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«From Thresholds to Routines: A Data-Driven Framework for Attracting and Retaining Young Audiences in Italian Museums»

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SUMMARY

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It is difficult to find the right words to close a journey that has meant so much to me. This second academic chapter has also come to an end, and with it a journey made of commitment, doubts, growth, responsibilities, and many moments in which the support of the people closest to me made all the difference.

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With love,

INTRODUCTION

For a museum director, the challenge of youth engagement is not only to attract young visitors once, but to design the conditions that make them enter, understand, enjoy, share, and return. This distinction is the starting point of the present thesis. Italy has one of the most extensive and symbolically powerful museum systems in Europe, yet a significant share of the population still remains distant from museum attendance. Previous evidence cited in this thesis shows that 69.2% of Italians did not visit any museum in 2016, while post-pandemic data still indicate that approximately 65 out of 100 Italians did not attend a museum or exhibition in 2023 (ISTAT, 2016; ISTAT, 2023). From a managerial perspective, these figures do not simply describe low participation. They reveal a structural problem of accessibility, relevance, and relationship-building between museums and citizens.

The issue becomes particularly strategic when the focus shifts to young people. Younger age groups may show higher levels of museum attendance than older adults, but occasional visits do not automatically become stable cultural relationships. A young person may enter a museum through a school trip, a holiday, a temporary exhibition, a discounted ticket, or a social occasion, without developing the confidence or motivation to return. The core managerial problem is therefore not limited to increasing youth attendance in numerical terms. It concerns the museum's ability to transform an episodic visit into a repeated and meaningful practice.

This thesis is based on a simple but operational assumption: young people do not simply lack interest in museums. Many of them face economic, cognitive, emotional, social, and territorial thresholds that prevent latent interest from becoming repeated attendance. A museum may be formally open and economically accessible, but still remain difficult to approach if its offer is unclear, its visit path is hard to understand, its price is perceived as disproportionate, or its social meaning is weak within youth peer groups. In this sense, innovation should not be understood only as the introduction of new technologies or isolated events. It should be understood as the redesign of the conditions through which young people feel able to enter, interpret, value, share, and repeat the museum experience.

The need to rethink the relationship between museums and young people is also consistent with the contemporary evolution of the museum sector. Museums are increasingly expected to act not only as institutions of conservation, but also as spaces for education, enjoyment, reflection, inclusion, and public dialogue. This broader mission requires museums to move beyond one-directional communication and to develop forms of engagement in which young audiences are not only observed as a target, but involved as interpreters, contributors, and co-designers of cultural experiences (ICOM, 2022; ICOM, 2025). For museum management, the relevant question becomes practical: how can cultural institutions create experiences that are understandable, affordable, socially legitimate, and repeatable for different groups of young people?

Within the Italian context, the Forum Giovani e Musei (Forum GEM) represents an applied setting in which this question is addressed through direct interaction between young people, museum professionals, companies, and data. Forum GEM is based on the principle of speaking with young people rather than merely about young people. Its objective is to increase the connection between young people and those who work in museums, so that cultural places can fully perform their role as contexts for education, pleasure, reflection, and knowledge-sharing (Forum Giovani e Musei, 2025). Across its first three editions, under the coordination of Prof.ssa Annamaria Gimigliano, the Forum has developed as a structured intergenerational environment in which youth perspectives are not treated as external opinions, but as part of the research and problem-solving process.

The 2025-26 edition is especially relevant for this thesis because it combines several components: training activities, a national survey on the relationship between young people and museums, structured debates between young delegates and museum directors, and a final public discussion at the Museo di Roma - Palazzo Braschi (Forum Giovani e Musei, 2025). The Forum is therefore not a survey-only initiative. It operates as a mixed-methods environment in which qualitative panel discussion and quantitative survey evidence inform each other. The qualitative component supports problem framing, interpretation, and the co-construction of questions; the quantitative component provides a broader empirical base for identifying descriptive patterns, behavioural segments, and managerial priorities.

This **mixed-methods logic** has evolved progressively across the Forum editions. The first edition highlighted practical issues such as the youth ticket price, internships in museums, and low-threshold uses of museum spaces, including the study room inaugurated at Palazzo Braschi. The second edition strengthened the need for evidence-based inquiry by introducing a survey to avoid relying exclusively on non-representative opinions; it also revealed the importance of learning, cognitive accessibility, and mediation in the museum experience. The third edition extended this process by involving both young delegates and companies, creating a broader empirical setting in which museums, universities, workplaces, and young adults could be connected around the same problem: how to make museums more interesting, accessible, and relevant for under-30 audiences (Forum Giovani e Musei, 2026).

It is therefore important to distinguish the role of Forum GEM from the original contribution of this thesis. Forum GEM is the empirical and participatory context in which the data were generated. The thesis does not reproduce the Forum report and does not claim ownership of the Forum process. Its original contribution begins at the analytical level: the author prepared and cleaned the microdata, developed segmentation criteria, built cross-tabulations and Power BI dashboards, interpreted descriptive patterns, and translated the results into a managerial framework for museums. The dataset was generated within Forum GEM 2026, while the data preparation, segmentation, dashboard interpretation, and quantitative reading of the evidence were developed by the author as the empirical contribution of this thesis.

Against this background, the central research question of the thesis is: **how can museums innovate to attract and retain young audiences?** This question is intentionally formulated from the perspective of museum management. It does not ask only why young people do or do not visit museums; it asks how museums can use behavioural evidence to design better conditions for attraction, comprehension, participation, and return. The empirical analysis therefore aims to identify patterns in Forum GEM 2026 microdata and to translate those patterns into practical recommendations for museum directors, cultural managers, and institutional stakeholders.

More specifically, the thesis pursues three connected objectives. First, it examines which characteristics, motivations, and barriers are associated with different levels of museum attendance among young people under 30. Second, it analyses whether relevant behavioural patterns emerge across education, city size, work or study status, price sensitivity, preferred museum types, visit contexts, and perceived barriers. Third, it interprets these patterns through a managerial lens, asking which levers museums can realistically influence to lower the thresholds that prevent occasional or latent interest from becoming repeated participation. The objective is not to produce a generic profile of young visitors, but to build an evidence-based decision framework for museum management.

The thesis adopts a pragmatic mixed-methods perspective, while the author's empirical work is mainly quantitative, descriptive, and exploratory. The available data support segmentation, cross-tabulation, visual analytics, and pattern discovery, but they do not allow causal inference in the strict statistical sense. Similarly, the thesis uses theories of social reinforcement and networked participation as interpretive lenses, not as proof of peer-to-peer contagion. The survey does not contain relational network data; therefore, it cannot identify who influenced whom, nor estimate direct contagion mechanisms. This methodological boundary is essential to keep the argument proportionate to the available evidence.

The theoretical contribution of the thesis consists in connecting cultural economics, cultural capital, audience development, and threshold-based behavioural reasoning to the specific problem of youth museum engagement in Italy. Cultural economics helps explain how museum attendance is shaped by perceived value, price, time, and non-monetary costs. Cultural capital explains why not all young people start from the same level of familiarity with museums. Audience development shifts the focus from passive attendance to active museum strategy. The Threshold Model provides the central conceptual axis: different young people require different activation conditions before museum-going becomes thinkable, understandable, and repeatable. Complex Contagion and Small Worlds are used more narrowly as interpretive lenses to understand why repeated touchpoints, peer mediation, and community-based circulation may support the transition from occasional visits to routines.

The managerial contribution is the **Threshold-to-Routine framework** developed in the conclusions. This framework argues that museums should not focus only on attracting young people once, but on lowering the thresholds that prevent them from returning. These thresholds may be economic, when the ticket price is perceived as excessive; cognitive, when the visit path is unclear or overwhelming; emotional, when young visitors feel inadequate; social, when museum-going is not legitimised by peers; or territorial, when museums are distant from ordinary youth environments. Moving from thresholds to routines means designing museum experiences that are affordable, intelligible, mediated, socially reinforced, and repeatable.

The thesis is organised into four chapters, followed by the conclusions. Chapter 1 provides the theoretical background needed to understand why museums are not equally attractive, accessible, or meaningful to all young people. It discusses cultural participation, museum attendance as cultural consumption, cultural capital, audience development, and the social embeddedness of cultural behaviours. The chapter builds the theoretical diagnosis of the youth-museum gap: young audiences differ in familiarity, access, motivations, and social environments, and therefore cannot be addressed through one generic youth policy.

Chapter 2 develops the conceptual framework and the hypotheses of the empirical analysis. It translates the main variables into managerial diagnostic dimensions, such as geography, education, motivation, perceived barriers, price sensitivity, and social reinforcement. The chapter places the idea of activation thresholds at the centre of the framework and clarifies that social-contagion theories are used as interpretive support rather than as estimable network models.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology and explains how Forum GEM 2026 data are transformed into useful museum intelligence. It describes the mixed-methods research setting, the role of qualitative panel debate and survey evidence, the structure of the data sources, the data-cleaning process, the Business Intelligence pipeline, the segmentation strategy, the visualisation logic, and the main methodological limitations. The chapter clarifies that the thesis produces decision-support evidence for museums, not causal proof.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the empirical results. The analysis focuses on the strongest and most managerially relevant patterns, including education, city size, museum visit context, museum type preferences, price sensitivity, motivation to learn, cognitive barriers, and the role of mediation. The findings are interpreted through the distinction between attraction and retention. Attraction concerns the first decision to visit; retention concerns the capacity to create routines, relationships, and recurring reasons to return. Quantitative dashboard evidence and qualitative insights are read together where they converge on the same managerial issue.

The Conclusions answer the research question directly by presenting the Threshold-to-Routine framework. This final framework translates the theoretical and empirical results into practical recommendations for museums: diagnose audience segments, lower entry thresholds, make the visit intelligible, activate repeated reinforcement, work through real youth communities, and build routines. In this sense, the thesis argues that youth engagement is not only a participation problem. It is a strategic management problem for museums that want to remain socially relevant, culturally accessible, and capable of building durable relationships with the next generation of visitors.

Chapter 1 Youth, Museums, and Cultural Participation

The purpose of this chapter is to build the theoretical foundation required to answer the broader research question of the thesis: how can museums innovate to attract and retain young audiences? The chapter adopts a managerial perspective. It does not review theory as an abstract exercise, but as a way to understand what a museum director needs to know before deciding how to act. From this perspective, the first problem is not simply that some young people visit museums and others do not. The deeper issue is that museums are not perceived in the same way by all young people. For some, the museum is a familiar, intelligible and desirable place. For others, it remains distant, expensive, cognitively demanding, socially unusual or emotionally irrelevant.

The chapter therefore addresses the following question: why are museums not equally attractive, accessible or meaningful to all young people? To answer it, the discussion

combines five theoretical blocks. First, the literature on cultural participation explains how museum attendance is unevenly distributed across social groups. Second, cultural economics frames museum-going as a form of cultural consumption shaped by value, cost, time and perceived utility. Third, cultural capital explains why some young people feel more prepared and legitimate inside museums than others. Fourth, audience development shifts the perspective from passive participation to active museum strategy. Finally, network theory and the small-world perspective introduce the idea that cultural participation is socially embedded and often circulates through communities, peers, universities, workplaces and local groups.

The chapter is intentionally constructed as a diagnosis. Before recommending what museums should do, it is necessary to clarify why generic youth policies are insufficient. If young audiences differ in cultural capital, access conditions, motivations and social environments, then museums cannot treat them as one homogeneous target. For museum management, the relevant conclusion is that attracting young people requires differentiated strategies: lowering barriers, making the experience more intelligible, creating social legitimacy and building relationships that can continue beyond a single visit.

1.1 Cultural participation and museum attendance in contemporary societies

Cultural participation has long been studied as a socially structured behaviour. Classic sociological research shows that activities commonly associated with institutional culture, such as museum visits, theatre attendance or classical concerts, are not evenly distributed across the population. Bourdieu (1984) argued that tastes, preferences and cultural competences are socially formed through education, family background and class position. In this view, cultural participation is not simply the result of individual interest, but also the outcome of accumulated resources that make certain cultural practices feel natural, legitimate or desirable.

This point is particularly relevant for museums. Museums are formally open to the public, but formal openness does not automatically produce equal access. A young person may be able to enter a museum from an economic or legal point of view, yet still perceive the space as difficult to understand, socially distant or not addressed to them.

Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper (1991) showed that museum publics are strongly associated with education and cultural familiarity. Their work suggests that the museum visit requires interpretive competences that are not equally distributed. As a consequence, the absence of young visitors cannot be interpreted only as lack of curiosity; it may also reflect unequal preparation for decoding the museum experience.

DiMaggio (1987) developed a complementary argument by showing that participation in the arts can operate as a marker of social boundaries. Museum attendance is not merely a leisure choice; it can also signal identity, belonging and proximity to certain social worlds. For young people, this dimension is crucial. If their peer group, family or educational environment treats museums as ordinary and valuable, visiting museums becomes more likely to appear socially legitimate. If museums are absent from their everyday environments, the visit may appear exceptional, school-related or even socially irrelevant.

More recent empirical research confirms the persistence of these mechanisms. Ateca-Amestoy (2010) shows that education remains a strong determinant of cultural participation, even when other variables are considered. Education does not simply provide information about art or history; it also develops habits of attention, curiosity and confidence in relation to cultural institutions. This helps explain why two young people of the same age may react very differently to the same museum offer. One may perceive it as an opportunity for discovery, while another may perceive it as demanding or unrelated to personal life.

The Italian context reflects the same structural issue. ISTAT data on cultural participation show that museum attendance and participation in cultural activities vary significantly by age, education and territory (ISTAT, 2024). These differences matter from a managerial perspective because they indicate that museums operate within unequal social conditions. A museum director cannot assume that all young people start from the same position. Some already possess the cultural codes needed to navigate the museum, while others need clearer guidance, lower entry thresholds and stronger reasons to perceive the institution as meaningful.

The first implication for this thesis is therefore that youth engagement cannot be reduced to communication. If the problem were only that young people do not know what

museums offer, then advertising would be sufficient. The literature on cultural participation suggests a more complex diagnosis: young people differ in familiarity, perceived legitimacy, confidence and social exposure to museums. These differences create uneven starting points that museum strategy must recognise.

Managerial implication: museums should not ask only how to inform young people about exhibitions, but how to make the museum experience socially and cognitively accessible to different youth segments.

1.2 Museum attendance as cultural consumption

Museum attendance can also be interpreted through cultural economics. From this perspective, visiting a museum is a form of cultural consumption that requires resources and produces benefits. It involves monetary costs, such as tickets and transportation, but also non-monetary costs, especially time, attention and cognitive effort. At the same time, it may generate aesthetic enjoyment, learning, identity construction, social interaction and civic value. Throsby (2001) emphasises that cultural goods cannot be analysed only through ordinary market utility because they produce both economic and cultural value. This distinction is important for museums: a visit is not bought only as a product, but experienced as a symbolic, educational and social activity.

For a museum director, the key question is therefore not only how much a young person is willing to pay, but what the young person believes they will receive in exchange for the money, time and mental effort invested. Price sensitivity is relevant, especially for students and young workers with limited disposable income. However, price alone rarely explains the whole decision. A low ticket price may still fail to attract a young person who expects the visit to be boring, confusing or socially isolated. Conversely, a higher price may be accepted when the experience is perceived as unique, well mediated, emotionally intense or socially valuable.

This helps clarify the difference between affordability and perceived value. Affordability concerns the economic possibility of entering the museum. Perceived value concerns the expected usefulness, enjoyment and meaning of the experience. Cultural economics suggests that demand for cultural goods depends on both dimensions. A museum can lower the ticket price and still remain unattractive if the

experience is not intelligible or relevant. Similarly, a museum can increase willingness to visit by improving the clarity of its offer, explaining the expected duration of the visit, offering different levels of depth and communicating why the experience matters for young people.

Time is another central variable. Throsby (2001) notes that cultural consumption requires time allocation. For young people, time competes with study, work, social life, digital entertainment and other leisure activities. A museum visit is therefore evaluated against alternative uses of time. This does not mean that young people lack time in absolute terms; rather, the museum must appear worth the time it requires. When the visit is perceived as long, tiring or difficult to plan, the threshold increases. When the visit is presented through clear, modular and time-conscious routes, the decision becomes easier.

Habit formation further enriches the analysis. Cultural preferences are not fixed; they develop through exposure. Repeated cultural consumption can increase familiarity and future demand. In this sense, early and repeated museum experiences can create a form of consumption capital: the more a young person learns how to enjoy museums, the easier it becomes to return. Throsby, Severn and Petetskaya (2024) show that preferences for live cultural experiences are shaped by previous exposure and accumulated experience. Applied to museums, this means that attraction and retention are connected. A first visit can become the beginning of a routine only if the experience reduces uncertainty and increases confidence.

Empirical research on cultural destinations also highlights the role of context and policy. Cuccia and Rizzo (2011) show that cultural participation and tourism patterns are influenced by seasonality, access policies and the integration of cultural attractions into broader territorial systems. For museums, this means that the visit is rarely isolated from its environment. A museum embedded in a lively urban, educational or tourism ecosystem can become easier to access and imagine. A small or peripheral museum may require stronger partnerships and clearer positioning to become visible to young audiences.

