

# ONLINE MARKETING COMMUNICATION OF POLISH NATIONAL ART MUSEUMS IN COMPARISON TO SELECTED EUROPEAN MUSEUMS

**KOMUNIKACJA MARKETINGOWA W INTERNECIE POLSKICH MUZEÓW NARODOWYCH  
ORAZ WYBRANYCH MUZEÓW EUROPEJSKICH — ANALIZA PORÓWNAWCZA**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to present the results of the comparative analysis of online marketing communication in three national art museums in Poland and the comparable museums in European cities, that could serve as a model for the use of marketing communication on the Internet. Marketing communications on the Internet of selected museums have been compared in three categories: website usability and responsiveness — in this category the cognitive walkthrough method was used; online advertisements — in this category a survey, distributed by email had been used to collect information from people responsible for marketing communication in selected museums and the results of the survey were subject to comparative analysis; social media marketing — in order to determine how selected museums are using social media, a content analysis of museums' profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube was conducted. The number and type of posts that museums posted during the month (July 1–31, 2019) and the number and type of collected responses were compared using the questionnaire. Based on the conducted analyses, basic problems related to the communication of Polish national museums online have been identified and recommendations for museums have been formulated.

**Key words: museums' marketing, online marketing communication, national galleries, online advertisements, social media marketing, museums' website usability**

## ABSTRAKT

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie wyników analizy porównawczej komunikacji marketingowej w Internecie trzech muzeów narodowych w Polsce oraz trzech wybranych muzeów w miastach europejskich. Komunikacja marketingowa wybranych muzeów w Internecie została porównana w trzech kategoriach: funkcjonalność i responsywność stron internetowych — w tej kategorii wykorzystano metodę wędrowki poznawczej; promocja w Internecie — w tej kategorii w celu uzyskania informacji na temat wykorzystywanych form promocji w Internecie rozesłano pocztą elektroniczną kwestionariusze ankiet do osób odpowiedzialnych za komunikację marketingową w wybranych muzeach, a następnie wyniki badania zostały poddane analizie porównawczej; marketing w mediach społecznościowych — w celu określenia, w jaki sposób wybrane muzea korzystają z mediów społecznościowych, przeprowadzono analizę treści profili muzeów w portalach: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram i YouTube. Za pomocą skonstruowanego w tym celu kwestionariusza porównano liczbę oraz rodzaj wpisów, jakie muzea zamieściły w ciągu miesiąca (w okresie od 1 do 31 lipca 2019 r.) oraz liczbę i rodzaj zebranych odpowiedzi/reakcji. Na podstawie przeprowadzonych analiz zidentyfikowano podstawowe problemy związane z komunikacją marketingową polskich muzeów narodowych w Internecie oraz sformułowano rekomendacje dla muzeów w celu poprawy ich komunikacji w Internecie.

**Słowa kluczowe:** marketing muzeów, komunikacja marketingowa w Internecie, muzea (galerie) narodowe, reklama w Internecie, marketing w mediach społecznościowych, funkcjonalność stron internetowych muzeów

JEL: M37, Z11

## Introduction

The Internet opens up more and more opportunities for museums to communicate with their guests (Schuler & Janell, 2002). However, not all institutions make full use of its resources. According to the latest research, the potential of marketing communication tools in Polish museums is used in a narrow scope (Macalik, 2018).

The aim of the article is to present the results of the comparative analysis of online marketing communication in three national museums in Poland and the comparable museums in European cities. The rank of national museums has been given to Polish museums, which take care of

the most valuable art collections. In order to choose three foreign museums with conditions similar to Polish national museums, that could serve as a model for the use of marketing communication on the Internet, purposeful sampling was used. Marketing communication on the Internet of selected museums was compared using the following methods: the cognitive walkthrough, a survey distributed by email, and the content analysis. Based on the conducted analyses, recommendations for museums have been formulated.

## Background

Although a number of studies have been conducted to analyze individual museum activities on the Internet, such as the usage of Facebook or Twitter (Wong, 2015; Vassiliadis & Belenioti, 2017; Belenioti, Tsourvakas & Vassiliadis, 2019) and the usability of museum websites (Lepkowska-White & Imboden, 2003; Marty, 2007; Mason & McCarthy, 2008; Theocharidis et al., 2014), the analysis of the marketing strategies used by museums, including the use of a range of tools such as website, paid and free online advertising and social media activities, is limited.

