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# Digital Marketing in Cultural Institutions - Example of Cultural Institutions of the City of Zadar

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## Abstract

Marketing in public cultural institutions can be defined as a tool for achieving an organizational and creative concept that seeks to build relationships with the audience. This paper will define how public cultural institutions manage their marketing departments, with particular emphasis on the importance of using digital marketing channels on the example of cultural institutions in the City of Zadar. The research is based on four cultural institutions of the City of Zadar. Those institutions were examined by the structured in-depth interview method to explore the reach of using digital marketing in cultural institutions (public cultural institutions) on the example of the listed public cultural institutions. The paper also explores which digital marketing channels are being used for the scope of promotion in the listed cultural institutions. Furthermore, the importance of using social networks, mobile, email, and content marketing as a channel to interact with consumers of cultural institutions will be studied. The analysis of the primary research results will prove that the regular use of digital marketing channels has led to an increase in the number of visitors to cultural institutions.

**Keywords:** digital marketing, non-profit marketing, cultural marketing, digital marketing channels, social networks

**JEL classification:** L30, L86, M31, M37, Z11, Z18

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## Introduction

Marketing orientation was initially exclusively focused on business entities and concentrated on meeting the needs and desires of customers in the business sector. Over the last decades, there has been a change in the understanding of the function and role of marketing orientation, which extends from business to both civil society and the public sector, with an emphasis on cultural institutions. By adopting marketing orientation, cultural institutions have radically changed their business philosophy. The earlier business philosophy focused on objects or exhibits was replaced by orientation to visitors of cultural institutions (Mahoni et al., 2017).

In this paper, the authors explore the reach of using digital marketing in cultural institutions (public cultural institutions) on the example of public cultural institutions in the City of Zadar. This paper explores which digital marketing channels are being used for the scope of promotion in the listed cultural institutions. Furthermore, the importance of using social networks, mobile, email, and content marketing as a channel to interact with consumers of cultural institutions will be studied. It is assumed that public cultural institutions of the City of Zadar use digital marketing channels, therefore this paper explores their reach as well as the media - a blend used in the listed institutions. The purpose of the research is to find out to what extent cultural institutions keep up with new trends in marketing and whether they recognize the importance of digital marketing for developing their brand. The primary research conducted among managers, marketing professionals in these institutions was to find out to what extent, and how they use digital marketing as a channel of promotion. Furthermore, the level of awareness of the importance of digital marketing among their users was explored.

The paper consists of several parts. The introduction is followed by a brief overview of the theory in the field of non-profit marketing, specifically in public cultural institutions. Furthermore, the following is a presentation of the concept and presentation of digital marketing as a process. This is followed by the methodology, research results, discussion and conclusion.

## Literature review

### *Marketing in public cultural institutions*

The marketing orientation in culture focuses on understanding the needs and wants of different cultural contents final recipients. According to Hill et al. (2003, p. 1) "Marketing is an integrated management process which provides mutually satisfying exchange relationships with customers on the route to achieving organizational and artistic objectives". Instead of orientation to objects or products, the implementation of cultural marketing achieves harmony between customer preferences and cultural institutions. Marketing orientation plays a key role in the demystification of the contents of cultural institutions, therefore marketing should be considered as a tool by which potential demand for contents of cultural institutions is translated into real demand.

Pitel in her book of 2017 explores the marketing basics on example of libraries, e. g.: branding, target audience, advertising or media, websites, email, social media, blogging, and others (Natal, 2017).

Marketing managers in cultural fields should investigate deeply the target cultural consumers' understanding, preferences, and perceptions. It is understandable because marketing strategies can indeed determine appropriate strategies in cultural fields to offer the best services in the most beneficial way for both parts of

businesses (Shahhosseini & Ardahaey, 2011). Colbert and St-James (2014) studied three central themes in arts marketing research: an emerging challenge to the traditional "supply-side marketing" assumption underlying arts marketing; the role of consumers as co-creators of artistic experiences; and unique aspects of arts marketing management - that is, branding of artistic products, pricing of artistic products, cultivating customer loyalty, and incorporating unique funding sources such as fundraising and sponsorships.

