, they elaborated on several guidelines for enterprises that want to be present on social media and engage with their audiences. These guidelines underline the expectations of social media users, which can also narrow to the audiences of cultural products or events. The first point stresses the need for interaction and constant activity. The second point is about “being interesting”, which translates into avoiding general statements. Instead, cultural organizations should listen to their audiences and adapt the content to the topics of interest of the public at that point in time. Another point the researchers suggest is humility – not showing you know better than your audience. In the cultural consumption case, communicators of cultural products and events need to be careful not to sound condescending. As it was pointed out by Steven Johnson (2006) and reiterated by Bonita Kolb (2013), the hierarchy between “high art” and “pop culture” is slowly fading and audiences see themselves as creators, too. Honesty and authenticity are two other points that count in the social media presence of a brand, which can also very well apply to cultural communication. Imperfection and the reflection of reality are two traits that present audiences appreciate. The brand becomes more relatable. In the end, to

attract new audiences, cultural entities need to be more relatable and accessible. At the same time, they need to keep the high standards of quality culture, avoiding falling into a kitsch-trap.

1.4. AI integration in cultural communication

Aligning the cultural phenomenon to the 21st century cannot happen without taking Artificial Intelligence (AI) into account, including the communication of cultural events and products. AI has already transformed marketing in general. A survey by Salesforce showed, in 2019, that AI would be the most adopted technology by marketers in the future (Columbus, 2019). According to Davenport *et al.* (2020), marketers use AI tools for more precise audience targeting or to automate time-consuming, repetitive tasks. They rely on AI to analyze customer data, their preferences, and behavior, to provide insights used in customized marketing campaigns and communication (Petrescu and Krishen, 2023). From a customer experience point of view, the AI technology has been used to improve its cognitive and behavioral dimensions (Puntoni *et al.*, 2021).

Lately, generative AI tools have emerged and been perfected, transforming the work of marketers, communicators, and content creators alike. But like any new technology, there is a curve in adopting AI tools, especially when it comes to generating content (Moore, 2014). The acceptance of AI tools by marketers and cultural communicators may also be explained through the lenses of the extended Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000), which included the “subjective norm” - the influence of what the closest people think about using the respective technology. Also, people tend to reject task automation when the output's consumption is closely tied to their identity (Brüns and Meißner, 2024; Leung *et al.*, 2018). The researchers found that those individuals who strongly identified with a social role proved to be more reluctant toward automation technology in that domain, as it diminished their ability to derive identity-related benefits.

On the other side, there are the content consumers, whose relation to AI is also subject to research. When talking about AI used in social media communication, it appears that emotional display of content can trigger more engagement (Yu *et al.*, 2024), as posts on social media mostly communicate emotional experiences (Steinert and Dennis, 2022). Also, consumers seem more inclined to view AI-generated ads favorably when these ads focus on empowerment and individual agency (Chen *et al.*, 2024).

2. Methodology

Research questions and objectives

The purpose of this research is to explore how AI can improve communication strategies for cultural events by understanding the perspectives of cultural communicators and managers. I aim to understand how these specialists reach, attract, and engage diverse audience segments: the strategies and methods they use, and their challenges. I also want to better understand, through their lenses, who their audience is and what drives people to attend a cultural event. Furthermore, I want to analyze how they see the role of AI in enhancing communication strategies for cultural events. How useful do they find AI tools? If they use AI, how do they employ it? What are the limits? How do they see the ethical implications? In addition, I am interested in examining their view on the use of emotion to engage audiences in cultural communication and to drive audience participation.

Research design

For this study, I employed a qualitative research design based on interviews. This method allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the subject from the perspective of practitioners actively engaged in cultural event organizing and communication. The method suits the exploration of complex phenomena, such as the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into communication strategies for cultural events, where insights are shaped by individual experiences, perceptions, and contextual factors.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine Romanian specialists in cultural communication and event organization. I used pre-defined themes and questions aligned to the research objectives, thus ensuring that all relevant topics were covered systematically while allowing the interviewees the freedom to elaborate on their experiences and provide nuanced insights. This format facilitated a deeper exploration of how practitioners perceive the challenges and opportunities associated with cultural communication, attracting new public categories and the use of AI.

The participants were selected based on their professional involvement in cultural event organization and communication, ensuring they could provide relevant and informed perspectives. Their expertise spans diverse event types and scales, from large international festivals to smaller local events, offering a rich and varied data set for analysis. Their experience averages 10 years in the field

and covers a multitude of cultural manifestations: literature, classical and contemporary music, visual arts, education, debates, and conferences on culture-related topics.

Considering that my qualitative research comprises only nine experts, the study is an exploratory endeavor meant not for statistical generalization, but rather to delve deeper into the experts' perceptions and practices and uncover patterns that may serve as a basis for further research.

Interview guide

The interview guide was structured to explore the key themes related to cultural communication and the integration of AI. It comprised a mix of open-ended questions, organized into thematic sections, to encourage detailed and reflective responses.