The first step in this research was to compare the usability of the websites of selected museums. According to the definition proposed by ISO 9241-11 usability is "the effectiveness, efficiency, and satisfaction with which specified users achieve specified goals in particular environments" (1998). After analyzing the literature on the usability of museum websites (Lepkowska-White & Imboden, 2003; Mason & McCarthy, 2008; Pallud & Straub 2014; Robu, 2014; Theocharidis et al., 2014), a checklist to examine selected websites was created.

As is well known, the main reason people visit museum websites is planning a museum visit (Marty, 2007), thus the first three questions on the checklist concerned about the possibility of obtaining information and contact. The user should be able to locate the desired information with the fewest number of clicks possible (Lepkowska-White & Imboden, 2003). From the marketing point of view the important issue

is an income generation, including booking forms, souvenir sales, etc. (Mason & McCarthy, 2008, p. 68). Hence the questions about the possibility of buying a ticket online and existing an online store on museums' websites. The last question on the checklist was about the aesthetics of the websites. Taking into account previous research on website aesthetics (Faraday, 2000; Robu, 2014), the following indicators were analyzed: layout and size of website elements, applied symmetry, quality of displayed images and typography — the art of arranging typefaces (fonts) to stylize the form, spacing, and layout of words in the text of displayed communication messages (Amar, Droulers & Legohérel, 2017).

The study also included a comparison of the responsiveness of the websites of selected museums. A responsive website can easily render on a variety of devices and windows or screen sizes (Glassman & Shen, 2014).

To investigate how museums under examination are promoted through the use of online advertising, it was necessary to address the people responsible for their marketing. The survey, which was sent to them by email, was based on the recent literature: Kumar & Shah (2004), Kidd (2011), Rodgers & Thorson (2017), Vassiliadis & Belenioti (2017), Macalik (2018).

The activity of museums in social media was also studied. Social media is a group of web applications that enable the creation and exchange of User Generated Content. Researchers state that social media constitute an efficient, cost effective advertising tool with the enormous ability to reach the target (Alalwan et al., 2017). Moreover, those people engaged in arts and culture online are also engaged in arts and culture offline. Effective communication policy is one of the greatest challenges for museums' marketers.

Although many scholars analyzed various aspects of the use of social media by museums, little is known about the measurement of social media efficiency and the actual measures of social media marketing efforts in museums. The most popular method of assessing the effectiveness of social media is observing the indicators such as numbers of fans, likes, and comments. Studies have shown that in order to generate a broader and repetitive audience, museums need to provide engaging fresh content.

These institutions have great potential in producing interesting content using edutainment and storytelling. Twitter and YouTube have been recognized as the most adequate media for museums (Wong, 2015; Vassiliadis & Belenioti, 2017).

## Selection of the Research Sample

In order to select museums for the analysis of comparative marketing communication on the Internet, a desk research method was used to analyze statistical data. The sample selection was conducted in two phases:

1. Among Polish national museums, museums with the smallest number of visitors were selected based on statistical data from Statistics Poland 2015 and 2017<sup>1</sup> (Table 1).
2. The aim of the selection of three foreign museums, that could serve as a model for the use of marketing communication on the Internet, was to choose museums with high attendance (according to EGMUS<sup>2</sup> data), with conditions similar to examined Polish national museums. In order to ensure comparability between museums located in the different EU Member States, the following indicators have been taken into account:
  - GDP per capita in 2017,
  - share of recreation and culture in total household expenditure in 2017<sup>3</sup>,
  - collection — museums of a different character (including museums of contemporary art) were excluded from the sample,
  - city population,
  - number of visitors in the city.

Taking into account the above criteria, for the comparative analysis of marketing communications on the Internet, the following museums were selected (Table 2).

**Table 1. Polish national museums selected for the survey**

Museum	Museum attendance in	City population	Number of visitors in the city
The National Museum in Poznan*	326 115	537 643	1.5 mln
The National Museum in Szczecin*	154 987	403 833	2.7 mln
The National Museum in Kielce**	129 548	195 774	1.5 mln

\* In 2017.

\*\* In 2015.

