

## MUSEUMS ON FACEBOOK WALL: A CASE STUDY OF THESSALONIKI'S MUSEUMS

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*The objective of this study is two-fold: first, to review the academic literature pertaining to social media strategies, in case of museums, and second, to provide and empirical analysis of the role of social media within marketing and communication strategies. We use first the suggested by the literature metrics, to evaluate the museums' efforts and to measure the stakeholder engagement, and second a content analysis is conducted, in order to explore how museums use their Profile on Facebook to support their marketing and communication strategies. In order to achieve the above research aims, we use data from Facebook pages of the four main museums of Thessaloniki, Greece over a whole year 2014 period. According to our results, museums' main efforts focus on promotion, communication and word of mouth, while they don't support enough yet innovation (through motivation of fans to suggest new products and services, or co-creation) and reputation (by motivating dialogue with fans and monitoring comments).*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Within the last decades, the use of social media for commercial networking purposes has increased (Griffiths et al. 2010) and many museums have attempted to be re-invented in order to introduce alternative visitor experiences that ideally engage audiences and transform them from passive observers into active participators and creators (Holdgaard and Klastrup, 2014). In terms of museum marketing, survival in this competitive arena requires not only the right product decisions but also an effective communications policy (Colbert, 2007). In this era of the Internet (and especially social media), word of mouth (WOM) is gaining in effectiveness as a mean of referral in applications such as Facebook and Twitter, making it possible to reach an unlimited number of people (Riegner, 2007; Trusov et.al., 2009; Miller and Lammas, 2010). It is surprising that in the literature on museum marketing research, eWOM is not mentioned at all, although surveys conducted in museums have repeatedly shown that third-party recommendation is one of the main reasons for visiting (Helm and Klar, 1997; Beywl, 2005; Willems and Lewalter, 2007).

The ideal of transforming museums and museum visitors has been referred to as ‘paradigm shift’, ‘participatory turn’ or ‘digital turn’ (Anderson 2004, 2012; Runnel et al. 2013; Simon 2010; Weil 2002; Hooper-Greenhill 2011), and the museum institution has repeatedly been ‘re-imagined’. Many researchers have suggested that social media can enhance the power of viral marketing (Subramani and Rajagopalan, 2003; Leskovec et.al, 2007) and increase the speed at which consumers share experiences and opinions with progressively larger audiences (Thackeray et al., 2008). According to

Hausmann, (2012), the low-cost opportunities that social media provides for enhancing the two-way communication with the audiences, coupled with the crucial importance of being present and active in these media (Kelly, 2013), make it an affordable and promising resource for building strong relationships with museum audiences.

Until recently, research into museums and social media has largely come out of the fields of visitor studies and museum education (Russo et al. 2008; Kelly and Russo, 2008; Russo, 2009; Kelly, 2009). The potential of social media as discussed in relation to these areas has been identified as being to engage users via participatory communication (through critique, comments, share ideas and interact), to enhance informal learning in museums and to involve audiences, and potential audiences, in exhibition development (Reyes et al., 2012).

From a management point of view, ‘understanding’ social media is the key for properly managing these channels. Museums are increasingly feeling the pressure to respond to the new opportunities offered by social media for connecting with active audience. It is therefore crucial for managers and researchers to comprehend how marketing input interacts with social media to produce desired marketing outcomes (Peters et al, 2013). The implications for corporations using several social media platforms as part of their overall marketing strategy are extremely interesting and empirical investigation on the subject has not been discussed enough in the literature.

The purpose of this paper is two-fold: first, to review the academic literature pertaining to social media strategies, in case of museums and second, to provide and empirical analysis of the role of social media within marketing and communication strategies in case of the four main Museums in Thessaloniki-Greece. We use two approaches: first, using the suggested by the literature metrics, we try to evaluate the museums’ efforts and to measure the stakeholder

engagement, while second we conduct a content analysis in order to explore how the four museums use their Profile on Facebook to support their marketing and communication strategies: promotion and communication, stimulation of word of mouth, market research and innovation as well as reputation management.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In reviewing the literature it became clear that more research is needed in terms of looking at social media use by museums from an institutional standpoint. A number of studies have been carried out in the areas of visitor studies and museum education, but few have taken into account the views from within the institution (Fell, 2012). Russo et al. (2008) argue that the social media space presents an ideal opportunity for museums to build online communities of interest and to engage users via participatory communication. However, by breaking down the conventions of information sharing social media challenge traditional notions of institutional authority and authenticity (Kelly and Russo, 2008). Yet social media can actually extend authenticity “by enabling the museum to maintain a cultural dialogue with its audiences in real time” (Russo et al. 2008).