The main themes were:

- Introduction on general background and experience – to understand the participant's professional role and experience in cultural event communication and organization.
- Current marketing approaches and challenges - to explore the difficulties practitioners face in attracting and retaining audiences, particularly younger demographics.
- Perception of AI in cultural communication - to assess how practitioners currently employ AI tools and to view their perspective on the compatibility of AI with the cultural sector's creative and authentic nature.
- The public of cultural events and the use of AI – to understand how practitioners perceive, from their experience, the relation of the audiences they engage with and the employment of AI tools.
- Ethical concerns – to identify possible ethical questions raised by the use of AI in the context of culture as human output.
- Future perspectives - to capture the specialists' views on the evolving role of AI in the cultural sector.

Expert Selection

In the selection of the participants, I was guided by the principle of proximity and the snowball effect, leveraging my professional network to identify specialists with substantial experience in cultural communication and event organization. I chose this approach to facilitate access to participants who were both relevant to the research topic and willing to engage in detailed, in-person

discussions about their practices and perceptions. The participants have worked for various local and international cultural events in Iași, Cluj, and Bucharest.

While snowball sampling proved effective in accessing highly engaged practitioners, it also introduced certain limitations: the sample was restricted to three major Romanian urban centers, which may limit the diversity of perspectives. As revealed by the experts themselves, there are visible differences in consumption behavior between the three cities, considered as due to economic disparities and cultural background. Also, it is worth mentioning that these cities are among the largest in Romania. The question arises how and whether audiences of cultural manifestations behave differently in smaller communities, and whether the approach towards AI differs among experts working in smaller cities and other regions in Romania. These constraints are acknowledged here to ensure methodological transparency.

The nine specialists brought complementary experiences, covering literature, music, visual arts, and interdisciplinary cultural projects. Their professional involvement ranged from managing communication for international festivals to coordinating smaller-scale local events, ensuring a diversity of perspectives on cultural communication practices. On average, they had 10–20 years of experience in the field, and many combined multiple roles over time. For instance, they moved between festival communication, NGO cultural projects, artistic initiatives, or editorial and journalistic work. Several participants had extensive backgrounds in organizing and communicating large-scale literature festivals and music events (spanning classical, jazz, and contemporary genres), while others specialized in contemporary art exhibitions and related public debates. A few combined cultural communication with broader cultural management activities.

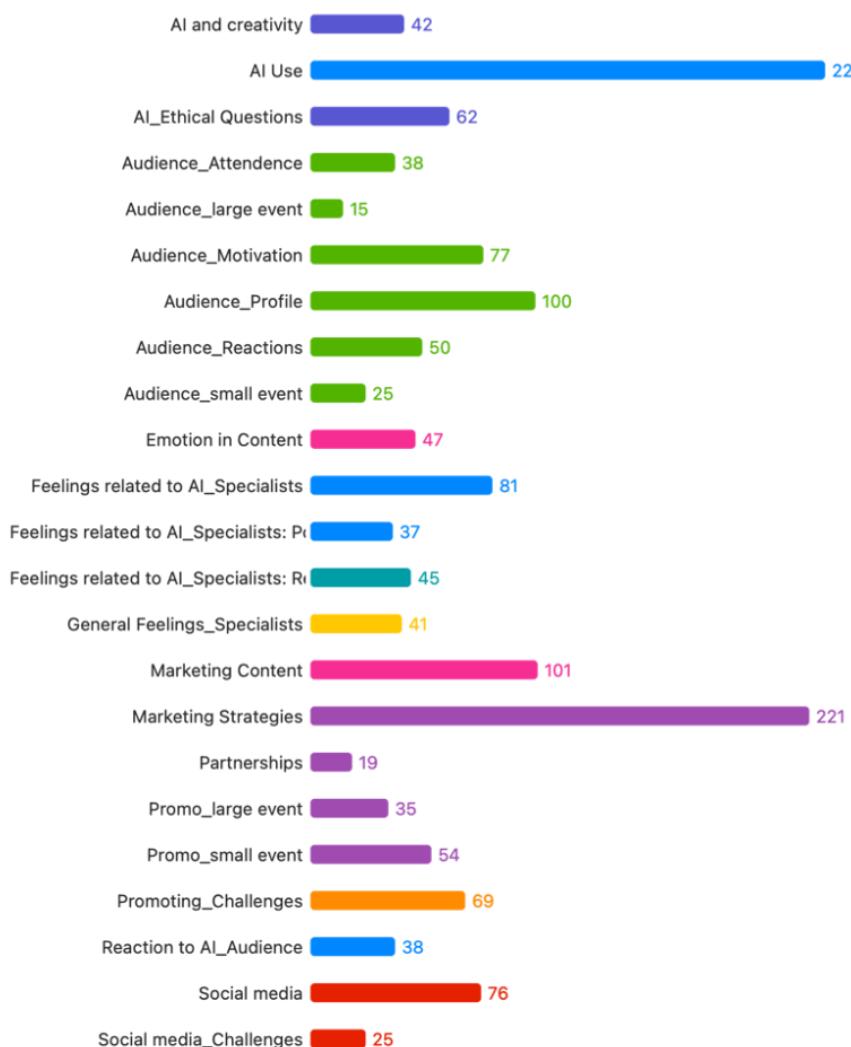
This diversity of roles and experiences ensured that the experts' insights covered a broad spectrum of cultural manifestations and audience types. It also highlights the common challenges practitioners face when balancing established practices with innovation in cultural communication.