Source: Statistics Poland: *Culture in 2015* — tables, *Culture in 2017* — tables.**Table 2. European museums selected for the survey**

Museum	Country	Museum attendance in 2017 r.	City population in 2017 r.	Number of visitors in the city in 2017 r.
The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon	Portugal	457 300	547 631	4.9 mln
The Art Museum of Estonia in Tallinn	Estonia	347 888	426 538	3.5 mln
The Louvre-Lens	France	450 324	30 689	no info

Source: European Group on Museum Statistics, Muuseumide kylastatavuse statistika 2017, Le Centre de documentation Économie Finances, Ülevaade Tallinna turismitrendidest 2017, Direção-Geral do Património Cultural: Ano de 2017. Monumentos, Museus e Palácios DGPC.

## Research methods

Marketing communications on the Internet of selected museums (described in the section: Selection of the Research Sample) have been compared in three categories:

- website usability and responsiveness,
- online advertisements,
- and social media.

In the first category — website usability and responsiveness — the cognitive walkthrough method was used. In this method "the evaluator

uses the interface to perform tasks that a typical interface user will need to accomplish" (Mahatody, Sagar & Kolski, 2010, p. 746). The researcher checked whether the user could easily and quickly find the information necessary to visit a museum, and then the websites of selected museums were subjected to comparative analysis. The checklist for the study of selected websites was created based on literature studies: Wharton et al. (1994), Faraday (2000), Marty (2007), Mason & McCarthy (2008), Mahatody, Sagar & Kolski (2010), Creswell & Plano Clark (2011), Lepkowska-White & Imboden (2013), Glassman & Shen (2014), Pallud & Straub (2014), Robu (2014) described in the section: Background.

In the second category — online advertisements — survey, distributed by email had been used to collect information from people responsible for marketing communication in selected museums and the results of the survey were subject to comparative analysis. The survey was conducted in the third quarter of 2019. The subjects of the study were marketing managers in selected museums (purposeful sampling described in the section: Selection of the Research Sample). The questionnaire was based on the recent literature: Kumar & Shah (2004), Kidd (2011), Rodgers & Thorson (2017), Vassiliadis & Belenioti (2017), Macalik (2018).

In the third category — social media — in order to determine how selected museums are using social media, a content analysis of museums' profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube was conducted. The number and type of posts that museums posted during the month (July 1-31, 2019) and the number and type of collected responses were compared using the questionnaire based on the recent literature: Kidd (2011), Theocharidis et al. (2014), Wong (2015), Alalwan et al. (2017), Vassiliadis & Belenioti (2017), Kapoor et al. (2018), Belenioti, Tsourvakas & Vassiliadis (2019).

## **Results — Website Usability and Responsiveness**

This section presents research findings in the three categories described before.

Answering the questions, what users can expect from the museum's website and what may encourage them to visit the institution, a questionnaire intended for examining the usability of museums' websites, was prepared (Table 3).

**Table 3. Evaluation of museums' websites usability**

Questions	Museums					
	The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum	The Art Museum of Estonia	The Louvre-Lens	The National Museum in Poznan	The National Museum in Szczecin	The National Museum in Kielce
How easily can the user find the information necessary before visiting a museum on the website on a scale of 1–10?	10	9	9	7	8	7
Does the website allow your visitors to switch to another language?	yes: English (1)	yes: English, Russian, Finnish, Chinese (2)	no: (0)	yes: English (1)	yes: English (1)	yes: English (1)
Does the museum website have a contact form?	yes (1)	no (0)	yes (1)	no (0)	no (0)	yes (1)
Is it possible to buy a museum ticket on the website?	yes (1)	yes (1)	yes (1)	no (0)	no (0)	no (0)
Does the museum website have an online store?	no (0)	yes (1)	v (0)	yes (1)	yes (1)	no (0)
How aesthetic and appealing is the layout on a scale of 1–10?	10	9	10	7	7	7
Total	23	22	21	16	17	16

Source: own data by using the cognitive walkthrough method.

On the websites of all of the examined museums, visitors can find all the information they need to plan their visit. However, the evaluated

websites differ in their layout and visual presentation of the information. Finding essential pieces of information on the websites of foreign museums is easier due to their placement on the website's layouts. Moreover, not all links on National Museum's in Szczecin website work, some refer the user to non-existent subpages. Also, on the website of the National Museum in Poznan users can find some incorrect pieces of information and typos. The biggest difference between the websites of Polish national museums and those of the foreign museums studied is the unavailability to buy tickets online on the websites of Polish museums. This makes those websites much less usable. Not all evaluated museums (both Polish and foreign) have an online store. In this context, the regard of Polish museums could be rated higher if their online shops were not of very low quality for both their technical properties and offer. The possibility of contacting via the website is an important issue, however, the Art Museum of Estonia, the National Museum of Poznan and the National Museum of Szczecin do not have a contact form.