The question of how to retain existing visitors and attract new potential ones to cultural services is in the focus of the marketing orientation of cultural institutions. There is no explicit answer to this question, but the answer must be given according to the results of market research that give rise to certain elements of marketing strategy. Certain elements of the marketing blend are elaborated in the marketing strategy of cultural institutions, namely the product, service, or the program of the cultural institution, price, sales and promotional blend - all these elements need to be tailored to the key features of target markets.

Marketing in public cultural institutions is developed under the principles of marketing in non-profit organizations, whose primary goal is not the profit but the focus on meeting the needs of stakeholders in the wider social area. This means that business that respects the principles of balanced sustainable development is a particularly important feature and specificity in the marketing of public cultural institutions, intending to achieve a balance between economic, social and environmental goals, i.e., the goals related to the long-term preservation of valuable cultural infrastructure.

Camarero et al. (2019) explored whether museums' external relationships depend on managers and internal relationships as well as on mode of governance. They concluded that close relationships with the external environment require managerial social capital and a supportive culture that favours internal cohesion. Finally, public museums directly run by government entities remain too bureaucratic and lack incentives to promote internal cohesion as well as relationships with customers and other stakeholders.

Pronounced social responsibility and development of a responsible approach towards the presentation of cultural contents are the basic features and peculiarities of marketing in public cultural institutions. Cultural institutions are taking an ever more proactive stance intending to reach new audiences and create stronger emotional connections and loyalty relationships with existing visitors.

Public cultural institutions turn to build strong partnerships at the community level in which they operate in the spirit of democracy and the culture of dialogue. In this way, cultural institutions strongly contribute to the development of the cultural identity of cities and activity that is in line with the principles of developing a brand of a city or a tourist destination.

A particular goal of marketing orientation is the enhancement of customer experience. The visitor who perceives the facts about an offer of a cultural institution often plays the role of the passive observer in the business object orientation of cultural institutions. Today the experience is built in cooperation with the visitor. In order to raise the overall level of user experience, numerous cultural institutions systematically and continuously invest in the development of interactive content through which visitors are exposed to cultural contents by personal and customized experiences of an active participant. This orientation is a reflection of the trend in the cultural market that can be described by the phrase "culture is not only creative, but it also instigates creation" (Weber-Kainz, 2005). As visitors to public cultural institutions want to satisfy their own need for inspired creativity by attending cultural events, a

shift from passive presentation towards an interactive workshop approach is necessary for the offer of cultural contents. This is the only way to fulfil completely the visitors' need for a new level of experience.

### *Development of marketing in public cultural institutions*

It has been almost 45 years since arts marketing began to slowly emerge as a sub-discipline within the field of marketing research, while in the territory of the Republic of Croatia; this area has been modernized and gradually developed since the mid-1990s to the present time. The focus of the experiential arts consumption theme is conceptualizing experience, the emotions that shape arts consumption, and the symbolic dimension of cultural experiences (Colbert & St-James, 2014).

Already in the first phases of marketing development in cultural institutions, the focus of the research was on conceptualizing the experiences of visitors to cultural institutions. As the offer of cultural contents become more and more diverse, marketing of cultural institutions is focused on the question of how to offer visitors additional value for money, how to stand out in the minds of the target group of customers and gain their loyalty. The answer to these questions lies in the need to provide extraordinary, unique and exclusive experiences that will engulf visitors for their uniqueness and exceptional emotional, multisensory and aesthetic nature (Hume, 2011). The aforementioned author also points out that the level of experience of visitors to a cultural event is influenced by the interaction between the overall quality of services, the perceived value for the time and money invested, and the satisfaction of visitors with the overall marketing relationships at the cultural institution level.

Similar, in his research (2009) Lehman seeks to answer the questions: What do museums see as the drivers of change in the museum sector in recent years? How do they think the public has changed? How have museums responded to the changes in both society and their visitors?

Wiedemann et al. (2019) explored museums' reactions to the call for open access and looks at how museums currently utilize their digital content. Based on an analysis of qualitative interviews with museum officials in Germany, they have found museums to follow four different strategies: public engagement, safeguarding heritage-related knowledge, promoting research infrastructure and achieving marketing goals. These differing strategies reveal that museums aim for different levels of open access and that they prioritise certain tasks in order to deal with conflicting expectations. From their research it becomes clear that museums tend to focus on some organizational tasks and disregard others to solve conflicting demands and that, in doing so, they are substantially guided by their institutional identity and self-understanding.