According to Kidd (2011) three organizing frames for social media activity have been identified: the Marketing Frame (promoting the ‘face’ of a museum), the Inclusivity Frame (related to real and online ‘community’) and the Collaborative Frame (involves interactivity and sometimes crowd sourcing). Most of the researchers agree that social media help build and sustain communities of interest around an institution: ‘Museums interested in building community and audiences have quickly realized the potential of these new technologies and attitudes’ (Grabill, et al, 2009). However, it is evident that communities do not establish and sustain themselves. Moreover, there is no certainty that this dialog will be sizeable. It has been shown that much of any interaction and exchange which occurs within an online community will come from a small segment of

potential and actual users. Social media can also be used to enhance collection information by crowd sourcing. The purpose of user involvement and co-creative projects in museums or other cultural institutions are: to attract new visitor groups (non-visitors); to get more knowledge about the visitors' preferences; to address the challenges of the experience economy; and to engage in subject matters and methods already familiar to the visitors, since participation, dialogue and sharing supposedly have become a matter of course for most users.

Social media has been recognized as a way to engage audiences in informal learning in museums (MacArthur, 2007; Kelly, 2009; Russo, 2009; Kelly, 2011). Informal learning is different from the formal context of schools and universities. Museums are considered to be free-choice, or informal, learning environments. According to Kelly (2009), social media "provide new ways to learn about audiences through interacting with them directly, where curatorial and exhibition development staff can act as stimulators and facilitators." In this way, "audiences can invest in and contribute their ideas, with the subsequent interactions informing and shaping their exhibition experiences". They found social media to be "an easy and efficient way to elicit feedback and dialogue at no actual cost". Multiple projects and studies have demonstrated that is not just enough for museums to have a social media presence it is what you do that matters (e.g. Holdgaard and Simonsen, 2011; Russo & Peacock, 2009).

Furthermore, the everyday use of smartphones with high quality built-in cameras has led to an increase in museum visitors' use of these devices to document and share their museum experiences. Visitors are increasingly sharing their museum visits through social media in new ways. Exploiting the features that smartphones and social media provide beyond those of dedicated cameras, visitors can now create complex layered forms of visual communication and share them online, all from within an exhibition.

Hausmann (2012), developed a practical framework for museums aimed at encouraging WOM marketing in social media. This framework focuses on the actions that museums need to undertake to engage their audiences on the web: to ensure the technological accessibility, to provide regular valuable content, to encourage communication.

Research of museums in Australia in 2010 found that audiences are willing to interact with museums in a two-way communication that involves both sides (Kelly, 2013). According to Kelly (2013) the role of new technologies and social media also affects the organisational structure of museums and requires the museum professionals to constantly develop their skills and knowledge in the digital sphere. In order to embrace the digital and social media museums need to bring the audiences into their centre through two-way communication.

From a quantitative standpoint, the engagement of museums with the Social Web seems to be lagging behind other cultural organizations, like theatres (Hausmann and Poellmann 2013). As concerns the qualitative aspects of the use of SM, they seem to be used more as an instrument of traditional communication rather than of user engagement. Schick and Damkjær (2010), in their analysis of Facebook profiles of Danish art museum, found that content produced by the users is generally limited and of poor quality. Results of Dudareva (2014) for Danish museums demonstrate that the respondents are actively using Facebook merely for getting information about exhibitions and events in museums. Similar results are shown by Fletcher and Lee's (2012) survey of American museums, according to which museum practitioners tend to use SM in one-way modalities, such as event listings, posting reminder notices, displaying online promotions or announcements to reach larger or new audiences. This evidence has been often ascribed to the conservative attitude of museum curators, who seem concerned with protecting their role as authoritative interpreters of the collections from the proliferation of usergenerated contents.

The studies conducted so far to evaluate the impacts of the presence of non-profit organizations on social media have mostly adopted a survey (Fletcher and Lee 2012; Waters et al. 2009) or a content analysis approach (Waters and LeBlanc Feneley 2013). Differently, Haussmann and Poellmann (2013) have recently adopted a case research strategy (Yin 2003) to analyze the use of Facebook by a German theatre with regard to marketing and communication strategies like: promotion and communication, stimulation of word of mouth, market research and innovation as well as reputation management.

In order to integrate the existing literature, we adopt the Haussmann and Poellmann's (2013) case research approach to analyze the way that the four main Thessaloniki's museums support their marketing and communication strategies through social media.

Since this is the first attempt (at least to our knowledge) to investigate the Facebook efforts of Greek Museums, it is important to note that Greek museums do not seem to be very active in social media efforts, although Facebook is the most used. This work focuses on Facebook only, as it is the most used and most widely spread of the social media platforms (Vlachvei and Notta, 2014).