In assessing the aesthetics of websites, the researcher used the framework distinguished by Faraday (2000). The websites of all of the surveyed museums present similar aesthetics, yet the websites of foreign museums are slightly more polished (Table 3). On the website of National Museum in Kielce, the problem concerns the typography used, while on the pages of the National Museum in Poznan and the National Museum in Szczecin, the arrangement of content and images, as well as symmetry and harmony.

The responsiveness of the evaluated websites was tested using two devices: a laptop and a smartphone. The arrangement, size, and shape of the displayed information and images were checked. The researcher recreated the process of finding necessary information before visiting a museum using the cognitive walkthrough method. The websites of Polish national museums are responsive, but their usability on mobile devices is slightly lower than the websites of foreign museums selected for research. Using the websites of the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, the Art Museum of Estonia and the Louvre-Lens on mobile phones, visitors can find all the information they need before visiting the museum by simply scrolling down, while on the Polish museums' websites they have to open the menu and search for information by

opening new pages. Moreover, on Polish museums' sites, the size of images and the layout of texts do not always match precisely the size of the device's screen.

## **Results — Online Advertising**

In this category, the frequency of use of paid advertising by the compared museums was examined. Questionnaires were sent to the representatives of the Marketing Departments of all the researched museums, asking them how often they promote the museum with the use of the following tools (Table 4).

Significant differences were observed between the use of paid advertising in Polish national museums and foreign museums. Polish national museums are promoted by paid advertising rarely or not at all (The National Museum in Szczecin). In these museums, the most frequently used form of paid advertising is a Fixed cost campaign (paid for delivering online advertisements for a specified period) on art portals ordered once a year and Sponsored articles ordered a few times a year. These forms of promotion are not used by the most visited museums among those surveyed. Polish national museums' marketers use News Feed Ads and Search advertising only for free promotion. At the same time, the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum and the Louvre-Lens are promoted by News Feed Ads and Search advertising a few times a week and the Art Museum of Estonia a few times a month. Moreover, the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum is promoted by the pull and push and display adverts a few times a week, the National Museum in Poznan a few times a month, and the Art Museum of Estonia a few times a year. Other museums surveyed are not promoted through those forms of advertising. Paid video ads are used several times a year or not at all, except for the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, which is advertised this way once a week.

**Table 4. Frequency of using paid advertising by selected museums**

Museum	Pull and push adverts (buttons, pop-ups, floating ads, etc.)	Display advertising	Search advertising	Sponsored articles	Paid video ads (not YouTube)	Fixed cost campaign	News Feed Ads, e.g. sponsored stories, promoted tweets
The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum	few times a week	few times a week	few times a week	not at all	once a week	once a year	few times a week
The Art Museum of Estonia	few times a year	no information	not at all	few times a year	few times a year	not at all	few times a month
The Louvre-Lens	not at all	not at all	few times a week	not at all	few times w roku	few times w roku	few times a week
The NM in Poznan	few times a month	few times a month	not at all	few times a year	few times a year	once a year	not at all
The NM in Szczecin	not at all	not at all	not at all	not at all	not at all	not at all	not at all
The NM in Kielce	not at all	few times a year	not at all	few times a year	not at all	not at all	not at all

Source: own study (survey distributed by email).

## Results — Social Media

In this category, a content analysis of selected museums' profiles on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube was conducted. In addition, the number of followers of the social media profiles of the compared museums was examined (Table 5).