An important feature of cultural contents and supply is the profundity and diversity of emotional experiences that the visitor feels through the perception of visual and auditory elements of artwork exhibited in cultural institutions. The essence of artistic expression is the manifestation of the artist's inner world, which usually refers to contents, and themes that visitors can identify with profoundly, based on their sensibility. Provoking genuine and authentic emotion in the visitor is the highest level of experience a visitor can experience by consuming cultural contents. The deep emotional bond forms the basis for further development of the relationship of loyalty between the visitor and the public cultural institution.

Emotional expression, which is contained in cultural contents, is complemented by a deep symbolic meaning of cultural contents since symbols evoke in man collective unconsciousness and build a sense of belonging, identity and spiritual

growth. Symbolic elements are present in all forms of artistic expression - from visual symbols in fine arts to narrative identity in stories and theatrical arts, or unique atmosphere and expression in music as a universal emotional and symbolic language. The symbolism of cultural contents leads to the exchange of personal experiences at the highest level, the emotional and the essential one. The objective of cultural contents marketing is not and cannot be to produce the emotional and symbolic component of visitors' experiences, but rather to recognize and understand them to secure further offering of contents that are oriented towards a high level of visitor satisfaction with the service (Colbert & St-James, 2014).

In the current development of marketing in cultural institutions so far, the focus has been solely on ensuring a high level of aesthetic, emotional, and symbolic experience and adventure for visitors to cultural institutions. Today, trends in the offer of cultural contents and marketing of cultural institutions are moving one-step further. Cultural institutions go towards co-creating and stimulating their own need for creativity with visitors. The cultural institution aims to awaken visitors to a high level of inspiration that will encourage them to express themselves independently, and thus to have a more free, creative and authentic experience of themselves and their environment. Through the joint creation with the audience, the value of artistic and cultural contents is increasing exponentially, and the artist's vision is raised and enriched in feedback with the visitor. Hence, the creative aspects represent the future of cultural institution marketing (Hill et al., 2003).

### *Digital marketing in cultural institutions*

The development of information and communication technology is applicable in almost all fields of human activities, as well as in the marketing of public cultural institutions. Digital media represent with their interactivity, multimedia and real-time user communication capability a very important tool of marketing communication for contemporary cultural institutions, especially concerning attracting new visitors and building loyalty relationships with existing visitors to a cultural institution.

Digital marketing can be defined as a process aimed at identifying and satisfying the desires and needs of potential target customers with information and communication technology, with an emphasis on the Internet. Considering that we live in a digital-centric world where "consumer consumerism is on autopilot", the Internet has changed the classic ways of running a business (Krajnović et al., 2017). Technological advances have led to the creation of completely new and different patterns of marketing communication between providers of goods and services, including cultural institutions, and end-users. "The term 'digital marketing' has evolved from a term that describes the marketing of products and services using digital channels, to an umbrella term that describes the process of using digital technologies to acquire and build consumer preferences, promote brands, retain consumers and increase sales. Digital marketing can also be defined as an adaptable, technology-enabled process by which companies work with consumers and partners to collaboratively create, communicate, deliver and maintain value for all stakeholders" (Duka, 2017).

Compared to traditional marketing, digital marketing has enabled interactivity and interconnectivity with end-users of products and services. Email, SMS messaging, and social networking services such as *Facebook*, *MySpace* or *LinkedIn* allow connecting people of similar attitudes and interests around the world, regardless of their geographical location or time zone. *Online* social communities are created through interactivity and interconnectivity and they share common attitudes, values and affinities. These digital marketing features greatly facilitate the process of

gaining insight into attitudes of particular social groups and the process of segmentation, targeting and market positioning as well as the development of targeted marketing communication, which is an important feature of digital media over conventional mass media such as radio or television (Constantinides & Fountain, 2008).