From a managerial point of view, the cultural-economics perspective leads to a practical conclusion: museums must reduce the total cost of participation, not only the ticket

price. The total cost includes money, time, uncertainty, cognitive effort and social risk. Innovation for young audiences should therefore combine accessible pricing with clear information, predictable visit formats, understandable mediation and experiences that make the perceived value of the visit explicit.

Managerial implication: youth pricing is necessary but not sufficient. Museums should lower the total cost of participation by reducing uncertainty, simplifying planning and making the expected value of the visit easier to understand.

1.3 Cultural capital and unequal familiarity with museums

The concept of cultural capital is central to understanding why museums are not equally meaningful to all young people. For Bourdieu (1984), cultural capital includes knowledge, dispositions, tastes and competences that allow individuals to recognise and appreciate cultural forms. Cultural capital can be embodied in habits and ways of interpreting the world, institutionalised through educational qualifications, or objectified in cultural goods and practices. In the case of museums, cultural capital affects the ability to understand artworks, historical narratives, curatorial choices and even the implicit rules of behaviour inside the institution.

This does not mean that museums are intentionally exclusionary. Rather, museums often rely on codes that are easier to understand for those who have already been exposed to them. A label, a chronological path, a collection arranged by school or period, or a silent gallery may appear clear to visitors with prior knowledge, but obscure to those who lack that background. The same space can therefore produce fascination in one young visitor and discomfort in another. The difference is not necessarily intelligence or interest, but familiarity.

Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper (1991) show that museum-going is strongly connected to education because the school system provides the categories needed to interpret legitimate culture. However, education does not operate only through formal knowledge. It also shapes a sense of entitlement to enter certain spaces. Young people who have studied humanities, arts, architecture or cultural heritage may perceive the museum as a natural extension of their education. Young people trained in technical, scientific or vocational pathways may still be curious, but they may require different

forms of mediation to connect the museum experience to their own interests and competences.

This point is particularly relevant for the present thesis because the Forum GEM 2026 research design includes young people from different educational and professional profiles. The aim is not to oppose humanities and scientific backgrounds, but to understand how different forms of knowledge affect the way young people approach museums. A technical profile may not immediately identify with a traditional art museum, but may respond strongly to science museums, industrial heritage, interactive experiences or narratives that connect artistic production with technology, innovation and problem solving. The managerial challenge is therefore to translate the museum's cultural content into multiple entry points.

Cultural capital also interacts with geography and family background. A young person living in a large city with frequent school visits, family cultural practices and many museums nearby may accumulate familiarity almost incidentally. A young person living in an area with fewer museums or lower cultural participation may encounter museums mainly through school obligations or tourism. In this second case, the museum may remain associated with duty, distance or exceptional travel, rather than with ordinary life. This distinction is essential for retention: young people may visit museums during holidays, but this does not necessarily mean that they perceive museums as places to return to in everyday contexts.

From the museum director's perspective, cultural capital should not be interpreted as a fixed characteristic of the audience, but as a design problem. If some young people lack familiarity, museums can create conditions that build it. Clear introductory routes, concise explanations, modular audioguides, peer mediation, guided visits with passionate mediators and accessible narratives can reduce the distance between the visitor and the collection. In this sense, audience development does not mean diluting cultural content, but making the path towards that content more readable.

Managerial implication: museums should treat cultural capital as something they can help build. The objective is not to simplify culture to the point of trivialisation, but to make visitors feel competent enough to engage with it.

1.4 Audience development and the managerial role of museums

The previous sections explain why cultural participation is unequal. Audience development explains how cultural institutions can respond. The concept refers to a set of strategies through which museums and cultural organisations seek to broaden, diversify and deepen their audiences. Kawashima (2000) distinguishes between different audience-development objectives, including cultural inclusion, extended marketing, taste cultivation and audience education. This distinction is useful because it shows that audience development is not only promotion. It may involve removing access barriers, changing the experience, building cultural competences and creating long-term relationships.

For the purpose of this thesis, audience development is the managerial bridge between diagnosis and action. If museums know that young people differ in access, cultural capital and social environments, the next question is what museums can realistically influence. They cannot immediately change family background or regional inequality. However, they can change how they welcome young people, how they explain collections, how they price and package experiences, how they collaborate with schools, universities and companies, and how they create repeated occasions for participation.

Hayes and Slater (2002) argue that audience development should not be reduced to attracting new visitors through short-term marketing campaigns. A campaign may increase visibility, but it does not necessarily produce durable engagement. This point is central to the thesis. From the museum director's perspective, the objective is not only to generate a spike in young visitors for one exhibition. The strategic question is how to convert occasional visitors into recurring participants, and how to make the museum part of a broader cultural routine.

Audience development also requires segmentation. Treating all young people as one target group risks producing generic initiatives that do not address specific barriers. A university student in the humanities, a young worker with a technical diploma, an AFAM student, a young person from a small town and an occasional tourist may all be under 30, but they do not have the same expectations, constraints or forms of cultural familiarity. Bollo et al. (2017) emphasise that audience development requires organisations to understand different publics and to design strategies that respond to

their needs and behaviours. This supports the analytical approach of the thesis, which uses segmentation and pattern discovery to transform survey evidence into managerial insight.

The contemporary definition of museums also supports this wider role. ICOM (2022) defines museums as institutions that serve society through research, collection, conservation, interpretation and exhibition, while also supporting education, enjoyment, reflection and knowledge sharing. This definition is important because it legitimises a broader understanding of the museum visit. A museum can be a place of learning, but also of sociality, wellbeing, civic reflection and participation. For young audiences, this plurality of functions is especially relevant because it allows the museum to be positioned not only as a site of cultural duty, but also as a meaningful place in everyday life.

The Forum GEM context reinforces this interpretation. The Forum is based on direct dialogue between young people and museum professionals and aims to increase the connection between young audiences and those who work in museums (Forum GEM, 2025). It therefore represents an example of audience development not as top-down communication, but as co-learning. The museum does not simply speak to young people; it listens to them, tests assumptions, discusses barriers and identifies possible solutions. This approach is aligned with the thesis objective of producing recommendations that are not only data-based, but also realistic for museum management.

However, audience development must avoid a common risk. Innovation for young audiences should not be understood as abandoning the identity of museums or replacing cultural depth with entertainment. The managerial task is more subtle: museums need to preserve their educational and cultural authority while designing more accessible paths into that authority. In practical terms, this means making the experience more readable, social, affordable and repeatable without reducing the value of collections.

Managerial implication: audience development should be treated as a strategic function. Museums should not only attract young people to individual events, but construct conditions for access, relevance and long-term relationship.

1.5 Small worlds and youth communities

The final theoretical block introduces the social dimension of museum participation. Cultural participation is often discussed as an individual behaviour, but in practice it is deeply embedded in social networks. Young people rarely make cultural choices in complete isolation. They receive suggestions from friends, classmates, colleagues, family members, teachers, content creators and communities. They also evaluate whether an activity is socially acceptable, enjoyable or worth sharing. For this reason, the thesis needs a social lens to understand how museum interest may circulate.

The small-world perspective is useful as an initial bridge. Travers and Milgram (1969) showed that individuals are connected through surprisingly short chains of relationships. Watts and Strogatz (1998) later formalised the small-world structure as a network configuration in which local clustering coexists with short paths between distant nodes. For museum management, the relevance of this idea is practical: cultural information does not need to reach every young person through institutional communication alone. It can also travel through short, trusted networks, such as student associations, university communities, workplace groups, local cultural circles, AFAM networks and peer groups.

This perspective also helps avoid the abstraction of a generic youth audience. Young people are not a single mass public waiting to receive the same message. They are organised into communities, micro-networks and informal tribes. Some are connected by educational background, some by profession, some by city, some by cultural interests and some by digital communities. Museums that work only with broad demographic categories risk missing how influence actually travels. A more effective approach is to identify the communities through which a museum can become visible, legitimate and repeatable.

Homophily is another important concept. McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook (2001) show that social networks tend to connect people who are similar in age, education, status, interests or lifestyle. This can reinforce cultural participation, but it can also reproduce exclusion. If museum-goers mostly interact with other museum-goers, the habit becomes stronger within already interested groups but does not necessarily reach more distant publics. Conversely, if a young person's peer group rarely talks about

museums, the absence of museum-going can become normalised. For museum directors, the challenge is therefore to build bridges between already engaged groups and less engaged ones.

Social network analysis also emphasises the role of central actors and connectors. Scott (2017) explains that some individuals occupy more central or influential positions in networks. In youth engagement, these actors may be student representatives, youth ambassadors, association leaders, cultural mediators, professors, workplace mentors, local creators or simply trusted friends. Museums can activate these connectors not as superficial influencers, but as credible mediators who help translate the museum experience into the language and interests of their communities.

Empirical research on peer effects supports the relevance of this mechanism. Noirjean et al. (2020) analyse museum attendance among teenagers and show that information about social networks can help identify spillover effects in cultural participation. Although the present thesis does not contain relational network data and therefore cannot estimate direct contagion, this literature justifies the interpretation of museum attendance as a behaviour with a social component. The role of friends, companions, expert peers and trusted communities is not marginal; it can affect whether a museum visit becomes thinkable, desirable and repeatable.

The social dimension is also consistent with the Forum GEM logic. GEM creates a structured dialogue between young delegates, museum directors, companies and institutions. In doing so, it does not simply collect opinions; it activates a networked environment in which museum-related ideas can circulate across universities, workplaces and cultural institutions. For this thesis, GEM is therefore relevant not only as a data source, but also as an example of how youth engagement may be supported through communities and bridges between social worlds.

At this stage, it is important to define the boundary of the argument. This chapter does not claim that social contagion is empirically measured. The available survey data do not identify who is connected to whom, and they do not allow the calculation of network centrality, density or direct peer-to-peer influence. The social-network perspective is used as a theoretical and interpretive lens. It helps explain why museums should work through communities and repeated social reinforcement, but the empirical test of social-

contagion mechanisms will remain limited by the structure of the data. This clarification will be developed further in Chapter 2.

Managerial implication: museums should not communicate only to an abstract under-30 audience. They should identify the communities, connectors and short networks through which young people already organise trust, identity and attention.

1.6 Chapter takeaway: the youth-museum gap as structural, behavioural, and social

This chapter has shown that the youth-museum gap cannot be explained by a single cause. It is structural because young people differ in education, cultural capital, family exposure, geography and access to cultural supply. It is behavioural because museum attendance requires perceived value, time allocation, motivation and the reduction of economic and cognitive costs. It is social because cultural choices are influenced by peers, communities, trusted connectors and the normalisation of museum-going within everyday networks.

The guiding question of the chapter was why museums are not equally attractive, accessible or meaningful to all young people. The answer is that young people do not start from the same position. Some have already acquired the cultural competences and social legitimacy that make museums familiar. Others may recognise that museums have value but still experience barriers that prevent the visit from becoming a repeated practice. These barriers can be economic, but they can also be cognitive, emotional, social and territorial.

For a museum director, the theoretical implication is clear. A generic youth policy is unlikely to be sufficient. Museums need differentiated engagement strategies that consider cultural capital, perceived value, mediation and social embeddedness. In practical terms, this means designing for different starting points: first-time visitors who need orientation, technical profiles who need alternative narratives, students who may respond to learning opportunities, young workers who may need time-efficient and meaningful experiences, and already passionate visitors who can become connectors for wider communities.

This theoretical diagnosis prepares the transition to Chapter 2. If Chapter 1 explains why the youth-museum gap exists, Chapter 2 will translate this diagnosis into a conceptual framework and hypotheses. The next step is to identify the mechanisms that shape youth museum behaviour and the levers that museums can realistically influence. In particular, the thesis will move from unequal cultural participation to the idea of thresholds: the different economic, cognitive, emotional, social and territorial conditions that must be lowered for museum attendance to become more frequent, socially reinforced and repeatable.

Table 1.1. Chapter 1 synthesis for museum management

Diagnosis	**Main theoretical support**	**Risk if ignored**	**Managerial direction**
Young people have unequal familiarity with museums.	Cultural capital and cultural participation literature.	Museums attract mainly already-prepared publics.	Design introductory and mediated access.
Museum-going has monetary and non-monetary costs.	Cultural economics and behavioural consumption.	Low prices alone do not create engagement.	Reduce time, cognitive effort and uncertainty.
Young audiences are not homogeneous.	Audience development and segmentation.	Generic youth initiatives remain weak.	Create differentiated strategies by profile and context.
Participation is socially embedded.	Small-world and network theory.	Institutional communication reaches only limited publics.	Activate communities, ambassadors and partnerships.

Retention requires repeated occasions.	Habit formation and audience development.	Visits remain occasional and tourism-based.	Create routines, recurring formats and post-visit relationships.

Source: Author's elaboration based on the theoretical framework reviewed in Chapter 1.

Chapter managerial takeaway: young audiences are segmented by cultural capital, access, motivations and social environments. Therefore, museums need differentiated engagement strategies rather than one generic youth policy.

Chapter 2 Conceptual Framework: From Thresholds to Social Reinforcement

2.1 Introduction: from behavioural variables to managerial levers

Chapter 1 showed that the relationship between young people and museums is not shaped by one single factor. Museum attendance is affected by unequal cultural capital, perceived value, time constraints, social exposure, territorial opportunity and the ability of the museum to make its experience intelligible. Chapter 2 moves from this diagnosis to a conceptual framework. Its aim is not only to list variables that may explain museum attendance, but to translate those variables into diagnostic dimensions that a museum director can use when deciding how to act.

The guiding question of the chapter is therefore the following: **which mechanisms shape youth museum behaviour, and which levers can museums realistically influence?** This formulation is important because the thesis does not treat young audiences as a passive object of observation. The empirical analysis is expected to support managerial decisions: where are the main thresholds, which groups are closer or more distant from museums, and which forms of mediation, pricing, communication or social reinforcement may reduce the distance between young people and cultural institutions.

The conceptual framework is organised around the idea of thresholds. A threshold is understood as the minimum set of conditions that must be satisfied before a young person decides to visit a museum, feels able to understand the experience, considers it worth sharing with others, and finds a reason to return. These conditions may be economic, cognitive, emotional, social or territorial. A young person with high cultural capital, previous museum experience and friends who already attend exhibitions may need only a small trigger. Conversely, a young worker with limited free time, little familiarity with museum languages, price sensitivity and no companion may require several reinforcing conditions before museum-going becomes a realistic option.

This threshold logic connects the theoretical blocks reviewed in Chapter 1. Cultural economics explains museum attendance as a form of cultural consumption shaped by cost, time, perceived value and accumulated cultural experience (Throsby, 2001). Cultural capital explains why not all young people possess the same familiarity with museum codes, interpretive practices and institutional spaces (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper, 1991). Audience development explains why museums should not passively wait for audiences to appear, but actively design conditions of access, relevance and relationship-building (Kawashima, 2000; Hayes and Slater, 2002). Finally, social reinforcement theories clarify why museum-going may require repeated, socially distributed stimuli rather than one isolated communication action (Granovetter, 1978; Centola and Macy, 2007).

The chapter defines the dependent variable, reframes the independent variables as managerial diagnostic dimensions, introduces the Threshold Model, Complex Contagion Theory and Small Worlds as interpretive lenses, and formulates the hypotheses that guide the empirical analysis. It also clarifies the methodological boundaries of the framework. The available data can reveal associations, profiles and recurring patterns, but they do not contain relational network information and therefore cannot estimate direct peer-to-peer contagion. This distinction is essential for keeping the theoretical argument rigorous and aligned with the empirical design of the thesis.

2.2 Dependent variable: museum visit frequency and youth engagement

The dependent variable of the thesis is museum visit frequency among young people under 30. In the empirical analysis, this variable is operationalised through the number of museum or exhibition visits declared by respondents over a defined period. However, from a museum-management perspective, visit frequency should not be interpreted only as a count. It is also a behavioural signal: it indicates whether the museum remains an exceptional event, a tourism-related occasion, or a more ordinary component of the respondent's cultural life.

This distinction is directly connected to the research question. The thesis does not ask only how museums can attract young audiences once. It asks how museums can attract and retain them. A first visit may be generated by a school trip, a temporary exhibition, a free-entry day, a holiday itinerary or a social invitation. Retention requires something more durable: a positive experience, a perceived sense of competence, a social reason to return, and repeated occasions that progressively lower the threshold of attendance. Museum visit frequency is therefore used as a proxy for the transition from occasional attendance to repeated engagement.

Cultural economics helps explain why this variable is meaningful. Museum attendance produces private benefits, such as learning, pleasure, inspiration and social recognition, but it also contributes to collective cultural value (Throsby, 2001). Unlike ordinary consumption, cultural consumption is cumulative: preferences are shaped by previous exposure, learning-by-consuming mechanisms and habit formation. The more a young person becomes familiar with museum experiences, the easier it may become to recognise value in future visits. Conversely, lack of exposure can reinforce distance, uncertainty and self-exclusion (Bourdieu, 1984; Ateca-Amestoy, 2010).