## **MUSEUMS' SOCIAL MEDIA EFFORTS – DATA, METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS**

According to the literature (Hausmann and Poellmann, 2013; Holdgaard and Klastrup, 2014; Hausmann, 2012; Trusov et al., 2009) social media can support marketing of museums in four main dimensions: a) promotion and communication, b) word of mouth, c) market research and innovation management and d) reputation management. Social media have added three elements that are key to successful strategic communication efforts: first dynamic messages, with significant reach to large number of audiences with much less cost, second, variety of shared multimedia and third creation of

formal and informal social networks that can be used to grow a community of supporters. Also word of mouth can be initiated effectively through social media, since the message on Facebook can be spread to an unrestricted, most probably right targeted audience, at extreme speed. Besides, word of mouth via social media has high credibility as the sender and the recipient know each other personally. Therefore it is advisable for museums to actively support word of mouth through either exclusive information, stories with a “buzz factor” and applications that facilitate the passing on of content (Schulz et al. 2008; Hausmann and Poellmann, 2013). Regarding market research and innovation, in depth analysis of comments, complaints, recommendations can facilitate market research and can improve the service chain of museums and generate new ideas for either product development or service enhancement.

The present research aims to answer the question: “How museums use their Profile on Facebook to support their marketing and communication strategies as they are described above”.

We used data of the top 4 Museums of Thessaloniki: Archeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Museum of Byzantine Culture, Teloglion Foundation of Art and War Museum of Thessaloniki. All the four museums are located in the city centre of Thessaloniki and very closed to each other.

We collected detailed information on all activities (posts, comments, and Likes) from museums’ official Facebook pages over a whole year period (January 2014- December 2014). Facebook data were collected by Next Analytics program (Nextanalytics.com). Specifically, we collected all available data through the Facebook for each museum. We collected data for number of friends/fans, likes, comments and shares for each post. Posts are grouped under four categories: links, photos, texts and videos. The most common measures for evaluating Facebook pages are the following (Coleman and Herriot, 2014; Vlachvei and Notta, 2015):

a) Number of posts on wall. Usually is calculated as posts per day. These posts are used to promote event and exhibitions, to give



background information and to encourage interaction with fans

b) Number of likes. Like -ratio is calculated as percentage of the post likes from the total reach. Usually according to Bonson and Ratkai (2012) “likes” on Facebook measure the popularity of a page or a post.

c) Number of comments - Comments actually may prove the commitment. It is calculated as total comments that a page post has received. Comment-ratio is calculated as a percentage of the comments of the post from the total reach of the post.

d) Number of shares. Shares are appearing less frequently than likes and comments. Number of shares is the total amount of shares that a post has received. The share-ratio is calculated as percentage of the total number of shares of the post from the total reach of the post. Through “shares” the museum spread the information and encourage word of mouth. According to the taxonomy selected by Bonson and Ratkai (2012), “shares” on Facebook proves the virality of the post.

e) Post nature. The most common posts are: a status update, a photo, a link (to a URL), a video status (downloaded video or from youtube.com or vimeo.com).

f) Engagement - Facebook defines engagement as: “Engaged Users is the number of people who have clicked anywhere on your post”, which consists of liking, commenting and sharing and people who have viewed your video, clicked on your links and photos. Engagement -ratio is calculated as percentage of the engagement from the total reach.

Weber (2011), classifies the most important social media metrics into the areas that analyze reach, engagement and business (ROI). In case of Facebook communities, the interest is on reach and engagement metrics. Specifically, in order to examine the differential effects involving the different dimensions of museum’ social media efforts, four dimensions of a museum’s efforts on a social media site have been identified:

1) the intensity of the museum’s efforts (i.e., the volume of posts and comments posted by the museum). Higher intensity is expected to give more opportunities to customers and fans to see and act, which

may increase the engagement of customers and to influence museum's market value. We use two measures of museums' Facebook activities: the number of postings and the number of comments. We then scaled it by the network size

2) the richness of the museum's efforts (i.e., the information richness of messages posted by the museum); Messages delivered through different media - texts, pictures, or videos - have varying abilities to deliver information, and accordingly, we can determine the richness of these various types of media (Daft and Lengel, 1986). Richer messages are more likely to be noticed by consumers because they are more engaging and informative. Research suggests that messages delivered and using pictures are richer than text and video is superior to static pictures because it is more explicit and easier to understand (Larkin and Simon 1987; Emerson 2012; Vlachvei and Notta, 2015). The richness of a museum's Facebook efforts is measured as the ratio of the number of the museum's enriched postings (flash, videos and photos) to the total number of the museum's postings. A larger value of this measure reflects the museum's greater efforts spent on Facebook in terms of the richness of information provided to public