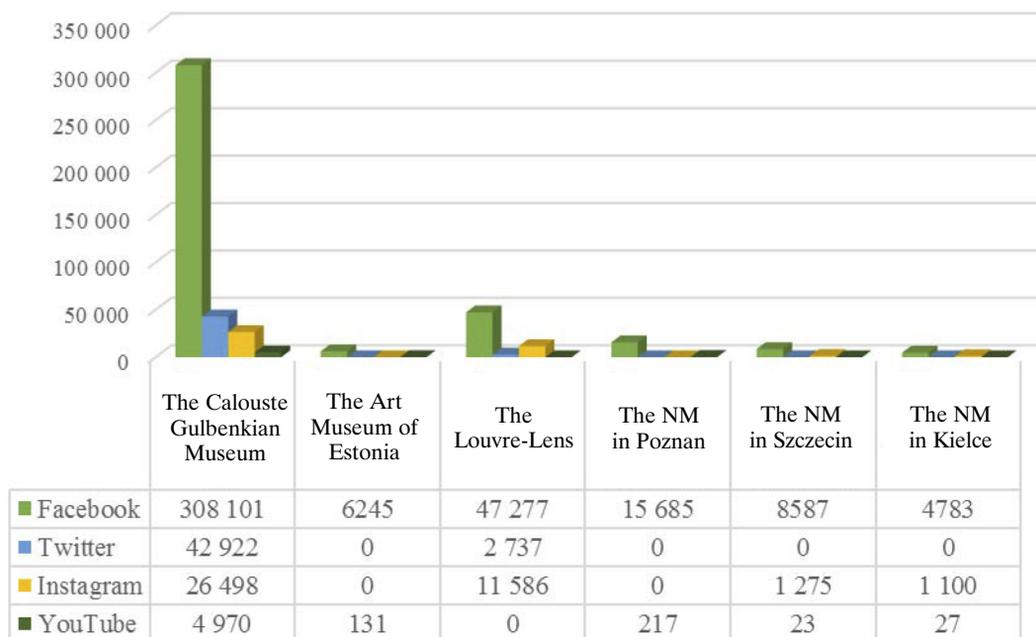
**Table 5. Social media content analysis — content uploaded from 1–31.07.2019**

Wyszczególnienie	The Calouste Gulbenkian Museum	The Art Museum of Estonia	The Louvre-Lens	The NM in Poznan	The NM in Szczecin	The NM in Kielce
<b>Facebook</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>
posts uploaded within a month	64	6	27	27	30	66
events	21	2	1	9	6	4
videos	12	0	5	3	0	1
images	50	47	46	32	158	347
curiosities connected with collection/exhibition information and links to the museum's website	11	0	4	3	4	29
links to other media	13	2	12	5	11	21
contests	8	0	6	11	6	7
contests	0	0	2	0	1	1
funny posts, jokes	0	0	1	0	0	0
reactions collected within a month	38 114	160	2 673	1 209	377	1 269
the highest number of reactions per one post	8 932	58	678	268	57	58
comments collected within a month	794	1	349	41	7	39
shares collected within a month	5 693	13	1 765	72	46	125
<b>Instagram</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>
posts uploaded within a month	29	—	12	—	5	22
videos	4	—	0	—	0	0
Images/sharing of visitors' images	53/54	—	12/0	—	5/0	37
contests	0	—	0	—	1	0
curiosities, funny posts	0	—	10	—	0	11
likes collected within a month	15 482	—	1 367	—	181	490
comments collected within a month	150	—	5	—	3	3
<b>Twitter</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>no</b>	<b>no</b>
posts uploaded within a month	43	—	25	—	—	—
videos	3	—	5	—	—	—
images	22	—	13	—	—	—
curiosities	3	—	5	—	—	—
information posts	9	—	5	—	—	—
links to other media	9	—	14	—	—	—
contests	0	—	0	—	—	—
funny posts, jokes	0	—	0	—	—	—
likes collected within a month	581	—	688	—	—	—
comments collected within a month	19	—	19	—	—	—
shares collected within a month	134	—	216	—	—	—
<b>YouTube</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>	<b>yes</b>
videos	9	1	1	0	0	0
views	3 031	14	237	0	0	0

Source: own study.

Although the number and variety of posts published on the Facebook profiles of Polish national museums are comparable to the number of posts published by foreign museums, the number of responses, comments, and shares collected by Polish national museums posts during the month is much lower. The only exception is the Art Museum of Estonia with only 6 posts within a month, but the number of responses collected in this time period by this museum is almost half the number of responses collected by the National Museum in Szczecin, which has published 30 different posts in the same period. The National Museum in Kielce publishes a lot of interesting and engaging content, like curiosities, images, and contests, however, the number of followers and responses collected within a month is relatively low.

**Figure 1. The number of followers of the social media profiles of the compared museums**



Source: own study.