For this reason, low visit frequency should not be read automatically as lack of interest. It may signal that interest exists but remains blocked by barriers: price, unclear communication, perceived difficulty, lack of companions, territorial distance or weak social legitimacy. Similarly, high visit frequency should not be read only as individual passion; it may reflect favourable conditions of access, education, family background, peer networks or urban cultural supply. Museum visit frequency is therefore both an outcome to be analysed and a symptom of deeper conditions.

The managerial implication is that attendance data become useful only when interpreted together with motivations, barriers, willingness to pay, preferred museum types, visit contexts and social variables. A museum director should distinguish between at least three profiles: young people who are already frequent visitors and may become connectors; young people who are interested but blocked by specific thresholds; and young people who remain distant because museums are not yet meaningful or legitimate within their everyday life.

2.3 Independent variables as diagnostic dimensions for museum management

The independent variables included in the conceptual framework are not treated as purely statistical controls. They are interpreted as diagnostic dimensions that help identify where the youth-museum relationship is blocked and which levers may be activated by museums. The main dimensions are territorial context, education and cultural capital, age and life stage, motivations, perceived barriers, willingness to pay, and social reinforcement. Gender and other demographic descriptors may be used descriptively when useful, but they are not formulated as central hypotheses because the thesis focuses on mechanisms that museums can translate into actionable strategies.

2.3.1 Territorial context: geography, city size and cultural supply

Territorial context matters because cultural participation is influenced by opportunity structures. A young person living in a large city with several museums, temporary exhibitions, public transport, universities and cultural events faces a different environment from a young person living in a small town or in an area where museums are less visible in everyday life. In this thesis, geography and city size are therefore read not only as demographic variables, but as indicators of supply, mobility, density, visibility and symbolic proximity.

From a cultural-economics perspective, access to cultural supply can increase the probability of museum consumption. Nevertheless, territorial access should not be reduced to the mere presence of museums. A museum may be physically close but still cognitively or socially distant. Conversely, a smaller museum can become highly meaningful if it is embedded in schools, universities, companies, tourism flows, local

associations and youth communities. The empirical question is therefore whether territory creates easier activation conditions, and whether these conditions are strong enough to influence museum visit frequency.

For museum management, the territorial variable answers a practical question: does the museum operate in an environment where cultural participation is already normalised, or must it first create visibility and legitimacy? In large cities, museums may need to differentiate themselves within a dense leisure and cultural market. In smaller or lower-supply contexts, they may need to build partnerships that compensate for weaker cultural density.

2.3.2 Education and cultural capital: familiarity with museums

Education is one of the most consolidated predictors of cultural participation. Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital explains why individuals do not approach cultural institutions from the same starting point. Familiarity with artworks, historical narratives, curatorial language and interpretive codes is accumulated through family background, schooling, peer environments and previous experiences (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu, Darbel and Schnapper, 1991).

The field of study is especially relevant in the Forum GEM 2026 research design. Young people from humanities, arts, cultural heritage or AFAM-related backgrounds may have lower cognitive thresholds because museums are aligned with their educational trajectory. Young people from STEM, technical, business or vocational backgrounds may still be interested, but they may require different entry points. This does not imply that museums should focus only on humanistic audiences. On the contrary, it suggests that non-humanistic profiles need stronger mediation and more explicit connections between museum content and their interests.

From the museum director's point of view, education is not only a segmentation variable; it is a mediation problem. If young visitors differ in cultural capital, museums should design different routes into the same collection: introductory paths, short explanations, thematic itineraries for technical audiences, interdisciplinary narratives, and examples that connect heritage with innovation, sustainability, design, work, identity or wellbeing.

2.3.3 Age, life stage and transition to work

The under-30 category is not homogeneous. Students, recent graduates and young workers organise time, money and social relations differently. Students may be closer to educational institutions and cultural discounts, but may have lower disposable income. Young workers may have more income and greater willingness to pay, but less discretionary time and stronger competition from work-related routines, commuting and other leisure activities.

This distinction is relevant for Forum GEM 2026 because the broader research design involves young people connected to the Forum as well as young workers reached through companies. The inclusion of workplaces expands the analytical frame beyond university students and makes it possible to interpret companies as potential channels for cultural participation. Museums can reach young adults not only through schools and universities, but also through welfare programmes, professional training, leadership experiences and wellbeing initiatives.

The managerial implication is that youth engagement cannot stop at student discounts. Museums should design different propositions for different life stages: low-cost access and peer events for students; after-work formats and evening openings for young workers; interdisciplinary experiences for technical profiles; and simple membership or subscription mechanisms for those who have begun to form a habit.

2.3.4 Motivations: learning, inspiration, leisure and sociality

Motivations explain why young people decide to visit a museum when many alternatives are available. Museum studies literature has shown that visitors are driven by different identity-related motivations, including curiosity, learning, social interaction, aesthetic enjoyment, professional interest, emotional recharge and meaningful leisure (Falk and Dierking, 1992; Falk, 2009). For young audiences, the museum becomes more attractive when it combines learning with experience, rather than presenting knowledge only as formal instruction.

In managerial terms, motivation is the positive side of the threshold equation. If motivations are strong, fewer additional incentives may be needed. If motivations are weak or unclear, price reductions alone may not be sufficient. A museum director should therefore ask not only what prevents young people from visiting, but what makes the

museum worth choosing over other activities. The museum must communicate a clear promise: what will the young visitor learn, feel, discover, share or remember?

The Forum GEM evidence already points toward learning, inspiration and social experience as relevant dimensions. These should be interpreted as design requirements. If young people value learning, museums must make learning accessible and engaging. If they value inspiration, museums must provide narrative depth and emotional space. If they value sociality, museums must make group visits, events and shared formats easier to imagine and organise.

2.3.5 Perceived barriers: economic, cognitive, emotional, social and territorial thresholds

Perceived barriers are central to the conceptual framework because they reveal why latent interest may not become behaviour. The most visible barrier is economic: ticket price, transport costs and the perceived trade-off with other forms of leisure. However, cultural participation research suggests that economic barriers are only one part of the problem. Cognitive barriers may be equally relevant: young people may not know what to see, how long the visit will take, how to organise the route or how to interpret the objects on display.

Emotional barriers can include fear of inadequacy, boredom, fatigue, embarrassment or the perception that the museum is not designed for people like them. Social barriers concern the absence of companions, the lack of peer legitimacy, or the difficulty of convincing others to join. Territorial barriers refer to distance, transport, limited cultural supply or weak integration between museums and everyday youth life.

This multidimensional view is essential for museum management. If the problem is only price, the solution is a discount. If the problem is cognitive effort, the solution is mediation. If the problem is emotional distance, the solution is hospitality and confidence-building. If the problem is social isolation, the solution is group activation and community engagement. The thesis therefore uses barriers as indicators of thresholds: each barrier raises the activation effort required before a young person decides to enter or return.

2.3.6 Willingness to pay and perceived value

Willingness to pay is not only an economic variable. It expresses the relationship between expected value and perceived sacrifice. Among young audiences, a low willingness to pay may reflect limited disposable income, but it may also reflect uncertainty about the experience. If a young person is not sure that the museum will be understandable, enjoyable or socially meaningful, even a moderate price can appear excessive. Conversely, respondents may accept a higher price when the experience is perceived as distinctive, well mediated, immersive or unique.

For a museum director, willingness to pay should therefore be interpreted together with perceived value. The relevant question is not only how much a young person can pay, but what kind of experience makes the price legitimate. This has implications for pricing, communication and service design. Youth pricing should be simple and memorable, but it should also be accompanied by clear information about what is included: permanent collections, temporary exhibitions, audioguides, guided tours, events, digital materials or post-visit resources.

In the thesis, willingness to pay functions as a bridge between cultural economics and practical recommendations. It helps identify price-sensitive segments, but it also helps understand whether economic accessibility is the main barrier or only one component of a broader threshold system.

2.3.7 Social reinforcement: friends, peers, content creators and trusted intermediaries

The final diagnostic dimension concerns social reinforcement. Museum-going is often measured as an individual choice, but it is rarely produced in isolation. Friends, classmates, colleagues, partners, families, teachers, content creators and expert companions can influence whether a young person becomes aware of a museum, considers it attractive, understands it as socially acceptable and decides to attend.

It is important to distinguish social influence from empirical network analysis. The Forum GEM survey can identify signals of social mediation, such as friend recommendation, group visits, content circulation, difficulty involving others or the role of expert companions. It does not contain relational data showing who influenced whom. For this reason, the thesis does not claim to estimate social contagion empirically. It uses social reinforcement as an interpretive lens for understanding how museum attendance may be encouraged through repeated and trusted signals.

From a managerial perspective, social reinforcement suggests that museums should not communicate only to isolated individuals. They should activate communities: universities, companies, student associations, AFAM networks, local youth groups, cultural volunteers, alumni communities and informal peer circles. The practical question becomes: through which trusted groups can the museum become visible, understandable and socially legitimate?

Table 2.1. Independent variables as managerial diagnostic dimensions

Variable	What it measures	Managerial question	Possible action
Territory / city size	Access, supply, mobility and local cultural density.	Is the museum visible and reachable in the everyday life of young people?	Local partnerships, transport information, territorial communication, neighbourhood events.
Education / field of study	Cultural capital and familiarity with interpretive codes.	Which audiences need more mediation to feel competent?	Introductory routes, interdisciplinary narratives, guides for first-time visitors.
Age / life stage	Student, graduate or young worker condition.	Which channels can reach young people at this life stage?	University collaborations, workplace welfare, after-work formats.
Motivations	Reasons to visit: learning, inspiration, leisure, sociality.	What makes the museum worth choosing?	Clear experience promise, thematic

			programming, social events.
Barriers	Economic, cognitive, emotional, social and territorial obstacles.	Which thresholds prevent entry or return?	Low prices, clear routes, mediation, group formats, hospitality.
Willingness to pay	Perceived value relative to cost.	What makes the price legitimate for young people?	Simple youth pricing, included services, transparent value proposition.
Social reinforcement	Role of peers, friends, creators and trusted intermediaries.	Who can make museum-going socially legitimate?	Youth ambassadors, communities, peer invitations, post-visit sharing.

Source: Author's elaboration based on the conceptual framework of the thesis and on the literature reviewed in Chapters 1 and 2.

2.4 The Threshold Model: why young people need different activation conditions

The central theoretical axis of Chapter 2 is Granovetter's Threshold Model of collective behaviour. Granovetter (1978) argues that individuals do not all adopt a behaviour under the same conditions. Each person has a threshold, namely a level of contextual or social activation that must be reached before the person decides to act. Although the original model was developed to explain collective behaviour, its logic is highly useful for interpreting youth museum attendance.

Applied to museums, the model suggests that young people differ in the amount of reassurance, motivation and support required before they decide to visit. A young person with strong cultural capital, previous museum experience and friends who attend exhibitions may require only a small trigger, such as the announcement of a temporary

exhibition or a casual invitation. A young person with limited familiarity, low confidence, price sensitivity and no companion may require several simultaneous conditions: a low price, clear information, a short route, a trusted recommendation and the perception that the experience will be understandable and enjoyable.

This model is particularly useful because it avoids blaming young people for non-attendance. It shifts the interpretation from lack of interest to activation conditions. A museum director should not assume that non-visitors are unreachable. Some may have high thresholds because the museum has never been presented to them in a way that feels relevant, safe, affordable or socially meaningful. The managerial task is therefore to identify which thresholds are high for which segments, and then design interventions that reduce them.

The Threshold Model also helps explain why the same policy can have different effects across groups. A discount may be effective for a motivated but price-sensitive young worker, but ineffective for someone who considers the museum incomprehensible. A social media campaign may reach a culturally interested student, but not a young person who needs personal recommendation. A guided route may reduce the cognitive threshold for technical profiles, while an evening event may reduce the social threshold for groups of friends. There is no universal threshold; there are different activation profiles.

This perspective directly informs the hypotheses of the thesis. Education is expected to reduce cognitive thresholds; perceived barriers are expected to increase them; social reinforcement is expected to help overcome them; willingness to pay depends on whether the perceived value justifies the sacrifice; and territory can either reduce or increase the effort required to visit.

2.5 Complex Contagion Theory: why repeated reinforcement matters

The second theoretical lens is Complex Contagion Theory. Centola and Macy (2007) distinguish simple contagions from complex contagions. Simple contagions can spread through a single contact, as happens with basic information. Complex contagions require reinforcement from multiple sources because the behaviour involves

uncertainty, effort, cost, risk or social exposure. Museum-going among young people can often be interpreted through this second logic.

Knowing that a museum exists is not necessarily enough to visit it. A young person may see a post about an exhibition and still decide not to go. The behaviour may require additional confirmation: a friend who recommends it, another friend available to go, a low-cost ticket, a clear explanation of what to see, and a positive story from someone trusted. The challenge for museums is therefore not only to broadcast information, but to create repeated and consistent touchpoints that reinforce both the desirability and the feasibility of the visit.

Complex contagion is especially relevant when the behaviour is socially uncertain. Some young people may fear that museums are too formal, too difficult, too expensive or not aligned with their peer group. A single institutional message may not overcome this perception. Multiple reinforcements from different contexts may be needed: university, workplace, peers, social media, local associations, newsletters, ambassadors and previous visitors. The more these signals converge, the more museum-going can become legitimate and attractive.

For museum management, this theory translates into a practical principle: do not rely on one isolated action. A temporary discount without mediation may fail. A digital post without a social pathway may be ignored. A guided visit without follow-up may not generate return. Engagement should be designed as a sequence: awareness, reassurance, entry, interpretation, sharing and return. This sequence is consistent with the broader narrative of the thesis, which moves from thresholds to routines.

Complex Contagion Theory also supports the distinction between attraction and retention. Attraction may require a sufficient number of stimuli to generate the first visit. Retention requires repeated positive reinforcement after the visit: follow-up communication, recurring formats, membership opportunities, youth events and social occasions that make returning easy and expected. The objective is not only to produce first entry, but to create a cycle of reinforcement that lowers the visitor's threshold over time.

2.6 Small Worlds and youth communities: where museum interest can circulate

The third theoretical lens is the small-world perspective. Small-world networks show that individuals are often connected through short chains of relationships and that information can travel across society through clusters and bridges (Travers and Milgram, 1969; Watts and Strogatz, 1998). For this thesis, the key point is not to conduct a formal network analysis, but to recognise that young people do not receive cultural stimuli in a social vacuum. They belong to micro-worlds: universities, degree courses, companies, student associations, creative communities, local groups, online communities and informal friendship circles.

This logic is close to the idea of consumer tribes. Maffesoli (1996) introduced the concept of neo-tribes to describe forms of belonging based on shared emotions, lifestyles and practices. In marketing literature, tribal approaches emphasise that consumers often construct meaning through communities rather than only through individual preferences (Cova and Cova, 2002). Applied to museums, this means that the under-30 public should not be treated as one abstract audience. It should be approached through real communities that already have internal trust, language, rituals and expectations.

For a museum director, the small-world and tribal perspective is actionable. Instead of asking how to reach all young people, the museum can ask which youth communities are already connected to the museum's themes or territory. A science museum can work with technical institutes, engineering students, start-ups and sustainability communities. An archaeological museum can work with schools, tourism networks and local identity groups. An art museum can work with AFAM students, design schools, creative collectives and cultural associations. A civic museum can work with neighbourhood communities, youth councils and companies located in the territory.

The role of Forum GEM 2026 can also be interpreted through this lens. The Forum creates bridges among young delegates, museum directors, companies, institutions and local networks. It does not only collect opinions; it activates short paths between groups that usually remain separated. This makes it valuable not only as a data collection context, but also as a relational infrastructure for audience development.

The small-world perspective leads to an important managerial recommendation: youth engagement should be community-based. Museums should not only design content for young people; they should also design pathways through which young communities can appropriate, discuss and share the museum experience. This is the point where audience development, social reinforcement and local strategy converge.

Table 2.2. Theoretical lenses and managerial translation

Theoretical lens	**Core idea**	**Interpretation for young museum audiences**	**Managerial translation**
Threshold Model	Individuals act only when their activation threshold is reached.	Young people differ in the conditions required before visiting or returning.	Lower economic, cognitive, emotional, social and territorial thresholds.
Complex Contagion	Some behaviours require reinforcement from multiple sources.	One post or discount may be insufficient for uncertain visitors.	Create repeated touchpoints before, during and after the visit.
Small Worlds / tribes	Influence circulates through short trusted networks and communities.	Youth behaviour spreads through peers, universities, workplaces and local groups.	Work with real youth communities rather than a generic under-30 audience.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Granovetter (1978), Watts and Strogatz (1998), Centola and Macy (2007), Maffesoli (1996), and Cova and Cova (2002).