3) the responsiveness of the museum's efforts (the extent to which a museum responds to consumers' messages). By providing informative contents, by responding to user queries, or complaints and giving feedback in a constructive manner, museum is possible to monitor its online reputation, to built trust and to avert negative publicity that can easily spread through internet (Luo and Zhang, 2013; Hausmann and Poellmann, 2013). Responsiveness index is measured by the ratio of the number of the museum's comments to the total number of comments made by both the museum and its fans.

4) the engagement index. The engagement according to Buhalis and Mamalakis (2015) is the most important element of the non-financial ROI. The total engagement rate can be calculated based on Smitha's (2013) formula as total engagement (the sum of likes and comments and shares) over total number of fans.

According to our data (Table 1) the museum with the most fans on Facebook seems to be the Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki with 12740 fans, while Teloglion Foundation of Art has a much lower number of fans reaching 3247 fans. From the analysis of visitors of the museums in 2014, (although we do not have data for Teloglion Foundation of Art) we can see that the museums which are more popular in real-life are also more popular virtually: they have a bigger number of Facebook followers.

The most active museum in terms of posting is War Museum of Thessaloniki with 299 posts and 0.82 posts per day, but all museums have a mean posting rate less than one post per day. All museums post more often photo messages which are more likely to be noticed by consumers because they are more engaging and informative (from 53% to 77.6% of total posts are photos), while Archaeological Museum and Teloglion Foundation use also links (43% and 31.6% of total posts, respectively). War museum of Thessaloniki seems to post the most popular posts, since it has the biggest number of likes per post (26.19). It is interesting that during the period analyzed every post made by Museum of Byzantine Culture, Archeological museum of Thessaloniki and Teloglion foundation of Art was on average shared more than 4 times by museums' fans with their friends, when according to Hausmman and Poellmann (2013) the statistics for German BSO are very closed (5 times).

Table 1. Descriptive Data

	<b>Archaeolog ical Museum of Thessaloni ki</b>	<b>Museu m of Byzanti ne Culture</b>	<b>War of Museum of Thessalo niki</b>	<b>Teloglio n Foundati on of Art</b>
Total posts	154	68	299	155
Total fans	12.740	7.427	3.887	3.247

Total visitors for 2014	102.000	92.000	32.000	-
Post/day	0.42	0.186	0.82	0.42
Likes/post	19.76	14.04	26.19	11.56
Comments/post	0.35	0.47	0.32	0.13
Shares/post	4.2	4.42	2.84	4.11
<b>Nature of posts</b>				
Text/post	4%	32%	5.3%	9.0%
Photos/post	53%	66%	77.6%	53.5%
Videos/post	-	-	6.7%	5.8%
Links/post	43%	2%	10.3%	31.6%

Table 2 presents intensity, richness, responsiveness and engagement indexes. According to these results, War museum of Thessaloniki uses more intensively its Facebook page, and its messages are more enriched. Second in terms of intensity, is Teloglion Foundation of Art, although richness index and responsiveness index are rather low. Concerning engagement rate, War museum of Thessaloniki seems to have the higher rate. Leander (2013) and Lee (2013) after an extended research of Facebook pages below 10.000 fans (500.000 and 5000 Facebook pages respectively) support different satisfying engagement rate (around 1% and from 1.7% to 6.1%, respectively) (Buhalis and Mamalakis, 2015). Therefore, according to the above statistics, the engagement rate of War Museum of Thessaloniki seems to be between medium and good levels. The engagement rate of the other three museums is less than satisfying. Regarding responsiveness, all the four main museums of

Thessaloniki seem to avoid dialogue or at least do not continuously monitor the comments of fans and react to them.

Table 2. Intensity, Richness and Responsiveness and Engagement

	<b>Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki</b>	<b>Museum of Byzantine Culture</b>	<b>War Museum of Thessaloniki</b>	<b>Teloglio Foundation of Art</b>
Intensity	1.63	1.34	10.18	5.38
Richness	0.53	0.66	0.84	0.59
Responsiveness	0.166	0.21	0.12	0.13
Engagement rate	0.29	0.17	2.25	0.75

We conducted a content analysis of each museum's posts, in order to evaluate how museums used their official Facebook pages to support their marketing and communication strategies. The categorization was according to the information content and seven categories were created which are:

General: stands posts that included wishes, greetings, national celebrations or other news of the world

Historical: stands for posts that had historical content

Informative: stands for posts that included museum's news, innovative actions or any other information material

Event: stands for posts that provided information for a variety of events

Educational programs: with information about museum's educational efforts

Contest: stands for posts that were drawing prizes according to user correspondence

Advertising: stands for posts that aimed to advertise the museum itself.