The frequency of marketing communication and communication, in general, is significantly increasing as information and communication technology speeds up and facilitates the process of creating, publishing, accessing, and consuming digital content. For this reason, the level of consumer awareness of different products, services or programs has increased significantly in a relatively short time since the disclosure of information. According to Ryan and Jones (2009), this creates the basis for eliminating information asymmetry and developing relationship marketing.

Digital (r)evolution has led to a significant increase in the amount of information available to a single user and searching for all available information can cause the lack of concentration and the loss of focus, as well as the inability to delve deeper into meaningful information to reach conclusions. To help the Internet users to better navigate the available "abundance of information", they have several filters at their disposal that narrow the search for results according to the user's interests and preferences. Personalized search features help eliminate unnecessary and irrelevant content for the user. Precisely because of the selectivity of information that the target user accesses, the task of digital marketing staff is to make the content attractive and interesting, enough to capture the attention and interest of target users (Rancati & Gordini, 2014).

In traditional marketing communication, the provider of products and services is the primary initiator of communication, and potential consumers are passive recipients of the message. In the digital marketing era, communication patterns are changing, and potential consumers can look back at the sender's communication message, send reviews, or share content with users with whom they are connected in the digital community. The democracy of digital media is reflected in public debates, forums, polls, user-posted contents and opinion polls (Ryan & Jones, 2009). All of the above features of the Internet as a medium significantly enhance the bargaining power of users in the market.

The digital marketing era leads to a significant change in the development of relationships between marketers and potential users of their services. Social media has become omnipresent. Statista predicted in 2018 that within a period of three years, a third of Earth's entire population will actively use it (Ćurlin et al., 2019). Due to a high level of information and involvement of users in social networks and their significant bargaining power, customers are actively involved in the process of making decisions about the features of particular products and services. Through collaborative customer relationships, satisfying the needs, desires and preferences of potential and actual customers are approached in a new and direct way. Customers who actively participate in the process of creating products and services and whose suggestions are respected by the producer (provider) are called *prosumers* (Provider and Consumer) (Ritzer & Jurgensen, 2010).

## Methodology

The primary research has been conducted with the aim to examine the extent to which digital marketing is used as a channel of promotion in cultural institutions in the City of Zadar and determine the importance of marketing on the example of the Croatian National Theatre of Zadar (hereinafter referred to as CNT Zadar), a cultural institution with a long tradition and important role in the culture of the City of Zadar in

Croatia. For the purpose of this research, authors have selected four cultural institutions of the City of Zadar, the second-largest city in Dalmatia and the fifth in the Republic of Croatia. Institutions that participated in the primary research were examined by the structured in-depth interview method. In the research, experts of the mentioned four public cultural institutions in the City of Zadar were asked 16 questions. The research was conducted between March and May 2019. The identity of the respondents is known only to the authors, and to ensure the anonymity of the respondents, they were assigned numbers from 1 to 4.

Out of four institutions interviewed, two respondents are directors of cultural institutions, while two interviewed employees are marketing managers.

## Results

The following text presents the research results.

**Annual attendance at the institution before and after using digital marketing.** The first question referred to the annual attendance at institutions to determine the impact of digital marketing on the attendance at cultural institutions in the City of Zadar. Institution 1 has been active since its inception in the use of digital marketing tools and the annual attendance at cultural institution 1 has been increasing year by year, which is in line with the growth and development of this young institution. Institution 2 has been using digital marketing tools for many years and it is difficult for them to assess how much they have contributed to their progress. Emphasis is placed on *Facebook* as a digital medium, and with the creation of the website, the number of followers has been growing as well as the number of visitors to institutions. It can be concluded that *Facebook*, as a digital marketing channel, contributes to the number of visitors.

**A marketing department at the institution.** All respondents indicated that there was a marketing department in their cultural institutions. It can be concluded that all cultural institutions in the City of Zadar have recognized the importance of marketing departments to improve their business performance.

The head of the marketing department is responsible for marketing activities within the institution. One of the respondents stated that in their cultural institution they cooperate as a collective in a way that the colleagues from other departments have access to social networks and, as agreed, they can publish curiosities from a specific sector. Emphasis is placed on cooperation among employees, which contributes to the popularity of cultural institutions of the City of Zadar in the public.

All the respondents claim that conducting marketing activities contributes to an increase in the number of visitors.