2.7 Integrated conceptual model: from thresholds to social reinforcement

The conceptual model of the thesis combines individual, contextual, experiential and social dimensions. At the individual level, education, cultural capital, motivations and willingness to pay shape the perceived value of museum attendance. At the contextual level, geography, city size and cultural supply influence the feasibility and visibility of the museum. At the experiential level, barriers and mediation affect whether the visit is perceived as understandable, enjoyable and worth the effort. At the social level, friends, companions, communities and trusted intermediaries influence whether museum-going becomes legitimate, shareable and repeatable.

The model assumes that these dimensions do not operate independently. A highly educated respondent may still visit rarely if the museum offer is geographically distant or socially unsupported. A young worker with technical education may become more interested if the museum is connected to innovation, leadership, science or professional growth. A price-sensitive respondent may accept payment when the perceived value is high and the experience is clearly communicated. A socially uncertain respondent may decide to attend if a trusted friend or expert companion reduces the emotional threshold.

For this reason, the framework is not a linear model in which one variable mechanically explains attendance. It is a decision-support framework. It helps the museum director diagnose which combination of thresholds affects which segment, and which levers can be activated to address them. The empirical analysis will not prove causality; it will identify patterns and associations that can inform practical decisions.

The model can be summarised as follows: cultural capital and territory define the starting position; motivations and perceived value define the attractiveness of the visit; barriers define the intensity of thresholds; social reinforcement defines whether the decision is supported by trusted environments; and repeated positive experiences define whether the first visit can evolve into a routine.

2.8 Hypothesis development

The hypotheses are derived from the theoretical framework and from the research objectives of the thesis. They are formulated as expected patterns rather than causal claims, because the empirical analysis is based on survey data, segmentation and pattern

discovery. Each hypothesis is also translated into its managerial meaning, in line with the museum-facing orientation of the thesis.

2.8.1 Hypothesis 1: territorial opportunity and museum interest

Territorial context can influence museum attendance by shaping both opportunity and familiarity. Regions and urban contexts with a stronger museum offer may create more occasions for young people to encounter museums through school, tourism, local events, university life or peer activities. This does not mean that geography mechanically determines interest, but it can modify the probability that museum-going becomes part of everyday cultural behaviour.

H1: Young people living, studying or working in regions and urban contexts with a stronger museum offer are expected to show higher museum visit frequency and greater museum interest than those located in areas with lower cultural supply.

Managerially, if this hypothesis is supported, museums in high-supply contexts should focus on differentiation, retention and repeatable formats. If the hypothesis is weak or not supported, the thesis will be able to argue that cultural supply alone is insufficient and that mediation, education and social reinforcement may be more important than geography.

2.8.2 Hypothesis 2: lower cultural supply and higher activation thresholds

The second hypothesis focuses on low-supply or less visible territories. Young people in regions with fewer museums, weaker visibility of cultural institutions or lower integration between museums and everyday youth life may have higher activation thresholds. The issue is not necessarily a lack of interest, but a weaker probability of repeated exposure and social normalisation.

H2: Young people living, studying or working in lower-supply or less visible cultural contexts are expected to show lower museum visit frequency or weaker ordinary museum engagement, especially where cultural opportunities are less integrated into youth networks.

From a museum director's perspective, the practical consequence is to avoid passivity. Smaller or less visible museums cannot rely only on institutional heritage value. They need active territorial strategies: collaboration with schools, universities, companies,

local associations, tourism actors and youth communities. In this sense, weaker cultural supply can be partly compensated by stronger relational work.

2.8.3 Hypothesis 3: humanities education and lower cognitive thresholds

The third hypothesis derives from cultural capital theory. Young people who study or have studied humanities, arts, cultural heritage or related fields are expected to have greater familiarity with museum languages, historical interpretation and symbolic value. Their cognitive threshold should therefore be lower than that of young people from scientific, technical, business or other non-humanistic fields.

H3: Young people with a humanities, arts or cultural heritage educational background are expected to show higher museum visit frequency and stronger museum interest than young people from other educational areas.

This hypothesis has an important managerial interpretation. If confirmed, it does not mean that museums should concentrate only on humanistic audiences. Instead, it shows where mediation is most needed. Technical and scientific profiles may be attracted through different narratives: science and technology connections, material culture, design, innovation, sustainability, restoration techniques, leadership metaphors and links between artistic and scientific knowledge.

2.8.4 Hypothesis 4: perceived barriers and reduced museum attendance

The fourth hypothesis concerns barriers. The theoretical framework suggests that barriers increase activation thresholds. Economic barriers raise the cost of entry; cognitive barriers raise the effort required to understand; emotional barriers reduce confidence; social barriers reduce legitimacy; territorial barriers reduce feasibility.

H4: The higher the number or intensity of perceived barriers, the lower the expected museum visit frequency among young respondents.

This hypothesis is essential for practical recommendations. If the empirical analysis identifies cognitive or emotional barriers as particularly relevant, the museum cannot limit its response to discounts. It must improve orientation, labels, mediation, visit routes, audioguides, welcome services and the overall readability of the experience. If social barriers emerge, group formats and peer activation become more important.

2.8.5 Hypothesis 5: social reinforcement and higher probability of visiting or returning

The fifth hypothesis derives from complex contagion and small-world theories. Young people may be more likely to visit museums when they receive reinforcement from friends, peers, trusted intermediaries or communities. The presence of companions can reduce emotional and social thresholds, while recommendations can reduce uncertainty about the value of the experience.

H5: Young people exposed to social reinforcement, such as friend recommendation, group visits, expert companions or community-based invitations, are expected to show stronger museum engagement than those who experience museum-going as an isolated individual choice.

The hypothesis must be interpreted carefully. The thesis does not estimate direct peer-to-peer contagion. It uses social variables as indicators of social mediation. If patterns are consistent with this hypothesis, the managerial recommendation will be to design engagement through networks and repeated touchpoints rather than only through institutional communication.

2.8.6 Hypothesis 6: willingness to pay depends on perceived value and mediation

The final hypothesis concerns willingness to pay. Cultural economics suggests that willingness to pay depends not only on income, but also on expected utility and perceived value. Young people may accept paying when the museum visit is perceived as distinctive, understandable, well mediated or socially meaningful. Conversely, even a moderate price may discourage attendance when the experience is uncertain or cognitively demanding.

H6: Willingness to pay is expected to be higher among young people who perceive museums as valuable, understandable and experience-rich, and lower among those who associate museums with high barriers or low expected relevance.

The managerial implication is that price strategy should be connected to value strategy. Youth discounts are important, but museums should also make explicit what the ticket includes and why the experience is worth the time and money invested.

Table 2.3. Hypotheses and managerial implications

Hypothesis	Expected pattern	Main theory	Managerial implication
H1	Higher cultural supply / large-city contexts are associated with higher museum engagement.	Cultural economics; audience development.	Adapt strategy to territorial opportunity and competition.
H2	Lower-supply territories are associated with weaker engagement or higher thresholds.	Threshold Model; territorial access.	Increase visibility and partnerships in weaker cultural contexts.
H3	Humanities / arts education is associated with higher visit frequency.	Cultural capital.	Design mediation for non-humanistic and technical audiences.
H4	Perceived barriers are negatively associated with visit frequency.	Threshold Model.	Reduce economic, cognitive, emotional, social and territorial barriers.
H5	Social reinforcement is associated with stronger museum engagement.	Complex contagion; small worlds.	Activate peer groups, ambassadors, universities, workplaces and communities.
H6	Willingness to pay increases when perceived value and mediation are stronger.	Cultural economics; perceived value.	Connect pricing to experience quality and transparent value proposition.

Source: Author's elaboration based on the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2.

2.9 Methodological boundaries of the conceptual framework

Before moving to the methodology, it is necessary to clarify what this conceptual framework does and does not claim. The thesis does not measure social contagion empirically. The available survey data describe respondents' individual characteristics, behaviours, motivations and perceptions; they do not contain a relational matrix showing direct connections among respondents. Therefore, it is not possible to calculate network centrality, density, clustering, structural holes or direct peer-to-peer influence.

The theories of contagion, thresholds and small worlds are used as interpretive frameworks. They help explain why museum-going, although measured at the individual level, can be socially mediated. The survey can capture signs of mediation, for example the importance of friends, group visits, content creators, expert companions or difficulty involving others. These signs do not prove contagion, but they are theoretically meaningful because they indicate that the decision to visit a museum may depend on social reinforcement.

The empirical analysis will therefore remain descriptive and exploratory. Its objective is to identify patterns that can support museum decisions, not to produce causal inference. This is consistent with the overall nature of the thesis: the goal is to transform Forum GEM 2026 data into actionable museum intelligence. The framework provides the theoretical structure needed to interpret those patterns responsibly.

This caution is also important for managerial use. A museum director should not expect the analysis to reveal deterministic laws of youth behaviour. Instead, the analysis can identify probable thresholds, relevant segments and promising levers. Good museum strategy will then require experimentation, monitoring and adaptation. Gender and other demographic descriptors may be considered when they help describe the sample, but the main explanatory focus remains on variables that museums can translate into action: access, mediation, perceived value, barriers and social reinforcement.

2.10 Chapter takeaway: which levers can museums influence?

Chapter 2 has developed the conceptual framework that connects the research question to the empirical analysis. The chapter started from the idea that museum visit frequency should be interpreted as a signal of youth engagement, not merely as a count of visits. It then reframed the independent variables as managerial diagnostic dimensions: territory, education, age and life stage, motivations, perceived barriers, willingness to pay and social reinforcement.

The main theoretical contribution of the chapter is the integration of a threshold-to-reinforcement logic. The Threshold Model explains why young people require different activation conditions before visiting. Complex Contagion Theory explains why isolated stimuli may not be enough. Small Worlds and tribal perspectives explain where influence, trust and legitimacy can circulate. Together, these lenses make it possible to interpret museum attendance not as a purely individual choice, but as a behaviour shaped by conditions that museums can partly redesign.

The managerial answer emerging from the chapter is clear: museums can influence youth attendance by lowering thresholds, multiplying reinforcing touchpoints and working through real youth communities rather than only through generic institutional communication. In practical terms, this means designing affordable, understandable, socially supported and repeatable experiences. Chapter 3 will explain how the Forum GEM 2026 data are collected, prepared and visualised to test these expectations and transform them into decision-support evidence for museums.

Chapter 3 Methodology: GEM Data as Museum Intelligence

The previous chapters clarified the theoretical and conceptual basis of the thesis. Chapter 1 interpreted the youth-museum gap as a structural, behavioural and social problem, while Chapter 2 translated this diagnosis into a conceptual framework centred on thresholds, reinforcement and youth communities. Chapter 3 explains how the empirical material produced within Forum Giovani e Musei 2026 is transformed into structured evidence for museum-management decisions.

The chapter is intentionally written as a methodological bridge. Its role is not merely to describe a dataset or a Power BI workflow, but to clarify how evidence is produced, cleaned, interpreted and translated into managerial intelligence. From the perspective of a museum director, the relevant methodological question is: **can these data help me understand which young audiences are closer or more distant, which barriers prevent them from visiting or returning, and which interventions may realistically lower those barriers?**

The analytical approach is pragmatic, descriptive and exploratory. The thesis does not aim to estimate causal effects, to build predictive models, or to measure peer-to-peer contagion through relational network data. Instead, it combines survey evidence, qualitative debate, open comments, segmentation and visual analytics to identify recurring patterns, meaningful contrasts and actionable audience profiles. This choice is coherent with the overall objective of the thesis: **producing decision-support evidence for museums that wish to attract and retain young audiences**.

3.1 Forum GEM 2026 as an applied mixed-methods research setting

Forum Giovani e Musei (GEM) constitutes the empirical and participatory setting of the research. GEM is not a conventional survey campaign. It is an intergenerational dialogue platform that connects a qualified representation of young people with senior figures of the Italian museum system, with the objective of increasing young people's interest in places of culture (Forum GEM, 2025). The official documentation defines the initiative as a real exchange rather than a simulation, based on the principle of speaking *with* young people rather than merely *about* young people (Forum GEM, 2025).

This distinction is methodologically important. The data analysed in the thesis were generated within a process in which young delegates, museum directors, institutions and companies were already involved in a structured conversation about museum innovation. The Forum therefore provides more than a dataset: it provides a mixed-methods environment in which quantitative survey evidence is discussed, challenged and interpreted through qualitative dialogue.

The 2025-2026 edition of GEM is articulated into four phases: training, survey investigation, debate and final public sharing. The training phase develops competences in problem framing, design thinking and stakeholder management. The survey phase collects anonymous evidence on the relationship between young people and museums. The debate phase brings young delegates and museum directors together around real problems from the museum sector. The final session at the Museo di Roma, Palazzo Braschi, is designed to share results and discuss possible directions for action (Forum GEM, 2025).

For the thesis, this structure justifies a pragmatic mixed-methods interpretation. The qualitative component is not limited to the open comments included in the survey. It also includes the workshop and panel debate environment, where young people and museum professionals discuss problems, interpretations and solutions. The quantitative component is represented by the national survey and by the author's subsequent data preparation, segmentation, dashboard construction and visual analysis.

Table 3.1. Methodological role of Forum GEM 2026 in the thesis

Component	Role in Forum GEM 2026	Role in the thesis
Training	Prepares selected young delegates to frame complex problems and interact with museum stakeholders.	Explains why young participants are not passive respondents, but informed contributors to the research setting.
Survey investigation	Collects anonymous evidence on the relationship between under-30 respondents and museums.	Provides the quantitative microdata used for segmentation, cross-tabulation and dashboard analysis.

Debate with museum directors	Creates a focus-group-like setting in which interpretations and solutions are discussed.	Supports mixed-methods triangulation and helps translate patterns into managerial language.
Final public sharing	Presents results and opens the discussion to institutions, companies and museum professionals.	Connects empirical evidence to recommendations for museum management and audience development.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Forum GEM 2025-2026 documentation.

3.2 Progressive co-construction across Forum editions

The 2025-2026 research design should be understood as the result of progressive co-construction rather than as an isolated questionnaire. Across the first three editions, Forum GEM gradually moved from direct dialogue and practical experimentation toward a broader empirical system. This evolution is methodologically relevant because it shows how the survey was shaped by previous interaction with young people and museum professionals.

The first edition helped frame youth engagement as a practical museum-management problem. The most important insights concerned low-threshold access, affordability and the possibility of making museums part of young people's everyday presence in the city. The second edition strengthened the evidence-based dimension of the Forum by combining focus-group-like debate with an anonymous survey distributed through the delegates' network. The third edition extended this model by involving companies and by reaching both students and young workers.

This progressive design is coherent with the thesis argument. If the objective is to understand how museums can lower thresholds and build routines, the research process itself must not rely only on abstract assumptions about young people. It must progressively listen, test, quantify and reinterpret. The Forum's evolution therefore reinforces the methodological value of the thesis: the empirical analysis is grounded in

a participatory context, but the analytical contribution is developed independently through the author's Business Intelligence work.

Table 3.2. Evolution of Forum GEM as an empirical and managerial setting

Forum edition	Main methodological development	Relevance for the thesis
First edition	Youth engagement emerges as a concrete museum-management issue involving affordability, access and low-threshold presence.	Frames the problem as practical and managerial, not only cultural or educational.
Second edition	Focus-group-like dialogue is combined with an anonymous survey distributed through the young delegates network.	Shows the move from opinions alone to evidence-based inquiry and highlights learning, price and cognitive accessibility.
Third edition	The survey expands to more than 1,600 under-30 respondents through delegate networks and 16 partner companies.	Provides the empirical base of the thesis and introduces the comparison between students and young workers.

Source: Author's synthesis based on Forum GEM materials, GEM25 survey results and the Forum GEM 2026 final presentation.

3.3 Research design and data sources

The empirical base of the thesis is composed of two complementary data-collection channels. The first channel is connected to the Forum delegates and their networks. In this case, the questionnaire was distributed through young people selected or involved in the Forum, who helped circulate it among peers, universities and youth communities. This channel is relevant because it reaches students and young adults who are close to university settings, student representation and cultural discussion networks.

The second channel consists of young workers reached through companies that participated in Forum GEM 2026. The final Forum material reports that the national survey involved 1,610 under-30 respondents: 816 questionnaires were collected through the young delegates' network, while 794 were collected through a panel of 16 companies that distributed the questionnaire among their young employees (Forum GEM, 2026).

This dual design is methodologically valuable because it allows the analysis to observe two youth conditions that are often treated separately: students and young workers. Students may be more easily reached through universities, peer groups and cultural-learning initiatives. Young workers may be more sensitive to time constraints, workplace welfare, after-work formats, company partnerships and professional-development narratives. From a museum-management perspective, the distinction is essential because the same museum strategy is unlikely to work equally well for both groups.

The survey does not constitute a probability sample of the entire Italian under-30 population. It is a large, strategically relevant sample produced through the Forum ecosystem and through partner companies. Therefore, the analysis should be interpreted as structured pattern discovery within an applied research setting, not as statistically representative measurement of all young people in Italy.

