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# A tool for motivating participation to cultural events

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## Abstract

In this demonstration we show *ComeAlong* for museums, a novel application to motivate participation to cultural events organized by museums. Together with the list of events organized by the museum, *ComeAlong* allows people to easily share their intention to participate through their social network, spreading the word of mouth to all their friends. As this sharing may be perceived as a cost (e.g. privacy concerns), our application allows organisers to motivate users by offering incentives, such as gifts or discounts. *ComeAlong* has also a special attention to the social aspect of the event attendance. It keeps the users informed of the intentions and opinions of their friends and of the whole community that shares the same interest in the museum. Comments, ratings and intention to attend are collected and shown both to create the feeling of being part of a community and to motivate hesitant people to participate.

## Author Keywords

motivating participation, sharing intention, word-of-mouth through social networks

## Introduction

Museums play a fundamental social and cultural role in the development of our communities. However, serving their purpose nowadays has become increasingly more

difficult as they find themselves competing for audiences and resources in a society with limited time but overloaded with activities [2]. The introduction of technology in museums has opened new opportunities, motivating research on how to exploit these technologies to give more value to museum experiences and attract more people to museum activities.

In this paper we present our ongoing efforts in providing applications for motivating people to participate in cultural events. The application we demonstrate is motivated by the real scenarios of two important museums in the Province of Trentino, Italy: The *Museum of Natural Sciences* (MUSE) and The *Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of Trento and Rovereto* (MART). The design of the application is based on results of a preliminary study run in collaboration with MART, aiming at getting insights on why, how and when people decide to go the museum.

The resulting application, namely *ComeAlong* for museums, exploits word of mouth dissemination through users' social networks to disseminate and advertise museum activities. It targets the user intention to participate, actual participation (check-in) and feedback (ratings), as natural advertising messages for motivating friends to come along. The challenge is to motivate users to share these intentions, location, ratings with their social networks, letting all their friends know how they will spend their free time.

ComeAlong is set to explore different types of incentives that may motivate people to share these messages, as well as effective dissemination strategies (without spamming friends). This requires a right balance between incentives that are feasible for event organisers to provide and yet interesting enough for users as to allow these messages on

their social networks. At the time of the writing, the application is in experimental phase, with pilots scheduled with MUSE and MART in July 2013.

## Related Work

Word of mouth is usually considered by people when they choose which product to buy or service to use between the ones offered by different institutions. Thanks to the Internet, word of mouth is no more limited to friends and relatives, but can be shared with the whole world. The motives that move people to share their opinions through the Internet are many and Hennig-Thurau and his colleagues [3] found that social benefits, economic incentives, concern for others and extraversion / self-enhancement are the most important reasons why people share their word of mouth through the Internet.

Social networks are already used by people to share word of mouth, with or without the support of the producers or providers of products and services ([1], [5]). Positive word of mouth is generated by high product quality, but word of mouth can also indicate defects, and for this reason producers and providers should check all comments about their products and services to promptly reply to bad word of mouth by providing support to the displeased consumers [5].

Through word of mouth customers choose what to reveal of themselves, but businesses can also motivate people to disclose more private information to increase their knowledge about their customers [4]. There are both extrinsic (monetary savings, time saving, self-enhancement and social adjustment) and intrinsic (pleasure, novelty, altruism) motivators that move people to disclose their private information.

## Preliminary study

Attracting people to come to the museum requires, besides common dissemination, at least a basic understanding of why, how and when people decide to go to the museum.

Following these questions, we run structured interviews with visitors at the end of their visit. Firstly, we focused on the decision to come to the museum: when they decided to come and why. Interestingly, more than half of the visitors decide to go to the museum on the same day or the day before, suggesting contextual factors influencing an immediate decision. Most of the remaining visitors, instead, plan the visit at least two weeks before. On the motivational side, people mainly visit the museum because of their personal interests, but still there is a 9% of visitors that come along with their family and friends mainly to engage in a social activity. This is an evidence of strength of the social component in this particular scenario.

Then, we dug into what particularly triggered their decision to visit the museum. According to the results, *word of mouth* is what motivates people to come the most (28%), closely followed by a *contextual opportunity*, such as being in the city for holidays (24%). The remaining 47% can be mainly attributed to various marketing campaigns of the museum. What is more significant for us is the low actual impact of social networks (less than 1%) on the decision to come to the museum. This indicates that there is space for improvements through this communication channel.

In order to understand better whether and how people recommend to visit the museum, we sent to the interviewed people a follow-up questionnaire by email. In the results, most visitors recommended to their family and

friends to go to the museum, but only 5% of them did it also through social networks. This suggests that, even though the museum is present on the most used social networks, very few people share their museum experiences through this channel. This result supports our idea that museums are not exploiting the full potential of this communication channel, and our goal is to explore ways of increasing the word of mouth dissemination through social networks and eventually attract more people to museum activities.

## ComeAlong for museums

ComeAlong for museums is an application designed to facilitate event organisers to advertise and attract more people to museum activities.

We have seen in our preliminary study that word of mouth is the most effective communication channel. Yet it performs poorly on social networks, which could be in part due to a non effective social media presence. ComeAlong provides the mechanism to increase the social presence of the museum and, potentially, the interest on museum activities. We do this by rewarding the sharing on social networks of users' intention to participate with an economic incentive offered by the museum, which can vary from a discount to a free gadget.

People that plan in advance, or even on the same day, can find it useful the possibility to confirm their intention to participate. On the other hand, also the sharing of the actual participation (check-in) is important, triggering immediate decisions. Thanks to this sharing, some friends could decide to come along, completing and enhancing the experience of attending the event by living it together and positively affecting the collection of good memories [6]. In the end the application itself give value to users interested

in cultural activities: they can be aware of ongoing events and keep updated on all the news about the museum.

Another important thing that influences people choice on whether to participate to an event is the expected quality of the event itself, usually given by the ratings and opinions of others that are known thanks to online and offline word of mouth. On websites, people's opinions are usually collected through ratings, i.e. in an objective way, while the attractiveness of an event depends on the personal tastes. For this reason, ComeAlong shows the single friends' ratings together with the overall average rating. In this way, users can see exactly what a specific friend thinks of the event and adapt his/her expectations to their personal tastes. Moreover, the application collects all the opinions and comments of users about the museum activities, creating a place where people can share their experience. In this way it supports the creation of a community between all its users.

#### *Demonstration flow*

In this demonstration we will show the mobile version of ComeAlong prepared for MUSE, which will be used in occasion of the inauguration of the new museum building on the 27<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

The features of the application will be illustrated a real case scenario, summarised in the following script:

- The demonstration starts with a summary of the features of ComeAlong, followed by the navigation in the information about the museum and its events;
- It continues with the flow of intention sharing and its effects: the intention is easily shared and spread through Facebook, making the user's friends aware of the application and motivating them to come along; in the narrated story, a friend decides to

participate and share his intention too, increasing the rumors about the event;

- Then we show how the application reminds the users of the event and supports them during the event, inviting friends to meet, enhancing each other experience;
- The demonstration is concluded with the area dedicated to ratings.

Together with the application, we will present also the first results coming from the tests already planned with MUSE and MART. A video of this demonstration is available at: <http://youtu.be/oGYnCPGgocc>

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