**Hiring marketing experts outside of the institution.** When asked if they hire experts outside the institution, all respondents answered in the negative. One of the respondents stated the impossibility of financing marketing experts as the reason for not engaging them outside the institution, while the other respondents did not state the reason.

**Marketing strategy at the institution.** Cultural events in the City of Zadar are diverse, so in cultural institutions, the goals of marketing strategies are adjusted to internal and external factors that influence the attraction of visitors to cultural institutions. The marketing strategy is planned and the long-term by developing a marketing blend. It defines the target group, the ticket price strategy and the promotion tailored to cultural events in the institution. All respondents from the cultural institutions in the City of Zadar state that they employ a developed marketing strategy that is adapted to pre-organized events in the institution, but in



fact, they are using marketing tactics in advertising their institutions, while the long-term marketing strategy should be more precisely defined.

**The target audience.** All cultural institutions surveyed are oriented to all age groups. It is advisable to precisely define the target group in the future, since defining the target group of potential consumers of cultural institutions is the basis for successful positioning of a cultural institution in a digital environment and successful planning of an institution's marketing strategy and marketing tactics.

**Customer relationships management.** Customer relationship management is a very important segment in the culture. The goal of every institution, including the cultural one, is to position the customer in the spotlight. In addition to using social networks, they use a guest book, workshops and surveys to communicate with their visitors as market feedback.

**Usage of digital marketing channels.** All the respondents interact with their customers by using the most popular social media as promotion channels (*Facebook, Instagram*) and the official website. The person in charge of managing social networks within cultural institutions is the marketing manager.

All respondents believe that these digital channels greatly help them communicate with their audience. The marketing department in cultural institutions recognizes the importance of digital channels as an indispensable tool in communication and maintaining customer relationships.

**A person in charge of managing social networks.** The person in charge of managing social networks in cultural institutions is the marketing manager. In some institutions, employees in other departments have access to social networks and, as agreed with the marketing manager, they can publish curiosities and events of particular departments.

**Usage of online systems in distribution (selling tickets, souvenirs, etc.).** Cultural institutions in Zadar have recognized the importance of using *online* distribution systems, making them more accessible to their users. By using *online* distribution systems, additional advertising benefits are achieved. By entering into contracts with *online* ticket distribution companies, it has been made possible to use media space with which the company cooperates. It would be advisable to recognize the importance of its *online* system and the benefits it brings by its application.

**Tracking the impact of digital communications channels.** Conducting an analysis of digital communication channels and their impact on a cultural institution greatly helps to create future posts on social networks. All four institutions follow the weekly analysis via the *Facebook* social network. It can be concluded that the cultural institutions of the City of Zadar are following the analyses of digital communication channels. However, they do not use the obtained results sufficiently for future advertising.

**Plans regarding the introduction of marketing communication in the institution.** The subject of this paper deals with the reach of using digital marketing in public cultural institutions in the City of Zadar. The conducted research found that the marketing managers of cultural institutions in the City of Zadar are in charge of marketing activities and have recognized the importance of digital marketing, which serves them daily as a medium for advertising cultural events. It can be concluded that all respondents have successful cooperation with cultural institutions in Zadar County as well as excellent communication through social networks. All of the cultural institutions reviewed are well on the way to the modern development of digital marketing. By keeping up with trends, they should focus on a clear target group to more easily elaborate on marketing tactics that result from a marketing strategy, not

the other way around. Emphasis is placed on collaboration that needs to be constantly promoted to improve customer relationship management (CRM).

For a more detailed presentation of the research results, see Perković (2019).

## Discussion

Cultural marketing is an area that is not yet precisely defined and cultural market studies are very rare, so it was a challenge to find out how cultural institutions turn to the public with a focus on digital marketing to attract a younger audience less and least interested in cultural contents. The research found that public cultural institutions in the City of Zadar have recognized the importance of digital marketing, which serves them daily as a medium for advertising cultural events - however, marketing in cultural institutions in the City of Zadar still lags behind new trends. During the research, it was observed that the surveyed cultural institutions did not have a defined digital marketing strategy; it is more about marketing tactics related to upcoming events. The marketing strategy is developed and planned over the long term and serves as a starting point for planning marketing tactics. This approach created inadequate conditions at the outset. Although knowledge of the target group helps to develop the strategy, none of the institutions surveyed has a defined target audience, which is ultimately a problem because it is much easier to plan a strategy and then tactics for a specific target audience.