3.4 Survey structure and analytical variables

The questionnaire was designed to observe both behaviours and perceptions. This distinction is essential because museum engagement is not exhausted by the number of annual visits. A young person may visit museums rarely but still consider them valuable; another may visit mainly during holidays; another may be willing to return if the experience becomes clearer, cheaper, more social or more relevant to personal interests.

The central dependent variable is museum visit frequency, understood as the number or frequency of museum or exhibition visits declared by respondents. In the empirical analysis, this variable is interpreted as a behavioural indicator of youth museum engagement. However, visit frequency is never read in isolation. It is analysed together with education, age, city size, student or worker status, preferred museum types, motivations, barriers, willingness to pay and signs of social mediation.

The independent variables are selected because each one can be translated into a possible museum decision. Territory and city size indicate access conditions and cultural supply. Education and field of study act as proxies for cultural capital and mediation needs. Motivations indicate what the museum experience must deliver in order to be perceived as valuable. Barriers show where thresholds arise. Willingness to pay measures the relationship between perceived value and economic sacrifice. Social variables reveal whether museum-going is supported or discouraged by friends, peers, expert companions and trusted intermediaries.

3.5 Data preparation, cleaning and transformation

The raw survey data were exported from the online questionnaire platform in spreadsheet format and then prepared for analysis. This phase is central because data quality determines the credibility of the subsequent visualisations. In a museum-facing methodology, cleaning is not a purely technical step: it is the moment in which raw responses become reliable evidence for decision-making.

The first operation consisted of checking the structure of the export. Each row corresponded to one respondent, while each column corresponded to a question or metadata field. Non-analytical columns were excluded from the working dataset. The remaining variables were renamed or documented so that the same question could be interpreted consistently throughout the analysis. Multiple-choice answers were recoded when necessary to support filtering, aggregation and visual comparison.

The second operation concerned consistency. Missing values, duplicated entries, incomplete responses and inconsistent categorical labels were inspected before dashboard construction. Where possible, categories were standardised to avoid artificial fragmentation. For example, similar educational fields or geographical labels were grouped into coherent analytical categories. This supports the thesis objective of helping museum managers detect meaningful segments rather than producing too many small and unstable categories.

The third operation concerned analytical exclusions. In selected analyses, AFAM students and Passionate respondents are treated separately or excluded in order to avoid distorting patterns for the general under-30 audience. AFAM students represent a highly

specific cultural profile, while Passionate respondents are defined as those who report visiting museums more than 12 times per year. These profiles are managerially important, but they should not be allowed to hide the thresholds faced by ordinary or occasional young visitors.

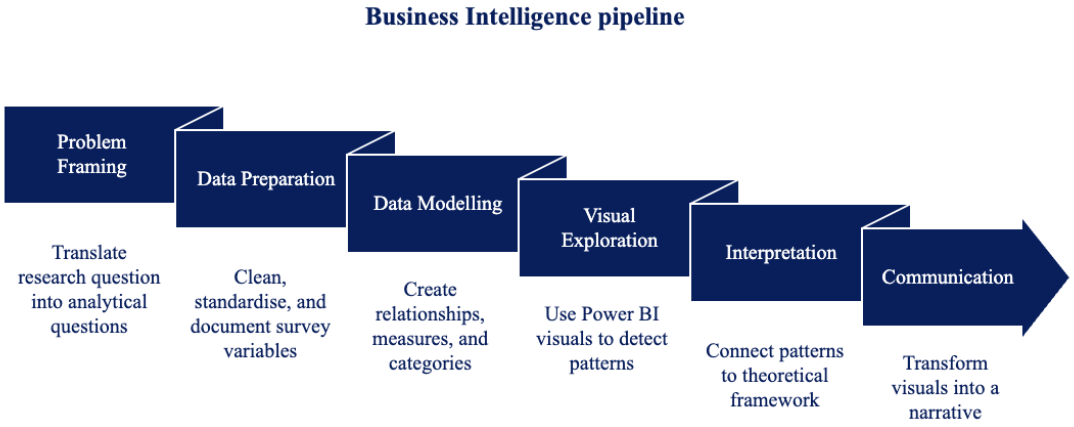
The fourth operation concerned open-ended comments. Free-text material was cleaned separately from structured variables. Comments that were empty, irrelevant, too generic or not meaningfully classifiable were removed from the qualitative coding base. As a result, 166 collected comments were reduced to 135 meaningfully classifiable comments. This distinction is reported transparently because the qualitative analysis is based only on comments capable of supporting interpretation.

3.6 Business Intelligence pipeline: from raw data to decision support

The analysis follows a Business Intelligence logic. In this thesis, Business Intelligence is understood as the organised process through which data are collected, cleaned, modelled, visualised and interpreted in order to support decisions. This approach is appropriate because the research does not require a black-box predictive algorithm; it requires a transparent system that allows museum stakeholders to observe differences among youth segments and discuss them in an accessible way.

The pipeline can be described through six main phases: problem framing, data preparation, modelling, visual exploration, interpretation and communication. These phases are not strictly linear. As in most applied analytics projects, insights emerging from visualisation may require the analyst to return to the data model, revise categories, create new measures or simplify visual outputs. The process is therefore iterative rather than mechanical.

Figure 3.1. Business Intelligence pipeline adopted in the thesis



Source: Author's elaboration based on the Business Intelligence pipeline adopted in the thesis.

In the modelling phase, Power BI was used as the main analytical environment. Power Query supported cleaning and transformation, while the data model allowed the creation of reusable categories and measures. This choice is coherent with the aim of the thesis because Power BI makes it possible to connect descriptive statistics with interactive dashboards. Compared to a static spreadsheet, it allows the analyst to apply filters and segmentations dynamically, which is particularly useful when the same behavioural variable must be read across education, age, city size, respondent channel or museum type.

The analytical model remains deliberately descriptive. The thesis does not use machine learning, regression modelling or causal inference as the primary method. This is a deliberate methodological choice rather than a weakness. The research question is managerial and exploratory: it asks which patterns can guide museum innovation, not whether a single variable has a statistically isolated causal effect. For this reason, descriptive Business Intelligence is more coherent with the practical objective of the thesis than a technically complex model that would be less transparent to non-technical stakeholders.

3.7 Visualisation and pattern discovery strategy

Visualisation is the core methodological tool used to transform data into museum intelligence. The purpose of a visual dashboard is not to make the analysis decorative, but to make patterns visible, comparable and interpretable. Effective visual communication reduces cognitive effort and supports decision-making by allowing stakeholders to identify what deserves attention (Tufte, 2001; Few, 2006; Knaflic, 2015).

The visualisation strategy follows the logic of progressive diagnosis. First, aggregate charts describe the overall sample. Second, comparative visuals show how key indicators change across groups. Third, segmentation views allow the analyst to isolate specific profiles, such as students, workers, diploma holders, AFAM students, respondents from large cities, or highly frequent visitors. Fourth, qualitative coding tables help interpret why certain quantitative differences matter.

Bar charts and stacked bar charts are used to compare distributions across categories. They are particularly useful for variables such as educational title, region, age group, preferred museum type and declared barriers. From a museum director's perspective, these visuals answer the question: which differences are large enough to justify differentiated action?

Matrix visuals and heatmaps are used to identify intersections between variables. For example, they can show how museum attendance varies by age and education, or how preferred museum types differ across respondent profiles. These visuals are appropriate when the managerial question is not only whether one group visits more, but where specific combinations of characteristics produce meaningful patterns.

Radar plots are used to compare multidimensional profiles. In the thesis, they are particularly useful when several indicators must be read together, for example museum-type preferences, average cultural-consumption levels, or motivational dimensions across segments. A radar plot makes it possible to observe whether a segment is balanced across several dimensions or strongly oriented toward specific interests. For museum management, this is useful because engagement strategies rarely depend on one variable alone. A technical-profile young worker, for instance, may not be highly interested in art museums but may show stronger affinity with scientific museums,

immersive experiences or industrial-heritage formats. Radar plots help make these profile differences visually immediate.

Slicers and filters are an essential component of the dashboard logic. They allow the same visual to be read under different conditions. For example, the analyst can observe whether a pattern remains stable when filtering by age group, respondent channel or city size. This interactive process is important because many youth-related museum issues are not visible in aggregate averages. Aggregation can hide differences between students and workers, between graduates and diploma holders, or between museum enthusiasts and occasional visitors.

3.8 Segmentation as a museum-management method

Segmentation is the methodological choice that most directly connects data analysis to museum strategy. A museum director cannot act on a generic category such as young people. The under-30 population contains students, workers, graduates, diploma holders, AFAM students, humanities profiles, technical profiles, occasional visitors, frequent visitors and young people who mainly visit museums while travelling. Each group may require a different threshold-lowering strategy.

The analysis therefore uses both predefined and interpretive segments. Predefined segments are already present in the dataset: age, gender, region, city size, education, student or worker condition, respondent channel and educational title. Interpretive segments are constructed from behavioural evidence: Passionate visitors, occasional visitors, holiday visitors, price-sensitive respondents, mediation-seeking respondents and profiles oriented toward specific museum types.

The qualitative dimension is integrated in two ways. First, the panel and workshop debate environment provides a focus-group-like space in which young delegates and museum directors discuss problems, interpretations and possible solutions. Second, the open-ended survey comments are coded as small data. The purpose is not to conduct a full qualitative grounded-theory study, but to extract recurring themes that explain the numerical patterns and translate them into operational language.

The coding procedure follows four steps. First, all comments are read and non-classifiable responses are removed. Second, each meaningful comment is assigned to one or more macro-themes. Third, macro-themes are compared with quantitative findings. Fourth, selected anonymised examples are used in Chapter 4 to clarify how young people describe museum experiences in their own words. The procedure remains conservative: comments support interpretation, but they are not used to produce unsupported generalisations.

The preliminary coding logic groups the 135 classifiable comments into three main families: economic accessibility, clarity and mediation, and experience design. Economic accessibility includes comments on high ticket prices, student discounts, free-entry initiatives and the relationship between price and perceived value. Clarity and mediation include comments on confusing exhibition routes, insufficient guidance, need for audioguides, concise explanations and passionate guides. Experience design includes comments on immersive installations, interactive elements, evening openings, gaming, events, comfort and social spaces.

3.9 Data quality, ethics and methodological limitations

The methodology has several strengths, but also clear boundaries. The first limitation concerns sampling. The dataset was collected through Forum-related networks and partner companies, not through random sampling. This means that the sample may overrepresent young people who are more educated, more connected to institutional networks, more willing to answer a cultural survey or more exposed to Forum communication channels. The results therefore cannot be generalised mechanically to all Italian young people.

The second limitation concerns self-reported behaviour. Museum attendance, willingness to pay, motivations and perceived barriers are declared by respondents rather than observed through ticketing data or behavioural tracking. Self-reported data are useful for understanding perceptions and attitudes, but they may contain recall bias, social desirability bias or approximation. This is particularly relevant for annual museum visit frequency, which respondents may estimate rather than calculate precisely.

The third limitation concerns causality. The analysis can identify associations and contrasts, but it cannot establish causal effects. If graduates visit museums more frequently than diploma holders, the dashboard can show the pattern, but it cannot prove that the degree itself causes higher attendance. Other factors may intervene, including family background, city of residence, income, peer networks and previous school experiences. The empirical chapter therefore interprets patterns cautiously and connects them to the theoretical framework rather than presenting them as causal proof.

The fourth limitation concerns social contagion. The thesis uses Complex Contagion Theory, the Threshold Model and Small Worlds as interpretive frameworks, but the dataset does not contain relational network data. It does not identify who is connected to whom, nor does it observe actual peer-to-peer transmission over time. Therefore, the analysis cannot calculate centrality, density, clustering coefficients or direct contagion effects. Social variables are treated as signals of mediation and reinforcement, not as formal network measures.

The fifth limitation concerns dashboard interpretation. Visual analytics can make patterns more accessible, but it can also create the impression that a pattern is stronger than it is. For this reason, charts are interpreted together with sample size, filtering choices and qualitative evidence. The dashboard is a tool for disciplined exploration, not a substitute for critical reasoning.

Ethical precautions are integrated into the analytical process. Data are analysed at aggregate level, small groups are not overexposed, and individual respondents are not identifiable in the thesis. Qualitative comments are used only when relevant and sufficiently anonymised. This stance is consistent with the broader aim of the thesis: using data to improve museum decisions while respecting the young people who produced those data.

3.10 Chapter takeaway: from data to museum intelligence

This chapter has shown how Forum GEM 2026 data are transformed into useful managerial evidence. The methodology begins from an applied mixed-methods setting, recognises the progressive co-construction of the Forum across editions, organises the survey into structured variables, cleans and prepares the dataset, builds a Power BI-

based analytical model, and interprets patterns through segmentation and qualitative coding.

The main methodological contribution is the creation of a transparent decision-support pipeline. Forum GEM provides the empirical and participatory context in which the data were generated; the thesis develops the independent analytical work: data preparation, cleaning, transformation, dashboard construction, segmentation, cross-tabulation, visual interpretation and managerial translation.

The next chapter will therefore not simply report charts. It will interpret dashboard outputs as evidence for museum management, distinguishing between attraction and retention, between economic and cognitive barriers, and between individual interest and social reinforcement. Managerial takeaway: the methodology produces decision-support evidence, not causal proof.

Chapter 4 Empirical Evidence and Managerial Interpretation

4.1 Chapter overview: from descriptive evidence to museum decisions

This chapter presents the empirical core of the thesis and discusses the evidence generated through the Forum GEM 2026 analytical pipeline. Following the methodology developed in Chapter 3, the objective is not to produce causal inference, but to identify behavioural patterns, relevant contrasts and actionable segments through descriptive Business Intelligence, dashboard interpretation and qualitative coding of open-ended responses. The guiding question is managerial: what do the data reveal about young people's motivations, barriers, profiles and behavioural patterns, and what should a museum director learn from this evidence?

The empirical evidence is therefore not treated as a neutral list of percentages. It is interpreted as a decision-support base for museums. For a museum director, the key issue is not only whether young people visit museums, but under which conditions they enter, understand, enjoy, share and return. The chapter translates the theoretical framework developed in Chapters 1 and 2 into an interpretation of youth museum engagement that can inform practical choices.

The main argument is that youth museum attendance cannot be reduced to a single explanatory factor. Geography, education, age, employment status, price sensitivity, motivations and perceived barriers all matter, but they matter through interaction. The most relevant managerial insight is that many young people recognise the educational value of museums, yet this recognition does not automatically become repeated attendance. The transition from interest to routine depends on affordability, cognitive accessibility, social reinforcement and the capacity of museums to become meaningful in ordinary time, not only during holidays or school-related experiences.

Managerial takeaway. Chapter 4 should not be read as a statistical appendix, but as the evidence base from which the final Threshold-to-Routine framework is derived. The museum director's question is: **which thresholds prevent young people from becoming regular audiences, and which levers can the museum influence?**

4.2 Sample, analytical base, and segmentation logic

The empirical base combines two complementary data-collection channels. First, the questionnaire was distributed through the network of the Forum GEM young delegates, generating 816 responses. Second, 16 partner companies disseminated the same questionnaire among their employees under 30, generating 794 responses. The resulting dataset consists of 1,610 valid questionnaires. This scale is relevant for an exploratory study of Italian youth museum behaviour because it includes both students and young workers and reflects the intergenerational and cross-sector logic of the Forum GEM initiative (Forum GEM, 2026).

The hybrid architecture of the dataset is one of the most important features of the empirical design. The student component captures respondents who are still embedded in educational and peer-based environments. The company component captures young workers who may no longer be reached through traditional university channels and whose museum behaviour is more strongly filtered by working routines, time constraints and value-for-money considerations. For museum management, this distinction is crucial: youth engagement cannot be understood only through students, because early-career workers are already part of the under-30 audience and require different engagement conditions.

From a geographical perspective, the dataset is not evenly distributed across Italian regions. Lazio and Lombardia are the most visible regional poles, while some territories are less represented and Molise is not present in the analytical base. This point requires caution. Regional differences can be discussed as descriptive patterns, but they cannot be interpreted as fully representative of all Italian youth. This limitation is consistent with the exploratory Business Intelligence orientation of the research: the aim is to detect meaningful behavioural regularities and managerial signals, not to claim demographic proportionality.

A further analytical choice concerns the separation of two special profiles from the ordinary analytical base: AFAM students and Passionate respondents. AFAM students are enrolled in Academies of Fine Arts and Conservatories, while Passionate respondents are those who declare more than 12 museum visits per year, corresponding to more than one visit per month. These groups are not removed because they are unimportant; they are separated because they display structurally distinctive behaviour. Once these groups are treated separately where specified, the operational dashboard subset used for ordinary comparisons is organised into three clusters: Student Under25, Worker Under25 and Worker Over25.