Prior to conducting the interviews, each participant received an information sheet about the study's aims and procedure, before agreeing to take part. I obtained their written informed consent, including permission to record and anonymize the interviews. To ensure confidentiality, I removed from the interview transcripts any personal identifiers, and participants are referred to only by „Specialist A”, „Specialist B”, etc. Before running the transcript analysis, I also changed the names of the organizations or events in which the experts were involved. Thus, I ensured that the study met, concurrently, standards of transparency, voluntary participation, and respect for respondents' professional integrity.

Method of analysis

Following the informed consent, I recorded the interviews. Two were conducted in-person and seven online, via Zoom and Microsoft Teams. I manually transcribed the dialogues for three interviews, while for the ones on Microsoft Teams, given the possibility of an automatic transcript, I only edited to correct the transcription errors. Next, I used Atlas.ti to conduct the transcripts' analysis, after having coded any names or data related to confidential information or that could lead to identifying the experts. Based on the recurrent themes in the transcripts, I set 23 (see Figure 1) codes grouped around four main subjects that were aligned to the research objectives and interview guide: Marketing Strategies, Audience, Promo challenges, AI and, separately, the specialists' general feelings.

Figure 1. Code list and frequency of appearance



Source: own representation

Table 1. Code frequencies by interviews

	1 interview_Spec...	2 Interview Spec...	3 Interview Spec...	4 Interview Spec...	5 Interviu Specia...	6 Interviu Specia...	7 Interviu Specia...	8 Interviu Specia...	9 Interviu Specia...	Totals		
● AI and creativity	42	182	7	8	4	8	3	5	7	42		
● AI Use	228	213	37	33	34	35	15	8	33	228		
● AI_Ethical Questions	62	137	1	8	4	13	6	10	8	62		
● Audience_Attendance	38	161	12	5	8		5	2	1	38		
● Audience_Large event	15	137	15	7	3			1	4	15		
● Audience_Motivation	77	182	15	12	26		1	7	4	77		
● Audience_Profile	100	213	32	12	31	3	7	5	5	100		
● Audience_Reactions	50	213	8	17		2	1	6	9	50		
● Audience_small event	25	228	4	15	3		1	1		25		
● Emotion_in Content	47	161	6	13	4	7	2	9	5	47		
● Feelings related to AI...	81	137	5	18		5	11	10	9	81		
● Feelings related to AI...	37	182	4	10		5	9		1	37		
● Feelings related to AI...	45	213	1	9			2	10	8	45		
● General Feelings_Spe...	41	161	12	16		4	2	4	1	41		
● Marketing Content	101	137	21	40	8	13	3	4	3	101		
● Marketing Strategies	221	182	41	45	29	52	7	16	6	221		
● Partnerships	19	213	3	2		7			1	19		
● Promo_Large event	35	228	12	6		10	1	3	2	35		
● Promo_small event	54	161		30	20				3	54		
● Promoting_Challenges	69	137			11	10	13	7	14	69		
● Reaction to AI_Audien...	38	182		8	15	1	2	2	4	38		
● Social media	76	213	23	35	3	1		6	3	76		
● Social media_Challen...	25	161	7	11	1				4	25		
Totals			251	355	205	168	87	121	122	107	110	1526

Source: own representation

3. Findings

Following the content analysis of the interviews, I found that, regarding the communication strategies, all nine specialists mentioned the importance of using a mix of traditional, offline (posters, flyers) and online (social media) methods to attract a diverse audience. As seen in Table 2, media partnerships were mentioned in 20 instances, referring to collaborations with radios, newspapers, and local cultural institutions. As for the online platforms, they are the main communication channel for small scale events. Instagram (10 mentions) and TikTok (19 mentions) are considered essential to reach young people. Facebook remains effective for more mature audiences. The specialists insisted on the need for interaction and two-way communication (“engagement”, “talk”). An interesting, unexpected find was the education of young audiences as a method of attracting and cultivating new audiences. Whether it concerns literature, classical music, or contemporary art, organizing events in schools and universities and building partnerships with educational institutions appears to be a long-term strategy embraced by various event organizers.