The focus of this paper is the proper use of digital marketing tools in communication with the target audience. In all four institutions surveyed, their relationships with audiences are nurtured through digital marketing tools, of which they pick out *Instagram*, *Facebook* and the official *website*. The goal of digital marketing is to use all its resources. The authors of this paper believe that digital communication tools are not being used to a sufficient extent, given the opportunities they provide. It is therefore desirable to increase the number of digital channels used in communication in the future. With very little investment, the aforementioned tools offer sponsored content, and such advertisements with their novelties can serve as a tool to reach a younger audience. This is supported by the fact that young people today use "smart" phones in their daily communication through which they receive information in a fast and easy way. For cultural institutions to make the most of social networks, it is very important to be active, define your target audience, and create promotional content accordingly. Listening to visitors' preferences is an important factor in creating promotional content. With a well-developed audience relationship strategy, great business progress can be made, and the audience needs to be at the heart of communication as every communication cycle begins and ends with it.

Nowadays, quality communication with the public cannot be achieved without the proper use of digital communication channels. Once the strategy and marketing tactics for the target audience have been defined, it is very important to analyse the digital communications channels and their impact on the institution. It has been established that all four institutions followed the analyses through *Facebook* but did not sufficiently explore them. In other words, if the mentioned social network did not automatically offer relevant marketing metrics, there would be no marketing analysis. The algorithms provided by the above social network are of great importance because they make available easy insight into the number of visitors, the age group and the region they come from, allowing the user to customize future contents on digital media.

Trend monitoring and posting quality content on social networks requires commitment and creativity, whereas a constant presence in the digital world is of

vital importance. The ultimate goal is to attract visitors, present themselves in the best light and give them a reason to come back.

## Conclusion

Over the last decade, digital marketing has led to a significant change in the development of the relationship between marketing and the potential users of its services. Public cultural institutions today operate on the same marketing principles as profit institutions, so they should be treated accordingly. They face an increasingly demanding audience that knows what they want but have less and less free time for cultural contents.

The research found that the managers of public cultural institutions in the City of Zadar recognized the importance of using digital marketing as well as the benefits it brings, such as the focus on the public, greater attendance, inspiring the public to go to see and visit cultural institutions. All the institutions surveyed use *Facebook*, *Instagram* and the official *website* to communicate with users as a channel of promotion, however, with the development of digital marketing, many digital communication opportunities are opening up, and it may be advisable for the institutions surveyed to improve digital marketing communication in the future. For the public cultural institutions to make the most of social networks, they must be active, define the target audience, and tailor their promotional content to it. The cultural institutions of the City of Zadar should provide their marketing staff with training on new digital marketing trends to create stronger digital involvement through the proper use of digital communication channels.

Marketing managers in public cultural institutions are facing great challenges because the posting of quality content on social networks requires commitment and creativity, where a constant presence in the digital world is of paramount importance. The successful business of the institutions is supported by the fact that the continued use of digital media tools results in higher attendance, so systematic monitoring of trends among social networks and other contemporary digital media is necessary. Concerning this, guidelines are recommended for further research that will focus on searching for the needs and motives of "consumers" of cultural content, especially members of the new generation of millennials, as well as reviewing the existing paradigm of communication between providers and users of cultural content in the new context of modern post digital society. Finally, the ultimate goal is to attract visitors, present themselves in the best light and give them a reason to revisit.

The scientific contribution of this paper is to improve the theoretical concept of digital marketing and evaluate the reach of using digital marketing tools in cultural institutions in the City of Zadar. The research is limited to one local environment, which is also the main limitation of the research, so it would certainly be advisable to expand future research to a wider geographical area and international experiences and practices, but also to explore and analyse other aspects of marketing communication when it comes to digital marketing in culture. The conducted studies can serve as guidelines for further research on the reasons why young people are not interested in culture and how cultural institutions can contribute to attracting young people to visit cultural contents.

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