Table 4.1. Analytical segmentation used in Chapter 4

Segment	**Definition / size**	**Interpretive meaning**	**Managerial relevance**
AFAM students	157 students enrolled in Academies of Fine Arts and Conservatories	Highly culturally proximate segment with stronger ordinary relation to museums	Useful for co-design, early testing, and specialised cultural formats
Passionate respondents	73 respondents declaring more than	High-frequency visitors with	Potential ambassadors and

	12 museum visits per year	consolidated cultural habit	benchmark for retention strategies
Student Under25	n = 520 in the operational dashboard segmentation	Young respondents embedded in educational and peer networks	Promising segment for peer diffusion and university partnerships
Worker Under25	n = 686 in the operational dashboard segmentation	Young workers with fragmented leisure time but still high cultural reachability	Requires clear value, flexible formats, and workplace bridges
Worker Over25	n = 174 in the operational dashboard segmentation	Older under-30 workers with stronger price and time sensitivity	Requires value-for-money clarity, routines, and low-friction access

Source: Author's elaboration on Forum GEM 2026 microdata, after exclusion of AFAM students and Passionate respondents where specified.

Within the filtered dashboard subset used for some comparisons, the average annual museum visit frequency is 3.46. This number is informative because it describes the ordinary relationship with museums after separating the most specialised and most highly engaged cases. The distribution is right-skewed: most respondents are concentrated between one and five visits per year, while a smaller group reports higher frequencies and a visible group declares zero visits. The museum is therefore not absent from the horizon of young respondents, but neither is it a routine practice for the majority.

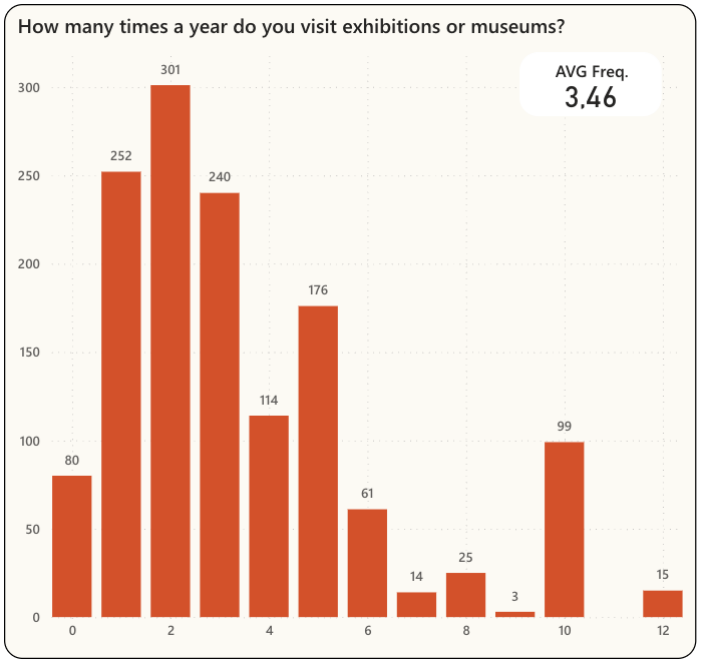


Figure 4.1 – Annual museum visit frequency distribution, excluding AFAM and Passionate respondents

Source: Author's Power BI elaboration on Forum GEM 2026 microdata, after exclusion of AFAM students and Passionate respondents.

Managerial takeaway. The youth audience should not be treated as a homogeneous under-30 category. Museums should distinguish between specialised users, occasional users, student networks, young workers and less culturally familiar profiles. Without segmentation, youth engagement risks becoming a generic communication exercise rather than a targeted management strategy.

4.3 Who visits more? Education, city size, and the limits of geography

The first major empirical result concerns the combined role of educational attainment and urban context. In the dashboard matrix, average museum visit frequency is crossed with educational title or age group and large-city status. Large city is operationalised as residence in an Italian regional capital, while non-large city includes all other municipalities. The matrix compares three profiles: diploma holders, graduates over 25, and graduates under 25.

How many times a year do you visit exhibitions or museums?

Title/Age	Grande città	NO Grande Città	**Media Tot**
Diploma	2,65	2,72	**2,70**
Laurea Over25	4,26	3,35	**3,81**
Laurea Under25	4,51	3,10	**3,44**
Media Tot	**4,08**	**3,11**	**3,46**

Figure 4.2 – Museum visit frequency by educational profile and large-city status

Source: Author's Power BI elaboration on Forum GEM 2026 microdata, after exclusion of AFAM students and Passionate respondents.

The pattern is clear. The urban effect exists, but it is not uniform across educational groups. The difference between large and non-large cities is minimal among diploma holders, whereas it becomes more visible among graduates, especially young graduates. This suggests that the large urban context does not automatically increase museum attendance for all young people. Rather, it amplifies pre-existing cultural predispositions. Where educational capital is already higher, the city provides a denser and more usable cultural ecosystem; where educational capital is weaker, physical proximity alone does not produce a comparable increase in attendance.

Educational title emerges as a stronger discriminating variable than geography alone. The Forum GEM final report states that diploma holders attend museums approximately 40% less than graduates (Forum GEM, 2026). This result refines the geographical hypothesis developed in Chapter 2. Geography matters, but less as an autonomous determinant than as a contextual factor interacting with education, accessibility, cultural infrastructure, and symbolic familiarity. A respondent may live in a region with a rich museum supply and still attend rarely if the museum remains difficult to decode, socially distant, or weakly connected to their ordinary routines.

This result is coherent with the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 1. From the perspective of cultural capital, a university trajectory does not merely provide formal credentials; it also reinforces familiarity with cultural codes, interpretive confidence,

and symbolic legitimacy in institutional cultural spaces (Bourdieu, 1984). Large cities then make these resources more actionable by offering a denser supply of museums, exhibitions, events, and peer-based opportunities. The city does not create museum demand from nothing; it lowers the practical and symbolic cost of activating an already structured cultural disposition.

Managerial takeaway. A museum director should not assume that being located in a culturally dense area is sufficient to attract young audiences. Urban supply becomes effective when it is combined with education, mediation, visibility, and social activation. For less culturally familiar groups, the museum must actively reduce cognitive and symbolic barriers, not only physical distance.

4.4 Cluster-based behavioural patterns: ordinary, specialised, and context-dependent users

The cluster-based analysis deepens the previous result by showing that museum behaviour is segmented by life stage, educational status, work status and consumption context. The purpose of clustering is not to label young people permanently, but to identify groups for which museums may need different activation conditions. In managerial terms, clusters help answer the question: which young audiences are closer to the museum, which are distant, and which require specific forms of mediation?

AFAM students are exceptional not only because they are enrolled in cultural or artistic training paths, but because their relationship with museums is less dependent on holiday contexts. Their interest in temporary exhibitions and ordinary museum attendance is stronger than that of other respondents. This segment is valuable for co-design and testing because it can help museums understand what already-engaged young cultural users recognise as meaningful. However, it should not be treated as representative of the broader youth audience. Its high familiarity with museum languages is precisely what makes it different.

Passionate respondents represent another form of specialisation. These respondents declare more than 12 museum visits per year and therefore embody an already-established routine. For them, the main managerial question is not first attraction, but retention, recognition and possible activation as connectors. Passionate visitors can

become ambassadors, peer mediators or early adopters of new formats, but their behaviour cannot be used as the benchmark for young people with higher thresholds.

Student Under25 respondents represent a promising early-majority segment. They are embedded in educational institutions and peer networks where cultural participation can be discussed, legitimised and shared. Universities, student associations and delegate networks can therefore function as bridges between museums and young publics. This segment is particularly relevant for social reinforcement because group visits, peer recommendations and academic communities can reduce the perceived social risk of museum-going.

Worker Under25 and Worker Over25 respondents mark the transition from educational belonging to labour-market belonging. Their museum behaviour remains present, but it is more filtered by time, price and perceived value. The company-panel component is especially useful because it shows that museums can reach young people through workplaces, welfare initiatives and training partnerships. For over-25 workers, the museum must compete with stricter time constraints and a clearer evaluation of value for money.

Diploma holders constitute a particularly important segment. The final Forum GEM materials indicate that they attend museums less frequently than graduates, while showing a relatively higher willingness to pay in specific cases (Forum GEM, 2026). This apparently paradoxical pattern suggests that the barrier is not only economic. Museums may be less present in their ordinary cultural routines, but this does not imply absence of value perception. The managerial task is to create more relevant entry points, especially through scientific, technical, industrial or experiential narratives.

Managerial takeaway. Museum managers should design different pathways for different youth segments. Specialised users can be involved in co-design and ambassadorship; students can be reached through educational and peer networks; workers require flexible and value-clear formats; diploma holders may need stronger bridges between museum content and technical, scientific or professional interests.

4.5 Why do they visit? Learning, inspiration, and the educational value of the museum

The next analytical level concerns the motivations that bring young people to museums. The main result is particularly important: the dominant motivation is not entertainment in a narrow sense, but learning. In the Forum GEM 2026 dashboard, 75% of respondents selected learning something new among the main sources of satisfaction from a museum visit. This finding is consistent with the second edition of the Forum, where learning also emerged as the strongest motivation, even more clearly than many museum directors initially expected (Forum GEM, 2025; Forum GEM, 2026).

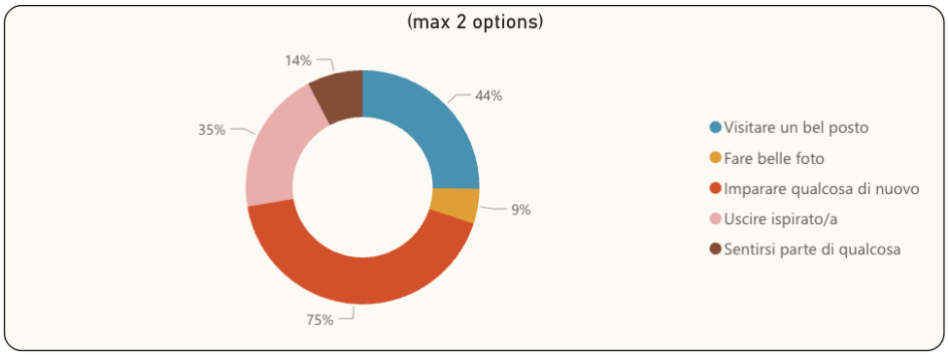


Figure 4.3 – Main motivations for visiting museums among young respondents

Source: Author's Power BI elaboration on Forum GEM 2026 microdata. Respondents could select up to two options.

The museum therefore remains recognisable as a learning environment. This does not mean, however, that the educational mission is automatically effective. The same data and the qualitative debate with young delegates suggest that learning may be accompanied by cognitive effort, fatigue and a latent sense of inadequacy. Young people value cultural depth, but they may not always feel equipped to access it. The managerial problem is therefore not to reduce the museum to entertainment, but to redesign the route through which learning becomes accessible and satisfying.

This result is coherent with Falk and Dierking's contextual model of museum experience, according to which a visit emerges from the interaction between personal, social and physical contexts. Young visitors may enter with curiosity, but their

satisfaction depends on whether the museum provides orientation, narrative coherence, social support and an environment in which they can feel competent. Learning is therefore both a motivation and a possible threshold: it attracts, but it also requires mediation.

The finding also refines the common assumption that young people are distant from museums because museums are too cultural. The evidence suggests a more precise interpretation. Young people do not necessarily reject the cultural or educational dimension of museums. Rather, they reject experiences in which the cultural value is difficult to understand, poorly mediated or experienced as disproportionate to their available time and attention.

Managerial takeaway. Young people do not ask museums to become less cultural. They ask museums to make culture more readable, paced and appropriable. Learning should remain central, but it must be supported by intelligible routes, concise interpretation and tools that reduce the visitor's fear of not understanding enough.

4.6 Why do they not visit more? Price, cognitive overload, and perceived inadequacy

The analysis of barriers shows that the problem of youth attendance is not only economic. Price matters, especially for older under-30 respondents and young workers. In the over-25 segment, the Forum GEM final presentation identifies price as a major barrier for 36% of respondents and indicates 10 euros as a threshold that a museum ticket should not exceed (Forum GEM, 2026). This result is consistent with the second edition, where more than half of respondents indicated a preferred museum ticket range between 5 and 10 euros (Forum GEM, 2025).

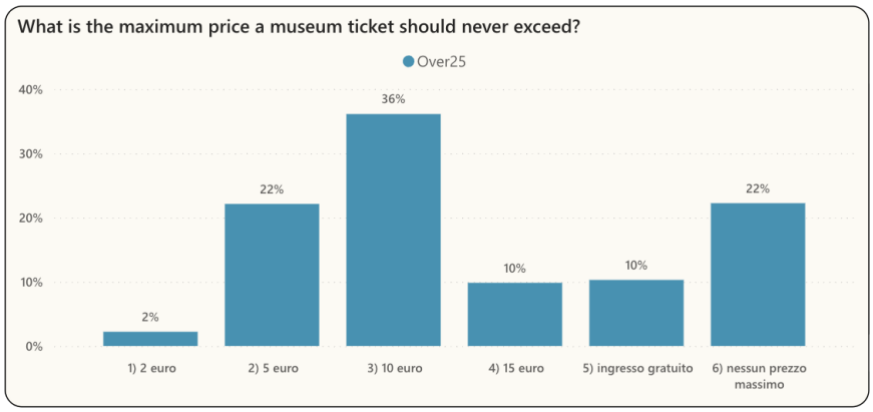


Figure 4.4 – Maximum acceptable museum ticket price for Over-25 respondents

Source: Author's Power BI elaboration on Forum GEM 2026 microdata.

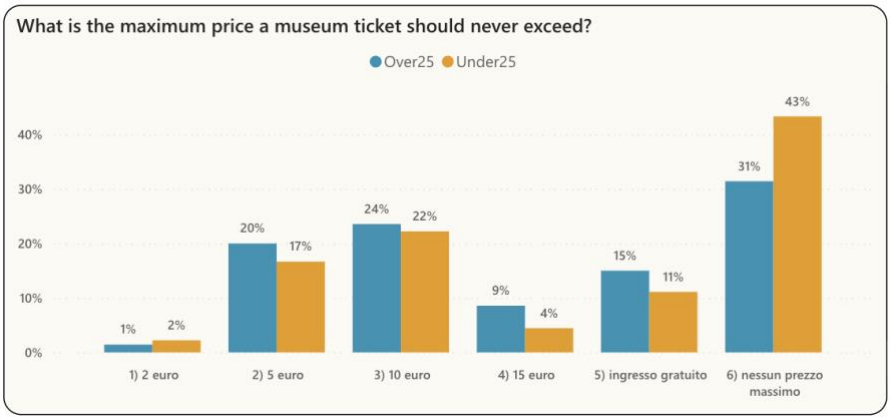


Figure 4.5 – Maximum acceptable museum ticket price for Diploma holders

Source: Author's Power BI elaboration on Forum GEM 2026 microdata.

The price findings should be interpreted through perceived value. A ticket is not evaluated only as an absolute amount, but in relation to the expected experience, the cost of living in the city, the availability of other leisure options and the clarity of what is included. Respondents react more positively when the ticket includes guidance, audioguides or services that make the visit more understandable. This means that willingness to pay is mediated by the museum's ability to make the value proposition visible before and during the visit.

A second major barrier is cognitive overload. The Forum GEM final presentation explicitly refers to a latent sense of inadequacy and to a widespread fear of missing something important during the visit. Respondents appreciate tools that identify a limited number of works on which to focus, provide a logical order and offer guidance from expert and passionate mediators. These results show that museums can be intimidating not because young people reject knowledge, but because the volume and organisation of knowledge can appear disproportionate.

This finding should be interpreted through the threshold framework developed in Chapter 2. Every young person has a different activation threshold before deciding to visit or return. Price can raise this threshold, but so can uncertainty, lack of route clarity, social isolation and fear of not understanding. Conversely, a clear visit path, included mediation, peer companionship and predictable duration can lower the threshold even when the ticket is not free.

The comparison with cinema attendance reinforces this interpretation. The Forum GEM report notes that cinema attendance shows lower variability than museum attendance. This suggests that cinema is a more standardised and easily decodable leisure practice: the visitor knows how long it lasts, what to do, how to behave and what kind of experience to expect. Museums, by contrast, can be more open and richer, but also more uncertain. The managerial challenge is to preserve the richness of museums while reducing the uncertainty that blocks participation.

Managerial takeaway. The main barrier is not only that the ticket is too expensive. It is that the visitor is not sure the experience will be worth the money, time and cognitive effort. Museums should therefore combine youth pricing with clearer orientation, included mediation and explicit value communication.

4.7 What makes them return? Temporary exhibitions, routines, mediation, and social reinforcement

The data also help distinguish attraction from retention. Attraction concerns first entry: what makes a young person decide to visit at least once. Retention concerns the conditions that make that person return. This distinction is central to the thesis because

the research question is not only how museums can attract young audiences, but also how they can retain them.

One of the strongest findings is that around two out of three young respondents visit museums while on holiday (Forum GEM, 2026). This result shows that museum-going is often framed as an exceptional activity connected to travel, tourism and destination cities. The museum is visited when young people are away from everyday routines, not necessarily when they are at home. This creates a strategic gap between large destination museums and the majority of museums, especially local and smaller institutions, that must work harder to become part of ordinary life.