Table 2. Keyword frequency about promotion strategies

Keywords	Instances
People	61
Communication	21
Media	20
TikTok	19

”to speak”	18
Facebook	14
Hard	12
Instagram	10
Emotion/ sense	9
Posts	9
Story	9
Partners	8
Video	7
Attract	6
Newsletter	6
Text	4

Source: own representation with data extracted from Atlas.ti

The interviews revealed that the specialists don't view their audience as a heterogeneous population. All specialists underlined how diverse the cultural events audience is, even within realms – different audiences within contemporary art, for instance, or literature, classical music. The variations appear to depend on the venue and the artistic content: “A museum like Tate Modern or Reina Sofia, which are contemporary art museums, organize other types of events than museums like Moco, which are also museums that call themselves Modern Contemporary, but address other types of audiences” (interview specialist C). Cultural events attract young people (mentioned in 10 instances), who are more active on Instagram and TikTok. People aged 30-50 are more inclined to attend traditional cultural events. As for the main motivations when attending a cultural event, the specialists mentioned curiosity, enthusiasm, and socializing – highlighted in 8 instances. At the same time, three experts highlighted a potential fear of feeling misplaced or not understanding the cultural event when it came to the audience's reluctance to participate in an exhibition opening or classical music concert. The importance of the social factor was outlined by all the specialists, whether through the importance of friends' presence – specifically mentioned, recommendation from friends, voluntary work, or for the “spectacle of the masses”. There is also a small category of consumers for whom attending cultural events is a habit, part of their lifestyle. As challenges in attracting their audiences, the specialists mentioned the difficulty in building audience loyalty, convincing people to keep coming to the next events: “I prefer 20 who come constantly to 100 who come once and never return” (interview specialist C). There is also a lack of a large audience for niche cultural events, such as contemporary art exhibitions, poetry recitals, and film screenings.

Among the challenges mentioned in the nine interviews, managing the brand presence on multiple platforms is mentioned specifically by six experts (“Nowadays, social media seems to be getting harder and harder to navigate, as if people...you have to do a PhD to learn how to manage it” (interview specialist B). According to them, TikTok poses the biggest challenges (“there is a universe in itself and we don't have the ability to manage presence on TikTok” (interview specialist B). Another challenge that resurfaced in all interviews was the lack of resources – time and people. All four specialists were involved in various aspects of the event organization. Those whose role was focused on communication also dealt with organizing activities and vice versa: “In the cultural area, people wear many hats: they are also project managers, they are also communicators, they also raise funds” (interview specialist D). Thus, the available time and concentration (as well as budget) for conducting effective presence on all communication channels is limited: “you're under super high pressure all the time, especially being like this, short on resources. In fact, it's super high pressure, and it's hard to relax when you're at the buttons of a campaign or at the buttons of a post, at the buttons of a press release, and very importantly, it feels very clear at the end of the line.” (interview specialist E). As for the role of AI in enhancing communication strategies for cultural events, I learned that, overall, AI is seen as a useful but incomplete tool by the specialists. The 14 mentions of ChatGPT (see Table 3) highlighted its role in repetitive or administrative tasks. The specialists also consider that AI cannot convey emotion - an aspect highlighted in 6 instances. The specialists' sentiment towards AI is generally positive. 20 instances highlight favorable perceptions (words like “useful”, “cool”, “awesome”, “can't wait”), while there are also concerns (9 instances) about lack of authenticity or communication mistakes in AI-generated content. Concerning the audience's reaction to the use of AI in promoting cultural events, in the 24 mentions, the reactions were indicated as neutral or positive, suggesting the gradual acceptance of AI in promotion, especially among young people. As expected, the specialists mentioned that the young audience is the most open to using technologies. One expert, however, observed that there is a category of very conservative young people who are reluctant towards technology, probably due to taking over their parents' values.

Table 3. Keyword frequency about AI usage

Keywords	Instances
“to help”/ “help”	24
Text	18
ChatGPT	14
Post/ Posts	12

Instrument	10
Plan/ plans	7
Images	6
Useful	5
Easy	5

Source: own representation with data extracted from Atlas.ti

Concerning the ethical issues and risks associated with the use of AI in promoting cultural events, all specialists expressed worries in 62 instances. These included the risks of manipulation, plagiarism, loss of authenticity, human creativity, and critical thinking. Four specialists expressed opinions about AI and the creative act, rather indicating surprise and curiosity about how AI becomes a “pseudo-creator”. Though they did not point out a clear favorable or against position, the tone of voice and choice of words indicated reluctance and disapproval: “creation can take new forms [...] maybe for them creation means generating, inserting a good prompt that generates something completely new to you” (interview specialist B); “It's a competition, it ends up being a competition of the artist with...I was about to say the pseudo-artist. It's not even a pseudo-artist, because we can't talk about a pseudo-artist as long as we're not talking about an entity [...] Where is the ethics in comparing an artist with a compilation of information? Because, in the end, that's what AI is” (interview specialist F).

Regarding the importance of emotional engagement in cultural communication and its relationship with audience participation and loyalty, eight of the nine experts emphasized that emotion must be present in promotional content. However, using it excessively or out of alignment with the event content can affect the brand's credibility and, thus, the public's perception. For literature events, for example, the public is seen as more selective and critical about the communication content. Contemporary art, on the other hand, is described by one specialist as a cultural act that is mostly consumed rationally, that addresses the intellect rather than the emotions. All experts agreed that the way to connect with and attract audiences to cultural events is by mostly addressing their emotional register, appealing to the human need for connection, belonging, and feeling. Words describing humour, the feeling of pride or belonging were used in regard to social media posts for events presenting classical music or literature.