Only the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum and the Louvre-Lens have profiles in four different social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and YouTube, and regularly post new online content. The profiles of these museums collected the highest number of followers, reactions to posts, comments, and shares, which means that they reach the widest audience with promotion. Comparing the activity of Calouste Gulbenkian Museum and Louvre-Lens on Twitter, it was noted that, although more content was published on the profile of the first museum, it caused less reaction than the content linked by Louvre-Lens. It can be concluded that on this social media platform it is better to share other people's content and interact with other users than to upload own content.

The platforms most often neglected by museums are Twitter and YouTube. The most significant difference in the use of social media platforms by Polish national museums and the foreign museums surveyed is the use of paid advertising and diversity of social media platforms. The research revealed that even with a number, quality, and variety of posts published by Polish museums, comparable to foreign museums, it is unlikely that the promotion will reach a wider audience without the use of a paid form of social media advertising.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

To sum up, the allocation of less financial resources for promotion by Polish national museums is associated with lower effectiveness of this promotion and, consequently, lower attendance. However, greater attention when selecting paid advertisements — choosing the most effective advertising tools, such as News Feed Ads, and adapting websites to recent standards, allows for effective promotion without spending much more money. Making online payments available to visitors and improving the responsiveness of the website is a one-off investment that will result in a long-term improvement. The offer, as well as functionality and responsiveness of the museum's online shops, are also worth considering. Unique, original souvenirs from museums could become their asset and a way to gain additional funds. Nowadays it is very important to involve the audience and interact with them. To this end, it is worth spending

more time on exploiting the opportunities offered by social media. Currently, the Polish national museums surveyed attach the greatest importance to Facebook, omitting other media such as Twitter, YouTube or Instagram. This section presents conclusions and recommendations in the three in three distinguished categories:

- 1. Website usability and responsiveness.** Nowadays, the responsiveness of websites and the possibility of performing various operations on mobile devices is very important. Websites of Polish national museums are not as advanced as those of compared foreign museums in terms of usability and responsiveness, but the biggest problem is the inability to buy tickets onsite and very low quality of the museums' online stores both in terms of their technical features and their offer. Selling tickets online helps to provide greater access to the audience by increasing the online presence of museums and providing a better experience for visitors. It is also a way to collect data that marketing teams can use to get to know museum guests better. Online stores with their rich offer provide museums with the additional financial benefits that these institutions need very much. It is highly recommended to work on adapting the websites to the standards presented by the analyzed European museums.
- 2. Online Advertising.** According to the study, the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum that invests most in various forms of online advertising has the highest attendance, however, regarding the Louvre-Lens experience, the use of many forms of online advertising is not necessary if the most effective are chosen. Polish museums investing in online advertising, use Sponsored articles and Fixed cost campaigns in the media targeted at audiences interested in art, which is not related to broadening the group of recipients. Given their scarce funds, it is recommended to invest in more effective tools, such as Search Advertising and News Feeds Ads. Museums that do not use any funds for online advertising have no chance to play a significant role in virtual space.
- 3. Social media.** Polish museums treat social media as cheap or free substitutes for online advertising, whereas, according to the analysis, using them without spending money on paid advertising campaigns is not effective. Investment in frequent news feed advertising is

recommended. Polish national museums use Facebook the most actively, but the promotion on Facebook brings results only when it is paid for. Given the fact that museums have a rich visual content, it seems a good idea to use Instagram more often. According to Vassiliadis & Belenioti (2017) findings, the most effective forms of museum promotion are profiles on Twitter and YouTube, whereas these social platforms are most often neglected by museums. Twitter and Instagram accounts offer the opportunity for institutions to become more involved in social life and interact with their audiences more often. It is advisable to use a variety of social media platforms. Promotion with limited funding requires posting high engaging content, contains contests, storytelling, catching-eye images, and videos. Humor tops the list of most appealing message types in Europe, cited by 51% and 50% of respondents (Casey, 2016). However, as the study showed, museums do not use a sense of humor to create content. Although creating such content is time-consuming, the study has shown that it brings much better results than, for example, posting video reports of long speeches at exhibition openings or posting dozens of photos from one event. Posting more appealing content is highly recommended.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The National Museum in Gdansk was not taken into account due to its ongoing renovation.

<sup>2</sup> European Group for Museum Statistics.

<sup>3</sup> Source: Eurostat, <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20190111-2>

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