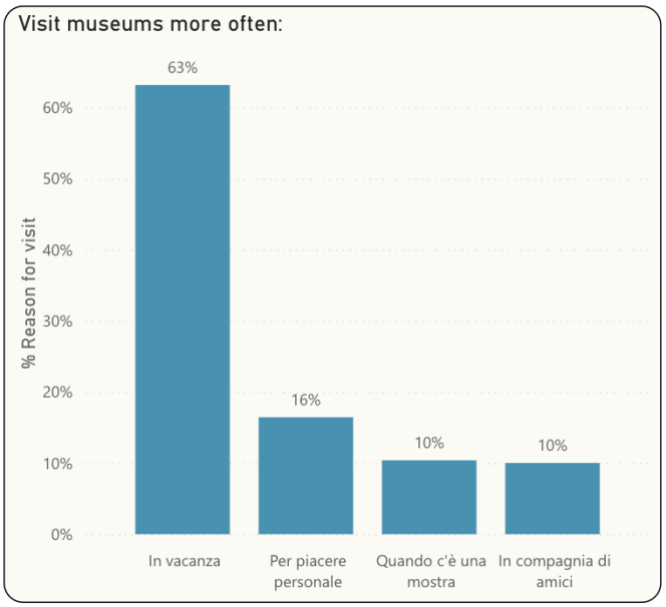


Figure 4.6 – Contexts and opportunities for museum visits

Source: Author's Power BI elaboration on Forum GEM 2026 microdata.

Temporary exhibitions emerge as a strategic return device. The Forum GEM materials indicate that temporary exhibitions facilitate return even among those who already visit museums more often (Forum GEM, 2026). This is managerially important because permanent collections can be perceived as stable and therefore less urgent to revisit, while temporary exhibitions create a reason to return within a defined time window.

However, temporary exhibitions alone are not sufficient if the museum does not build a continuing relationship before and after the event.

Mediation is another return factor. Young respondents appreciate tools that help them select a limited number of works to focus on, understand the route and receive explanations from expert and passionate people. This suggests that the return decision is influenced by the quality of the first experience. If the first visit produces clarity, pleasure and a sense of competence, the threshold for the next visit is lower. If it produces confusion or inadequacy, the museum remains associated with effort rather than with discovery.

From the perspective of Complex Contagion Theory, return also depends on reinforcement. Museum-going is not comparable to the diffusion of a simple piece of information. It requires time, planning, cultural confidence and sometimes social coordination. One communication touchpoint may not be enough. Repetition through friends, university communities, workplace initiatives, post-visit communication and recurring formats can make museum-going more legitimate and easier to repeat.

Managerial takeaway. Retention requires routines. Museums should not rely only on occasional exhibitions or isolated campaigns. They should create recognisable, repeated, socially reinforced formats that make young people expect the museum to offer reasons to return.

4.8 Qualitative small data: open comments as managerial intelligence

The open-ended responses add an important qualitative layer to the analysis. A total of 166 comments were collected. After cleaning and excluding responses that were not meaningfully classifiable, 135 comments were retained for coding. These comments should not be interpreted as the whole qualitative component of Forum GEM, because the Forum also includes panel and debate moments. Rather, they function as small data: short textual signals that help explain why the quantitative patterns matter.

The coding process identified three main macro-themes. The first concerns ticket price and perceived fairness. Respondents criticise high costs especially when museums compete with urban living expenses and other cultural or leisure opportunities. At the

same time, they value included services such as audioguides or explanatory tools because these increase the perceived value of the ticket.

The second macro-theme is route clarity and mediation. Several comments describe museums as difficult to navigate because of insufficient guidance, unclear exhibition paths or information that does not help visitors decide what to prioritise. This theme is directly connected to the cognitive threshold identified in the previous sections. For young people with limited museum familiarity, the question is not only whether the collection is valuable, but whether the visit path makes the value accessible.

The third macro-theme concerns memorable experiences, contents and objects of engagement. Respondents mention immersive videos, interactive installations, tactile replicas, science-centre formats, emotionally powerful exhibitions and curated museum shops or gadgets. These elements should not be dismissed as superficial. They are often the points through which young visitors remember, narrate and share the museum experience with others.

A particularly important negative insight concerns the association between museums and compulsory schooling. Some respondents describe museums as an extension of school obligations rather than as spaces of autonomy, pleasure and discovery. This confirms the need to reposition the museum visit after formal education. If museums remain associated only with compulsory school trips, they risk losing young people precisely when they become autonomous cultural consumers.

Managerial takeaway. Qualitative comments transform numbers into actionable intelligence. They show that museums should focus on price fairness, route clarity, included mediation, memorable formats and the repositioning of the visit as an autonomous and socially meaningful experience.

4.9 Discussion of hypotheses and theoretical interpretation

The empirical material allows a more precise assessment of the hypotheses formulated in Chapter 2. The evidence supports some hypotheses clearly, refines others and requires methodological caution in all cases. The assessment remains descriptive and

interpretive, because the research design is not intended to estimate causal effects or relational contagion.

Table 4.2. Assessment of the research hypotheses

Hypothesis	Assessment	Interpretation
H1: Higher cultural supply / large-city contexts are associated with higher museum engagement.	Partially supported.	Large-city context is associated with higher museum frequency for some groups, especially graduates, but geography alone does not explain attendance. It interacts with education, visibility and mediation.
H2: Lower-supply or less visible territories are associated with weaker ordinary engagement or higher thresholds.	Exploratory / partially supported.	The dataset suggests that lower visibility and weaker everyday museum access may raise thresholds, but regional representativeness is limited. The result should be read as a managerial warning, not as a regional causal claim.
H3: Humanities / arts education is associated with higher visit frequency and stronger interest.	Supported with refinement.	Cultural proximity matters. AFAM and arts-related profiles show stronger museum familiarity, while the broader education divide between diploma holders and graduates is especially visible.
H4: Perceived barriers are negatively associated with visit frequency.	Supported descriptively.	Price, route clarity, cognitive overload, FOMO, time and social distance act as thresholds that prevent latent interest from becoming repeated attendance.

H5: Social reinforcement and mediation are associated with stronger museum engagement.	Supported interpretively, not causally estimated.	Friends, expert companions, peer groups, universities, workplaces and community channels appear relevant as mediators. However, the survey contains no relational network matrix and therefore cannot measure contagion directly.
H6: Willingness to pay varies with perceived value, mediation and expected experience quality.	Supported as a non-linear relationship.	Willingness to pay is not a simple predictor of frequency. The 10-euro threshold, the value of included guidance and the diploma-holder pattern show that price is interpreted through perceived fairness and expected value.

Source: Author's interpretation of Forum GEM 2026 microdata, dashboard outputs and qualitative comments.

The results indicate that the most powerful explanatory dimensions are educational and experiential rather than purely territorial. Geography remains relevant, but mainly as an opportunity structure. It becomes effective when young people have the cultural capital, social context and practical conditions needed to use the available museum supply. This is why city size alone does not produce the same effect for all educational groups.

The findings confirm the usefulness of the threshold-based interpretation. The survey does not observe the exact internal threshold of each respondent, but it reveals variables that plausibly raise or lower that threshold: price, intelligibility, familiarity, social companionship, educational background, preferred museum types and visit context. Young people with lower thresholds need fewer incentives to visit; those with higher thresholds require more consistent support.

Complex Contagion Theory strengthens this reading without becoming an empirical network model. Museum-going often requires more than one exposure because it

involves time, confidence, cultural legitimacy and coordination with others. A single post, discount or exhibition may be insufficient for uncertain visitors. Repeated and trusted touchpoints can instead make the museum more thinkable and socially legitimate.

The methodological boundary remains important. This chapter does not estimate social contagion empirically. The analysis remains individual- and cluster-based. It uses social-contagion theories to interpret signs of mediation and reinforcement, such as friends, companions, expert guides and communities, but it does not identify who influenced whom. For this reason, network language is used with caution and only as an interpretive lens.

Managerial takeaway. The data suggest that young people require different activation conditions. Museums can influence attendance by lowering thresholds, multiplying reinforcing touchpoints and working through real communities rather than relying only on institutional communication.

4.10 Implications for museum management

The first managerial implication is that youth engagement should not be reduced to discounting strategies. Affordability remains necessary, especially because ticket price is visible in the data and in the comments. However, discounting does not solve the problem of cognitive overload, route uncertainty or weak perceived value. Youth pricing should therefore be combined with included mediation and a clear explanation of what the visitor will gain from the experience.

Second, museums should develop regular, recognisable youth-oriented routines rather than relying exclusively on isolated events. Evening openings, free or very low-cost youth moments, recurring thematic formats, student memberships and repeatable community-based appointments can help transform the museum from an exceptional destination into an ordinary cultural option. The key is persistence: routines require time and repeated signals.

Third, museums should be understood as urban and civic social infrastructures, not only as destinations. Because a large share of youth attendance occurs during holidays,

museums need to create local reasons to return. Smaller and non-destination museums should work with schools, universities, workplaces, local youth groups, cultural associations and municipalities to become visible in the everyday life of young people.

Fourth, interpretation design should receive higher managerial priority. The evidence supports modular intelligibility: short routes for first-time or time-constrained visitors, must-see paths, thematic trails, clear numbering, concise labels, audio or QR explanations and guides capable of transmitting passion rather than only information. These tools reduce the fear of missing out and help visitors feel competent.

Fifth, museums should invest in bridge-building partnerships. Student associations, universities, AFAM institutions, local youth councils, companies, workplace welfare programmes and technical training initiatives can all function as channels of social reinforcement. This is particularly important for young workers and technical profiles, who may not be reached by traditional cultural communication but may engage through professional development, wellbeing or interdisciplinary learning.

Table 4.3. Managerial translation of the empirical findings

Finding	Interpretive meaning	Managerial action
Education explains more than geography alone.	Cultural capital and confidence condition access.	Differentiate strategies by educational familiarity and develop first-time visitor paths.
Museums are often visited on holiday.	Attendance is exceptional rather than routine.	Create recurring local formats and ordinary-time reasons to return.
Learning is the main motivation.	Young people value cultural depth.	Protect educational value, but redesign mediation around clarity and pace.

Price is a barrier, especially for older under-30 workers.	Cost is evaluated through perceived fairness and expected value.	Connect youth pricing with visible value and included guidance.
Cognitive overload and FOMO are visible.	Visitors fear missing or misunderstanding what matters.	Use modular routes, clear orientation, concise interpretation and expert mediation.
Peer and community channels matter.	Museum-going is socially mediated.	Use ambassadors, student associations, company partnerships and group formats.
Temporary exhibitions facilitate return.	Retention needs reasons to revisit.	Connect exhibitions to memberships, post-visit communication and recurring formats.

Source: Author's elaboration on Forum GEM 2026 empirical findings and managerial interpretation.

At the policy level, the findings imply that public action should not focus only on nominal access or territorial supply. Supply remains important, but youth participation also requires mediation, communication, social bridges and routine-building. National and regional policies should therefore support not only free or reduced admission, but also youth mediation programmes, university partnerships, local ambassador schemes, digital orientation tools and targeted initiatives for groups with weaker cultural familiarity.

4.11 Limitations and chapter takeaways

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the survey was based on a non-probability sample distributed through Forum delegates and partner companies.

Although the dataset is large and analytically rich, it is not statistically representative of all Italian under-30s. The overrepresentation of Lazio and Lombardia, the absence of Molise and the weaker presence of some territories require caution in generalising regional conclusions.

Second, the survey relies on self-reported behaviour, which may be affected by recall error, social desirability and respondent self-selection. Young people already interested in culture may have been more willing to answer the questionnaire than those completely disengaged. Third, the analytical strategy was descriptive and exploratory. It identified patterns and segments, but it was not designed to establish causal effects. Fourth, the network framework remained interpretive because the dataset did not contain direct relational variables such as friendship ties, peer influence measures or adjacency matrices.

Despite these limitations, the chapter provides a coherent empirical answer to the guiding question. Young people do not simply lack interest in museums. Many of them recognise the value of museums, especially as learning environments, but they face thresholds that prevent interest from becoming repeated attendance. These thresholds are economic, cognitive, emotional, social and territorial. Education and cultural capital reduce some thresholds; unclear routes, high prices, inadequate mediation and weak routine-building raise them.

For a museum director, the key implication is concrete: youth engagement depends on the museum's capacity to make entry easy, the visit intelligible, the experience socially legitimate and the return repeatable. The museum becomes attractive not by abandoning cultural depth, but by mediating that depth through clear narratives, welcoming spaces, repeated opportunities and bridges toward young people who have not yet incorporated museum-going into ordinary practices.

This chapter therefore prepares the final conclusions of the thesis. The empirical evidence supports the movement from threshold to routine: museums should first lower the barriers that prevent young people from entering and understanding, and then build recurring, socially reinforced formats that help occasional visitors become returning participants.

Chapter managerial takeaway. The data suggest that museum innovation should focus less on generic youth communication and more on reducing cognitive effort, increasing social mediation, improving perceived value and creating repeatable reasons to return.

CONCLUSION

This thesis was developed around a managerial question rather than a purely descriptive one: how can museums innovate to attract and retain young audiences? The answer emerging from the theoretical framework, the Forum GEM 2026 empirical evidence, and the dialogue with museum professionals is that museums should not interpret youth engagement only as a communication problem. Young people do not simply need to be informed that museums exist. They need to perceive museums as affordable, understandable, socially legitimate, and repeatable places within their ordinary lives.

The core conclusion is therefore that museums can innovate by moving from a logic of occasional attraction to a logic of relationship building. In practical terms, this means lowering the thresholds that prevent young people from entering, understanding, enjoying, sharing, and repeating the museum experience. The final managerial framework proposed by the thesis is defined as the **Threshold-to-Routine Framework**. It synthesises the main theoretical and empirical findings and translates them into concrete actions for museum directors.

1. Direct answer to the research question

The research question of the thesis asked how museums can innovate to attract and retain young audiences. The evidence collected through Forum GEM 2026 suggests that innovation should be understood as a redesign of the conditions of participation. Museums do not need to abandon their educational, cultural, or civic mission. Rather, they need to make that mission more accessible to young people who differ in education, cultural familiarity, working status, urban context, and social networks.

The first managerial implication is that attraction and retention must be distinguished. Attraction concerns the first decision to enter the museum. Retention concerns the

decision to return, to recommend the experience, and to include museum-going within one's personal or social routine. A museum may succeed in attracting a young visitor through a discount, a temporary exhibition, a school-related experience, or a holiday context. However, this does not automatically create a durable relationship. Retention requires recurring formats, clear value, post-visit communication, and a sense that the museum is not an exceptional destination only, but a place that can be revisited.

From the perspective of a museum director, the most useful question is therefore not only: how can I increase the number of young visitors? The more strategic question is: how can I reduce the effort required for young people to choose the museum again? This change in perspective is the main contribution of the thesis. It moves the discussion from generic youth engagement to a structured decision framework based on thresholds, mediation, reinforcement, and routines.

2. Theoretical synthesis: from cultural capital to social reinforcement

The theoretical contribution of the thesis rests on the integration of cultural economics, cultural capital, audience development, and social-contagion theories. Cultural economics helps frame museum attendance as a form of cultural consumption shaped by price, time, perceived value, non-economic benefits, and experience quality (Throsby, 2001). This perspective is necessary because the museum visit is not a purely recreational product. It carries educational, symbolic, social, and identity-related value.

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital explains why young people do not start from the same position when approaching museums. Those who have accumulated familiarity with art, history, heritage, or cultural institutions through family background, education, and previous exposure generally face a lower threshold of entry. They know how to behave, what to expect, and how to extract value from the experience. Conversely, young people with weaker cultural familiarity may perceive the museum as distant, demanding, or not designed for them (Bourdieu, 1984). This does not imply a lack of intelligence or curiosity. It indicates that museums often require implicit codes of interpretation that are unequally distributed.

Audience development shifts the interpretation from diagnosis to action. If cultural participation is unequal, museums cannot only wait for interested young people to

arrive. They must actively design access, relevance, mediation, and relationship-building strategies. In this sense, audience development provides the managerial bridge between the sociological explanation of inequality and the practical responsibility of museums.

The social-contagion theories included in the thesis further strengthen this argument. Granovetter's Threshold Model shows that individuals adopt a behaviour only when their personal activation threshold is crossed (Granovetter, 1978). Applied to museum attendance, this means that one young person may decide to visit after seeing an exhibition poster, while another may need a friend's invitation, a low price, a clear route, an expert mediator, and repeated reassurance that the experience will be worth the effort. Complex Contagion Theory reinforces this idea: some behaviours require multiple confirmations before they become legitimate or attractive (Centola and Macy, 2007). A museum visit is not only information to be transmitted; it is a practice that may require repeated social and cognitive reinforcement.

Finally, Small Worlds and the logic of youth communities show that participation circulates through short, trusted networks rather than through the abstract category of young people (Watts and Strogatz, 1998). Universities, AFAM networks, workplaces, student associations, local communities, alumni groups, and peer circles are not simply communication channels. They are environments in which museum-going can become normal, discussed, and socially reinforced.