Limits of the study

While this research shed light on cultural marketing practices and the use of AI for both large- and small-scale events in various cultural domains, the study has limitations. The conclusions are

drawn based on only nine interviews. While the specialists have an extensive and varied experience, both with the local and international cultural stage, they are all based in three main cities in Romania: Iași, Cluj, and Bucharest. Thus, they can offer limited considerations on audience motivations and behavior, the public's relation to AI technology, as well as the audience's response to marketing. Differences in perception and behavior are bound to exist between cities, not to mention countries and cultures. Extensive research is needed to obtain a more realistic picture of the phenomenon.

Another limit of the study may be related to an identity bias (Brüns and Meißner, 2024) in the case of those specialists who are content creators. They may have wanted, consciously or unconsciously, to defend the value of their work (as human creation) by adopting a cautious position and not speaking openly about how they really feel about the use of AI tools. Four of the experts, who are also content creators in their communication efforts, specifically denied using AI tools for writing their texts and underlined, by repeating negations, their refusal to use generative AI tools for content creation. However, in the conversations, they disclosed that they do use such tools to obtain a text draft or generate new content ideas.

4. Discussion

This research started with a question about what role AI plays in building resilience for cultural events organizers, in their efforts to reach, engage, and convince their audiences. In terms of strategies that the cultural events experts I interviewed already implement, all nine specialists stressed the importance of authentic communication, adapted to each category of audience. They also stressed the diversity of the public. There are different types of cultural event consumers, even by event type (e.g. classical music at the Philharmonic and classical music in an unconventional space), which raises challenges in diversifying the messages and communication channels efficiently enough. The lack of resources and the fact that one person (be it communicator or organizer) needs to handle multiple, various activities represents a barrier in effectively applying the marketing actions that could improve the results. In this respect, AI tools appear to be the appropriate solution, as they can automate repetitive or tedious actions, fasten planning, and even creative processes (as in suggesting ideas and helping to overcome “creative paralysis”). The general sentiment of the specialists towards the use of AI tools was positive, comprising enthusiasm and anticipation. The general acceptance, however, was mostly related to the help AI can give in administrative tasks, mostly. When it came to content generation, though they admitted having used ChatGPT, the attitude was more reserved and uncertain. The more reserved tone and affirmations came from the specialists directly involved in

communication and content creation. It may appear that identity (content creator versus organizer) may play an important role (Brüns and Meißner, 2024) in the acceptance of AI tools. The major concerns were about the authenticity and emotion that needed to be perceived by the target audience, especially the loyal category. The brand's credibility depends, in their view, on how genuine the messages sound, how well they evoke or represent what actually takes place in that particular event. And this is where AI instruments are limited, in the specialists' opinion. However, they recognize that there are AI creations that are accepted as genuine art creations, sometimes even without the public's awareness of the authorship. Also, they admitted having used ChatGPT for generating some texts, summarizing long-form content, or "translating" content to fit the audience's level of understanding (ex. curatorial texts).

These findings resonate with the findings of Brüns and Meißner (2024) and Leung *et al.* (2018), who suggest that professional identity and role strongly influence the acceptance of automation technologies. As the interviews revealed, practitioners focused on content creation seemed more cautious toward AI-generated output. It also reflects the extended Technology Acceptance Model (Venkatesh and Davis, 2000) with the subjective norm playing a significant role in technology adoption.

One of the key aspects that transpired from the nine interviews, which I did not anticipated, was socialization as one of the audience's strongest motivations when choosing to attend a cultural event. I started with the presumption that art and culture are mostly individual experiences (Dewey, 2024). I relied on the idea that people tend to seek such events in order to connect with their feelings, to meditate on life and their own existence (McCarthy *et al.*, 2001). The social factor, though important, seemed to come secondary. What these interviews revealed is rather the contrary: people come, firstly, to connect with other people, to feel they belong, to find like-minded or like-spirited peers, to meet with friends. People seek connection both in the communication of events and in the cultural experience (in participation). This is why specialists, in their communication efforts, still count on "talking" to people and the power of the word-of-mouth. Thus, the more connection their messages transmit, the stronger the impact: audience engagement and participation. Connection also implies emotion. This is where AI tools need to prove their capability – generate the kind of messages to which people can relate and connect, through reason and emotion. Although the specialists' underlined the importance of factual communication, emotional content was also considered important, as long as it remained authentic, without exaggerations (too many adjectives, metaphors, hyperboles). It remains to be seen how capable generative AI tools are in creating such content, balancing facts and emotion that resonate with a human audience. Human creation is still seen at the heart of the public's motivation to attend a cultural event.

These considerations reflect the discussion brought to attention by John Dewey (2024) and McCarthy *et al.* (2001) on the interaction between individual aesthetic experience and social engagement, suggesting that AI-mediated communication should not only transmit information but support both individual experiences along with relational aspects of cultural participation.