Content analysis of postings of museums revealed indirectly the main reason as to why each museum created a profile to a social medium. Data analysis arose feelings of surprise, as results were rather unexpected. Promotional posts were not so often: advertising posts are from 3.3% to 14.3% of total posts, and event promotion posts from 6.5% to 14.7% of total posts. Only in case of Telloglion Foundation the advertising posts appeared to reach 40.8% of total posts. Most of museums' posts include information (from 44.1% to 67.5%), while historical posts appeared to be interestingly popular for War Museum of Thessaloniki (19%).

Also in War museum of Thessaloniki appear only a few posts with contest and content results, something that is very common in other museums and institutions, since organizations try hard to stimulate interaction (e.g., through competitions, polls, questions) on their profile to motivate and involve fans and followers and to make the site more interesting in general. Also, it is interesting that none of the posts has to do with "call to action", or co-creation projects that are supposed to lead to a rich dialogue and meaningful participation.

It is also surprising that educational programs do not appear so often (from 3.3% to 8.4%, in War Museum and Archeological Museum, respectively), although museums support their main interest and focus has to do with educational programs (Table 3).

Finally, one of the aims of the use of social media and especially Facebook, is to market the museum, to a world-wide online audience, and as a complement to this, it is increasingly important to engage with an online audience that may or may not be able to physically visit the Museum. However, it is surprising that there are no posts in others that Greek language, except from a very limited number of links, in case of Teloglio Foundation of Art and Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki.

Table 3. Content analysis of museums' Facebook posts

	<b>Archaeological Museum of Thessaloniki</b>	<b>Museum of Byzantine Culture</b>	<b>War Museum of Thessaloniki</b>	<b>Teloglio Foundation of Art</b>
General	10.4%	2.9%	6.7%	13.1%
Historical	-	-	19.0%	
Informative	67.5%	44.1%	59.2%	36.2
Event promotion	6.5%	14.7%	6.7%	5.9%
Educational programs	8.4%	5.9%	3.3%	3.9%
Contests- contest results	-	-	1.6%	-
Advertising	7.1%	14.3%	3.3%	40.8%

Total posts    154                                  68                                  299                                  152

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## **CONCLUSIONS**

Shaping the outline of the results that emerged from the research of the relevant literature and the research on Thessaloniki's museums, it is obvious that social media can support the marketing strategies of museums, especially regarding promotion and communication, word of mouth, innovation and reputation management. Although there are some expected differences between the museums regarding their involvement in Facebook, either on the way they use the opportunities of Facebook or on their engagement with their fans and followers, museums have a unique opportunity through social media to deliver powerful experiences that not only inspire and teach but also interact with society and guide audience, and that is why the results of this work are very important.

Our results prove that museums' main efforts focus on promotion, communication and word of mouth, by using rich messages, with "buzz factor", while they are not supporting enough yet innovation (through motivation of fans to suggest new products and services, or co-creation) and reputation (by motivating dialogue with fans and monitoring comments).

With respect to the implications of this study, social media museum life demands a clear strategy, commitment, resources and personnel, and a fan base to cultivate. The more fans a museum has on Facebook, the larger is the potential for electronic worth of mouth. Museums should ensure that their profile is updated and that the posts are interesting enough to generate traffic and create buzz, by posting enriched messages or stories that appeal to fans on an emotional level. Finally, museums should pay attention to the interaction (e.g., through competitions, polls, questions, rewards) on their profile in



order to motivate and involve fans and followers, for a reach dialogue and meaningful participation. Motivation of fans to suggest good ideas can be also stimulated through rewards and public recognition.

For researchers the results can contribute to theory validations and interpretations. Measuring popularity, commitment, virality and engagement is useful to evaluate interactivity and dialogues and indicate levels of engagement of the dialogue. Transparency and trust are essential for effective dialogue, while activating the audience is a difficult part of museum dialogue.

However, the findings of this work cannot be generalized, since a main limitation that must be acknowledged, is that our investigation represents four case studies of museums of Thessaloniki. Further research is necessary to compare the results of our empirical study with similar museums in Greece or in other countries. Also, another possible direction for future research could be to investigate further and to evaluate the content in terms, for example, of reciprocity, relationship nurturing, etc, or to establish reliable measures and scales of communication strategies for social media, in order to understand organizational relationship building.

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