These theories are not used as empirical network models in the thesis. The data do not allow the measurement of relational contagion, centrality, clustering, or peer-to-peer diffusion. Their function is interpretive. They help explain why the same museum offer can be easy to adopt for one segment and difficult for another, and why museum innovation should combine individual accessibility with social reinforcement.

3. Main empirical findings

The empirical analysis was based on the Forum GEM 2026 survey, which collected 1,610 valid questionnaires through two complementary channels: the network of young delegates and the network of 16 partner companies. This design is particularly relevant because it includes both students and young workers. The student sample captures a

population still embedded in educational and peer-based environments, while the company sample captures under-30 workers who may be more difficult to reach through traditional university channels and whose museum behaviour is shaped by time constraints, routines, and value-for-money considerations (Forum GEM, 2026).

The most important finding is that museum attendance among young people is not homogeneous. Education, city size, visitor profile, age, and working condition contribute to different levels of familiarity and different thresholds. The analysis showed that museum attendance varies more clearly than cinema attendance, suggesting that museums are more sensitive to cultural capital and contextual conditions. Cinema appears as a more ordinary leisure practice, while museum-going remains more dependent on education, urban exposure, perceived value, and the capacity to interpret the experience.

The geographical hypothesis required a cautious interpretation. The preliminary expectation was that young people living or working in regions with higher museum supply would show greater interest, while those in regions with lower supply would show lower interest. The empirical evidence suggests that geography matters, but not as a simple regional determinant. City size and accessibility appear more meaningful than region alone. Large cities offer denser cultural supply, more visible exhibitions, and more frequent cultural occasions; however, these conditions do not automatically translate into repeated youth attendance. Supply becomes effective only when it is accompanied by mediation, affordability, and social activation.

The educational hypothesis received stronger support. Young people with humanistic, artistic, or AFAM-related backgrounds display greater familiarity with museums and stronger interest in exhibitions, especially temporary exhibitions and experiences not limited to holiday contexts. This finding is coherent with the theory of cultural capital: educational paths closer to cultural production reduce the cognitive distance between the young visitor and the museum. At the same time, the analysis also showed that technical profiles should not be interpreted as culturally uninterested. Respondents with technical or scientific backgrounds showed higher interest in scientific museums and in experiences that connect cultural content with experimentation, technology, and applied knowledge. For museum directors, this means that the objective is not to communicate

the same offer to everyone, but to translate the museum's value into different cultural languages.

The motivation data also provide a decisive insight. The main reason that brings young people to museums is learning something new. This confirms that the educational mission of museums remains central. However, the qualitative evidence shows that learning must be made cognitively accessible. Young people often perceive large museums as formative but demanding experiences, requiring significant mental effort. The issue is not that museums are too cultural; rather, they are sometimes insufficiently guided, insufficiently ordered, or insufficiently readable for visitors without strong prior familiarity.

Price sensitivity emerged as another important barrier, but it should not be interpreted in isolation. The evidence suggests that 10 euros functions as a psychological threshold for many young respondents, especially when they are older than 25 or already in the workforce. Nevertheless, willingness to pay depends on perceived value. A young person may refuse a ticket perceived as expensive if the visit appears confusing or generic, but may accept a higher price if the experience is clearly mediated, unique, social, or professionally meaningful. Price is therefore not only an economic variable; it interacts with value perception, confidence, and expected experience quality.

Social reinforcement also emerged as a relevant interpretive dimension. Friends, companions, trusted mediators, expert guides, and peer contexts can reduce the social and emotional threshold of the museum visit. The second edition of Forum GEM had already shown that the apparent irrelevance of content creators did not mean that social influence was absent: focus group discussions suggested that content creators often operate indirectly, as information providers whose influence is absorbed into personal decision-making or peer word-of-mouth (Forum GEM, 2025). The third edition confirms that social mediation matters especially when the museum is perceived as difficult, large, or cognitively demanding.

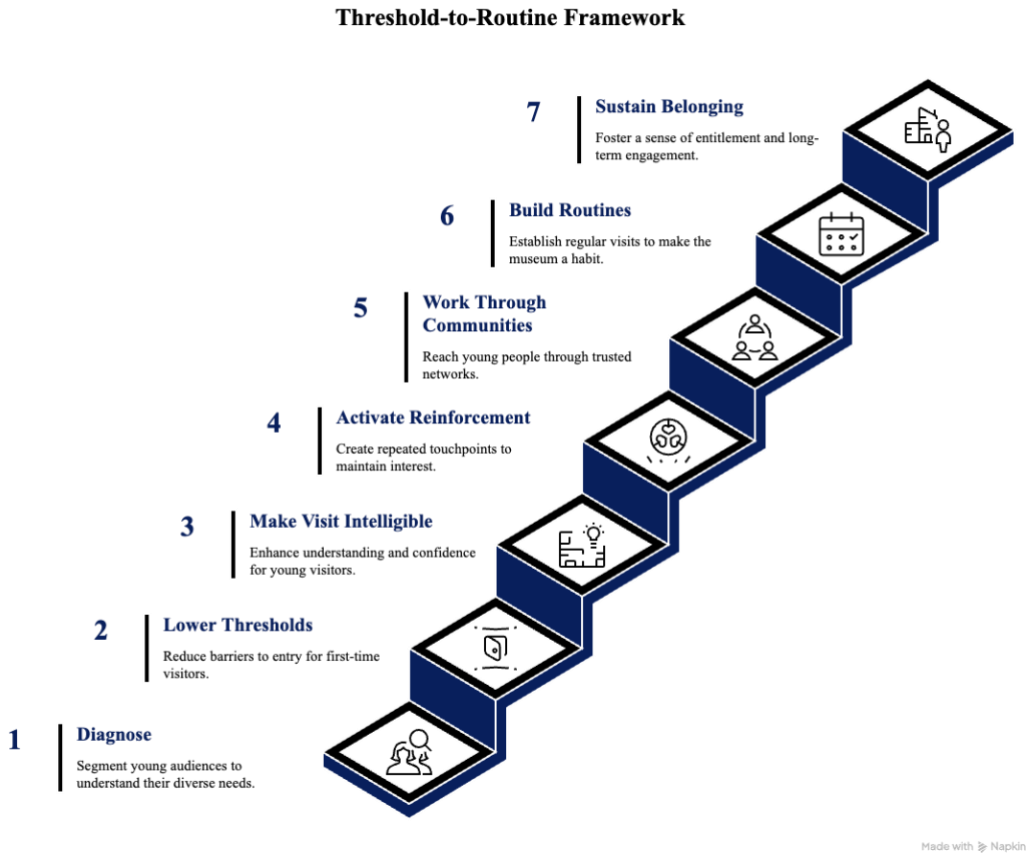
The open-ended comments, interpreted as qualitative small data, were particularly useful because they transformed percentages into managerial intelligence. They revealed recurring complaints about high ticket prices, appreciation for included audioguides, dissatisfaction with unclear exhibition routes, and appreciation for

passionate guided visits. They also highlighted interest in immersive, interactive, sensory, and participatory experiences. These comments confirm that the youth-museum gap is not only economic or demographic. It is also cognitive, emotional, and experiential.

4. The Threshold-to-Routine Framework

The final outcome of the thesis is the Threshold-to-Routine Framework. The framework is designed for museum management and answers three practical questions: **what should museums do, why should they do it, and how can they implement it**. Its logic is simple: young people become regular museum audiences when museums reduce the thresholds of participation and create repeated, socially reinforced occasions to return. The operational synthesis is presented in Figure C1 and Table C1.

Figure C1. Threshold-to-Routine managerial framework.



Source: Author's elaboration on the theoretical framework and Forum GEM 2026 evidence.

Table C1. Threshold-to-Routine managerial framework.

Step	Museum action	Rationale	Examples	Expected effect
1. Diagnose	Segment young audiences instead of treating under-30s as one group.	Young people differ by education, cultural capital, work status, city size, and museum familiarity.	Dashboards by students, workers, AFAM, diploma holders, occasional visitors, passionate visitors.	More precise targeting and fewer generic initiatives.
2. Lower thresholds	Reduce the effort required to decide to visit.	High thresholds can be economic, cognitive, emotional, social, or territorial.	Low youth pricing, clear website information, easy booking, introductory routes, explicit visit duration.	More first visits and lower perceived risk.
3. Make the visit intelligible	Help young visitors feel competent inside the museum.	Limited cultural capital can produce confusion, FOMO, or inadequacy.	Must-see routes, modular audioguides, QR explanations, concise labels, expert mediators.	Higher confidence, satisfaction, and perceived value.

Step	Museum action	Rationale	Examples	Expected effect
4. Activate reinforcement	Create repeated and consistent touchpoints.	Complex contagion suggests that one stimulus may not be enough.	Friends, ambassadors, universities, workplace welfare, newsletters, group events, post-visit follow-up.	Interest becomes more legitimate and memorable.
5. Work through communities	Reach young people through real micro-networks.	Small-world logic shows that behaviour circulates through short and trusted networks.	AFAM networks, student associations, companies, youth councils, local creators, alumni groups.	Higher trust and stronger peer diffusion.
6. Build routines	Make the museum a repeatable place, not only an exceptional visit.	Retention requires habit formation and recurring reasons to return.	Youth nights, monthly events, evening openings, exhibition cycles, cultural aperitifs, museum study spaces.	From occasional attendance to repeated participation.

Step	Museum action	Rationale	Examples	Expected effect
7. Sustain belonging	Transform the museum into a place that young people feel entitled to inhabit.	Long-term engagement requires identity, comfort, and civic relevance.	Co-design labs, informal spaces, volunteering, youth boards, partnerships with schools, universities and companies.	A durable relationship between young people and the museum.

Source: Author's elaboration on the theoretical framework and Forum GEM 2026 evidence.

5. Managerial recommendations

The recommendations are organised into short-term actions, medium-term organisational changes, and partnership-based strategies. This structure reflects the needs of museum management: some interventions can be implemented quickly, while others require strategic planning, resources, and inter-institutional cooperation.

5.1 Short-term actions

Short-term actions should focus on **reducing the most immediate thresholds**: price uncertainty, cognitive overload, unclear routes, and weak communication of value.

- **Introduce or strengthen clear youth pricing.** A simple, visible, and memorable youth tariff reduces uncertainty and makes the visit easier to plan. The tariff should be communicated before the visit, not discovered only at the ticket office.
- **Create modular visit paths.** Museums should offer short, medium, and deep routes, for example 30, 60, and 90 minutes. This responds to the need for guidance and reduces the fear of missing something important.

- **Include basic mediation in the ticket experience.** Audioguides, QR codes, maps, and short introductory explanations should not be perceived as optional extras. They are part of the accessibility infrastructure of the museum.
- **Improve the clarity of exhibition routes.** Young visitors repeatedly ask for logical order, readable panels, clear signage, and the possibility to understand where to go and what to prioritise.
- **Create low-pressure occasions to enter.** Evening openings, youth events, small concerts, talks, and informal formats can help young people enter the museum without feeling that the visit must be solemn or school-like.

5.2 Medium-term organisational changes

Medium-term changes should focus on turning isolated initiatives into **repeatable organisational practices**.

- **Build a youth audience dashboard.** Museums should collect and monitor simple indicators: age group, education, visit frequency, first-time visits, return visits, preferred formats, ticket sensitivity, and satisfaction with mediation.
- **Design a youth engagement calendar.** Museums should avoid one-off initiatives and establish recognisable routines, such as monthly youth nights, seasonal guided routes, recurring exhibition talks, or fixed low-cost days.
- **Train mediators for different youth profiles.** A technical-profile visitor, an AFAM student, a young worker, and an occasional visitor do not require the same language. Mediation should be differentiated without simplifying the cultural value of the museum.
- **Use passionate young visitors as co-designers.** AFAM students and frequent visitors can become ambassadors, testers, and content co-creators. Their role is not only promotional; they can help museums understand how youth communities interpret the experience.
- **Evaluate post-visit relationship management.** Museums should consider how to communicate after the visit: newsletters, membership offers, invitations to future events, and follow-up content that helps transform a single visit into a relationship.

5.3 Partnership-based strategies

The Forum GEM 2026 evidence confirms that youth engagement cannot be delegated only to the museum's communication office. It requires partnerships with the environments in which young people already live, study, work, and build trust.

- **Universities and AFAM institutions.** Partnerships with universities and AFAM networks can support co-design, ambassador programmes, guided visits, student memberships, and interdisciplinary projects.
- **Companies and workplace welfare.** The involvement of 16 partner companies in the GEM 2026 survey shows the potential of reaching young workers through workplace networks. Museums can enter welfare and training programmes, especially through leadership, creativity, innovation, and complexity-management formats.
- **Scientific and technical communities.** Museums should not assume that technical profiles are distant from culture. Scientific museums, industrial heritage, interactive formats, and links between art and technology can reduce the divide between humanistic and technical knowledge.
- **Local communities and smaller museums.** Small and medium-sized museums can compensate for lower visibility through strong local partnerships, schools, youth councils, associations, and recurring civic events.
- **Forum GEM and alumni networks.** The GEM model can become a recurring listening and experimentation infrastructure, where young people do not only answer surveys but participate in the design of museum strategies.

6. Contribution of Forum GEM 2026

Forum GEM 2026 contributes to the thesis in two ways. First, it provides empirical evidence on young people's cultural and museum behaviour. Second, it represents a practical model of audience development because it brings young people, museums, companies, and institutional stakeholders into the same conversation. This is consistent with the original purpose of GEM: speaking with young people rather than only about them, and increasing the connection between museums and young audiences so that museums can function as places for education, pleasure, reflection, and knowledge sharing (Forum GEM, 2025).

The Forum is particularly relevant because it does not reduce youth engagement to marketing. The dialogue with companies expands the role of museums beyond sponsorship and suggests new possibilities in welfare, training, interdisciplinary learning, and territorial development. From a managerial point of view, this is important because it positions the museum as a civic infrastructure able to contribute to young people's personal and professional growth.

At the same time, the thesis must be distinguished from the Forum report. Forum GEM generated the empirical and participatory environment in which data were collected and discussed. The original contribution of this thesis lies in the independent analytical work performed on that evidence: data preparation, cleaning, segmentation, cross-tabulation, Power BI visualisation, dashboard interpretation, hypothesis discussion, and managerial translation. The thesis therefore transforms Forum GEM microdata into a decision-support framework for museum management.

For this reason, GEM should not be interpreted only as the empirical setting of the thesis. It can also be understood as a prototype of the type of ecosystem that museums need: a network where young people, cultural institutions, universities, companies, and policy stakeholders jointly identify problems and test responses.

7. Limitations and future research

The conclusions of the thesis should be read within clear methodological boundaries. The analysis is exploratory and descriptive. It is based on self-reported survey data and on a sample that is rich and analytically useful, but not statistically representative of all Italian youth. Some regions are more visible than others, and this limits the possibility of drawing strong territorial conclusions. The geographical hypotheses therefore require cautious interpretation.

A second limitation concerns causality. The analysis identifies associations, contrasts, and behavioural patterns, but it does not prove causal effects. For example, the relationship between education and museum attendance can be interpreted through cultural capital, but the data do not isolate education from family background, previous exposure, income, or peer environment. Similarly, price sensitivity can be described,

but the analysis cannot predict how each respondent would behave under different ticket-pricing scenarios.

A third limitation concerns social contagion. The thesis does not contain relational network data. It does not observe who is connected to whom, who influenced whom, or whether a museum visit spread through a specific friendship network. For this reason, Complex Contagion, Threshold Model, and Small Worlds are used as interpretive frameworks, not as empirical network models. Future research could complement this study with network data, longitudinal tracking, experiments, or pre/post evaluations of specific youth-engagement initiatives.

Future studies could also compare different museum types, such as archaeological museums, contemporary art museums, science museums, local museums, and temporary exhibitions. A further research direction would be to measure return behaviour directly, distinguishing between first visit, repeat visit, and long-term membership or participation. This would allow museums to move beyond measuring attendance and towards measuring relationship quality.

8. Final statement

The final answer of the thesis is that museums can innovate for young audiences by becoming **threshold-lowering and routine-building institutions**. This does not mean reducing the complexity or value of culture. It means designing the conditions through which more young people can access that value without feeling excluded, disoriented, or overloaded.

The museum director's practical task is therefore to act on five levers: affordability, intelligibility, mediation, social reinforcement, and repeatability. Affordability lowers the economic threshold. Intelligibility lowers the cognitive threshold. Mediation lowers the emotional threshold of inadequacy. Social reinforcement lowers the social threshold of legitimacy. Repeatability transforms the museum from an occasional destination into a familiar place.

In this sense, the thesis does not conclude that young people are uninterested in museums. It concludes that interest often remains latent unless museums create the

conditions for it to be activated and sustained. The most promising innovation is not necessarily technological or spectacular. It is managerial, relational, and cultural: making museums places where young people feel able to enter, understand, share, return, and belong.

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Artificial intelligence tools were used solely to support linguistic revision, structural refinement, and academic clarity. All contents, analyses, interpretations, and final decisions remain the author's responsibility.