Communication must also be adapted to the context of current reality (what is being talked about, what concerns them at that moment). This is a particular challenge for cultural events professionals who need to focus on various tasks, engage with several different audience types on different platforms, and constantly communicate (especially for small-scale events). Frequent mentions of Instagram (10) and TikTok (19) show that promotion strategies must be adapted to the characteristics of the young audience. It appears that, in this case, AI tools could prove helpful in better managing this kind of varied communication: identifying current topics, suggesting content related to the interests of different categories of audience, even automating content creation and distribution.

These insights reinforce the theoretical frameworks for platform-sensitive and interactive engagement strategies. They connect to the findings of Kolb (2013) and Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), who highlight the need for cultural organizations to engage audiences online, be present on social media, and adapt communication to the interests of specific user groups.

Another interesting finding was the use of education as a strategy for attracting new audiences and cultivating audience loyalty. Young volunteers, for instance, are an important category in both organization and promotion (mentioned by 4 specialists). Partnerships with schools and universities, to bring events directly to the younger audiences, are another important element, mentioned by four experts. It is also important to remember that these young audiences grow up in a digital, AI-driven environment. To be able to connect with them means to also embrace their language and interaction style. It is another opportunity to use AI tools that could generate the type of content to appeal to this generation.

This supports the literature emphasizing the importance of audience development and digital engagement strategies in cultural consumption (Arsene *et al.*, 2020; Kolb, 2013). It shows how educational initiatives and communication tailored for generational characteristics reinforce audience connection and loyalty.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study explored the role of AI in developing resilience through enhanced communication strategies for cultural events, drawing insights from semi-structured interviews with specialists in the field. In the view of these experts, the way AI can build resilience when it comes to

communication is by using it as a complementary tool to automate administrative tasks, optimize content distribution, and generate ideas for creative messages. However, its effectiveness depends on integrating a human, authentic approach that preserves the emotion and cultural specificity of communication, in order to generate a sense of connection.

The participants in the study emphasized that the emotional component is an important driver in audience engagement. While AI can assist in structuring content, they consider that it struggles to convey authentic emotion, which is crucial in marketing events centered around art, literature, and music.

The specialists raised concerns around authenticity, manipulation, and loss of artistic integrity. Practitioners remain cautious about the overuse of AI-generated content, as audiences value human connection and originality in cultural storytelling.

Instagram and TikTok were identified as the most effective platforms for reaching younger audiences, while Facebook remains relevant for older demographics. To retain the audience, the specialists use a hybrid approach, combining AI-assisted automation with human-driven engagement.

Cultural managers face time and personnel constraints, making AI a valuable tool for optimizing workflows. However, they still have limited expertise in AI-driven marketing, which poses a barrier to adoption.

From a practical perspective, these findings suggest that cultural event organizers should leverage AI selectively, to optimize workflows while ensuring human oversight in content creation. Emotional resonance must remain a priority and AI could support, but not yet replace, human storytelling in cultural marketing. Strategic adaptation across digital platforms is necessary, with AI-assisted analytics helping tailor messaging to different audience segments. Ethical considerations must be addressed proactively, ensuring that AI-generated content aligns with the values of authenticity and artistic integrity.

Looking ahead, the study also points to clear directions for future research. As mentioned in the limitations of the study, future research should apply these insights to larger and more diverse samples to assess how different cultural sectors and geographic regions engage with AI in communication. Investigating how different demographic groups perceive AI-generated content in cultural marketing would provide further practical insights. Cross-cultural comparisons could examine variations in AI adoption and effectiveness in different marketing environments. Moreover, as AI continues to evolve, future studies should explore how improvements in AI-generated content impact audience engagement over time.

Taken together, these insights underline AI's potential to act as a resilient ally in cultural communication, provided, of course, that it is guided by human creativity, ethical responsibility, and

cultural sensitivity. By bridging technological innovation with authentic connection, both practitioners and researchers can ensure that AI strengthens, rather than diminishes, the human stories at the heart of cultural expression.

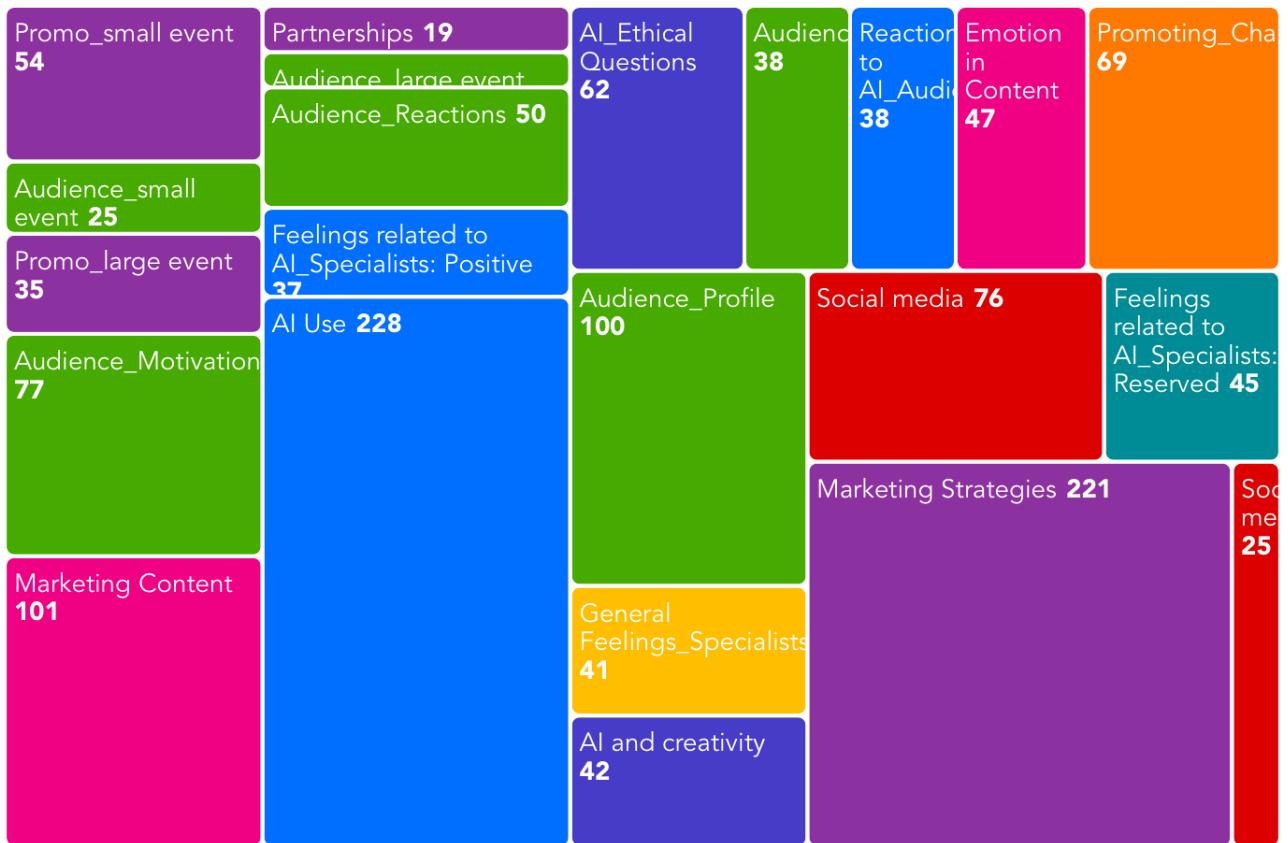
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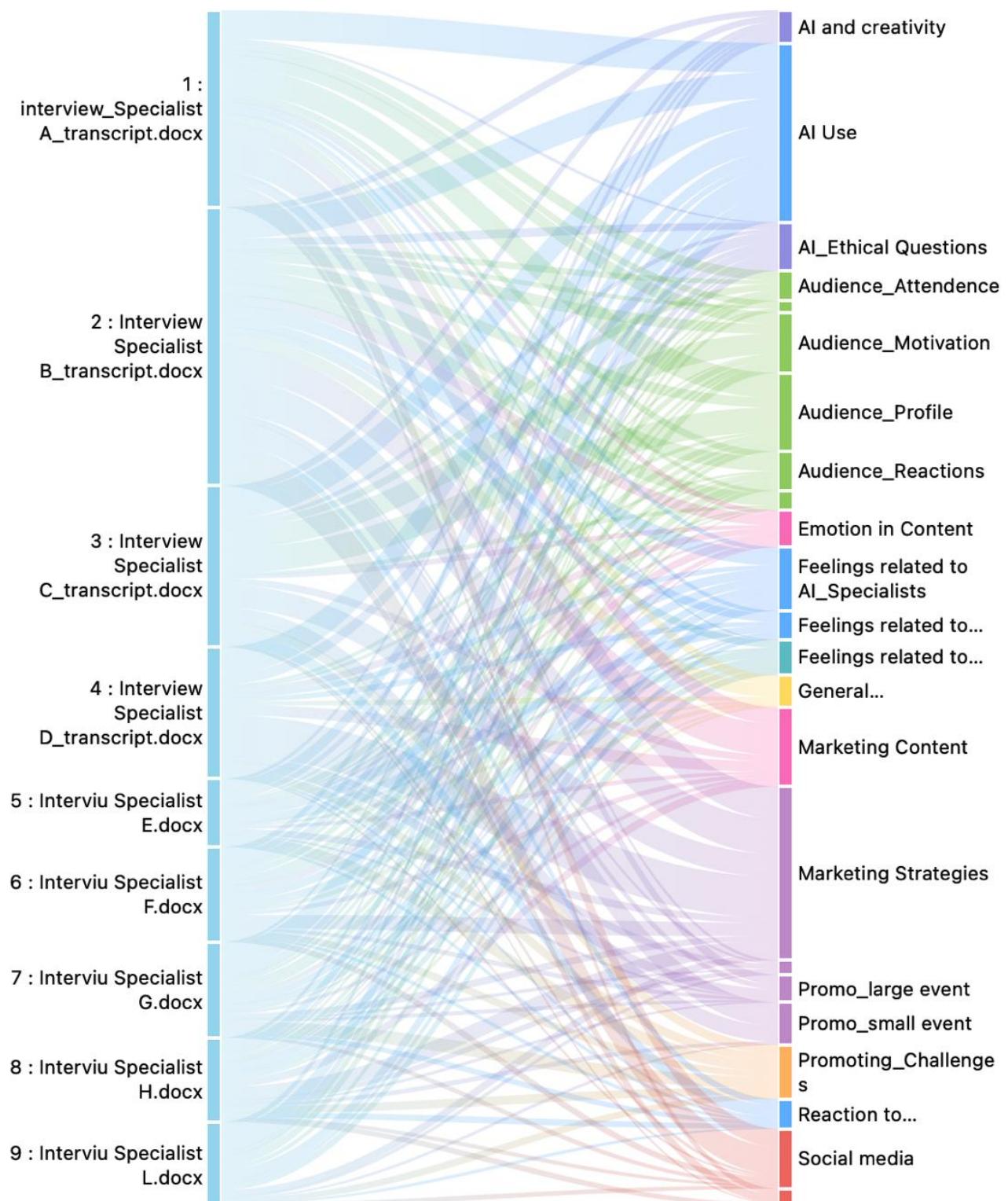
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Annex 1. Code frequency blocks



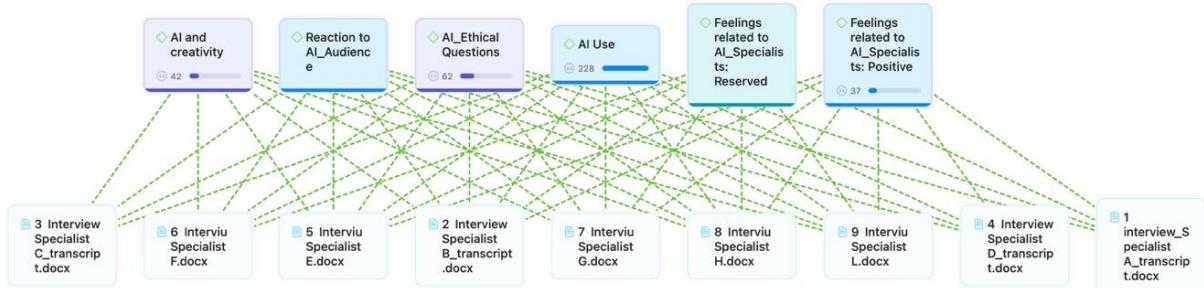
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Annex 2. Sankey Diagram Interviews and codes co-occurrence



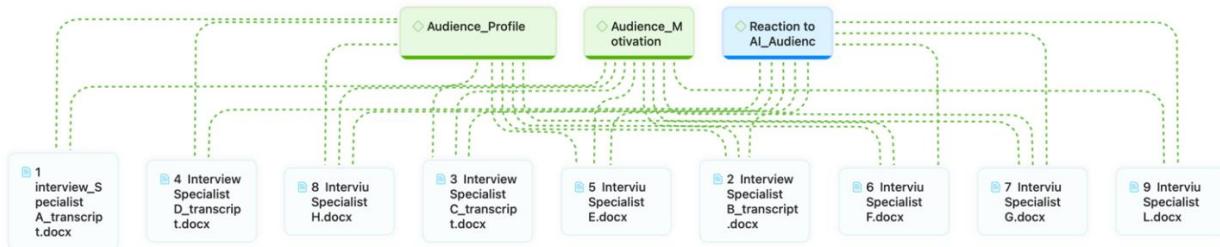
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Annex 3. Visual map of mentions of AI Use in interviews



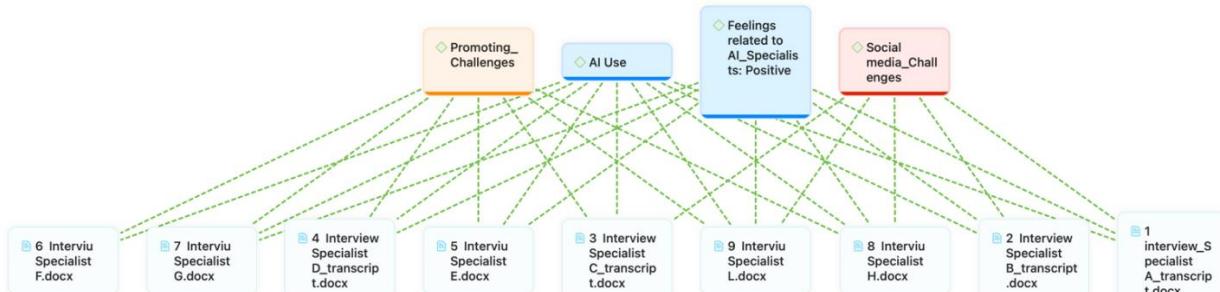
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Annex 4. Visual map of mentions of Audience and AI Use in interviews



Source: own representation

Annex 5. Visual map of mentions of AI Use and Promoting Challenges in interviews



Source: own representation