

# Crowdfunding in the museum context: Exploring alternative approaches to financial support

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** The objective of the article is to investigate the applicability of crowdfunding in the museum context, addressing the limited research available in this area. By focusing on museums in Poland, known for their cultural diversity, the objective was to examine how crowdfunding can provide financial support, enhance museum visibility, and foster community engagement.

**Research Design & Methods:** Using an exploratory qualitative approach, we analysed digital data from 28 Polish museum crowdfunding projects collected between May and July 2023. We examined structural choices, social communication strategies, and goal achievement using online promotional channels. This analysis followed pre-defined research questions and a theory-driven coding method with consensus coding by two researchers.

**Findings:** Our research highlights crowdfunding's potential in addressing museums' financial challenges, and offering tailored support, especially for smaller institutions. It also identifies cases of campaigns falling short of funding goals due to inadequate promotion and donor communication. Reward-based crowdfunding consistently outperforms donation-based models, strengthening audience connections and cultural heritage dissemination in the museum context.

**Implications & Recommendations:** This study underscores crowdfunding as a financial solution for museums, emphasizing the need for digital literacy and employee training. Variations in communication strategies among museums highlight the importance of strategic planning. Crowdfunding can enhance financial stability, audience connections, and societal impact when aligned with other financial measures, making it a viable strategy for museums.

**Contribution & Value Added:** This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on innovative fundraising, engagement, and museum management. It bridges the gap in research regarding crowdfunding in museums. The study's value lies in its comprehensive understanding of how crowdfunding can be applied across various facets of museum operations, providing museums with valuable insights for financial support, audience engagement, and enhancing their societal impact.

**Article type:** research article

**Keywords:** crowdfunding; financing; museum; social media, digital

**JEL codes:** L32, M1, G23

Received: 9 November 2023

Revised: 16 April 2024

Accepted: 17 April 2024

## Suggested citation:

Najda-Janoszka, M., & Sawczuk, M. (2024). Crowdfunding in the museum context: Exploring alternative approaches to financial support. *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review*, 12(3), 83-97. <https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2024.120305>

## INTRODUCTION

Crowdfunding is a well-recognized financial model for funding various projects. It has gained prominence for its capacity to gather modest contributions from a wide pool of individuals, primarily through online platforms (Mollick, 2014; Moysidou & Hausberg, 2020). This innovative approach is not only a valuable financial model but also a platform for testing ideas and enhancing consumer engagement (Younkin & Kashkooli, 2016). However, its specific application within museums remains relatively underexplored, despite its success in areas like non-profit initiatives, cultural projects, and the arts

(Handke & Dalla Chiesa, 2022). Only a handful of articles (Web of Science, Scopus) present research on crowdfunding in museums. This lack of research may be attributed to a relatively recent shift in the managerial approach within museums (Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2018), grappling with budget limitations, funding reductions, and heightened competition from the entertainment industry (O'Hagan, 2021). In this context, crowdfunding emerges as a promising and innovative solution (Pan, 2021).

The current state of research on museum crowdfunding highlights a fragmented landscape, dominated by selective case studies and broader discussions within the cultural and creative industries (Pan, 2021; Handke & Dalla Chiesa, 2022). The existing literature, emphasizes the role of online crowdfunding platforms, and the impact of social media on project promotion (Prokúpek *et al.*, 2023). However, while touching upon intriguing themes, demonstrates notable gaps, particularly concerning the application of crowdfunding models to specific museum initiatives and types. The focus on large art institutions located in major cities, while showcasing their unique potential for interactive content, generates a risk of thematic and ownership bias (Pan, 2021). This research aims to bridge these gaps, by exploring the structure and communication of museum crowdfunding projects, with a focus on delivering both financial and social outcomes.

We adopted an explorative qualitative approach, focusing on the diverse landscape of Polish museums. The analysis covered digital data from 28 museum crowdfunding projects sourced from crowdfunding platforms and online promotional channels. Crowdfunding emerges as a flexible financial solution, especially beneficial for smaller institutions, democratizing fundraising, enhancing visibility, and mobilizing local support. Our findings stress the importance of digital literacy and employee training for successful crowdfunding. Reward-based models consistently outperform donation-based ones, fostering audience connections and cultural heritage dissemination. This research enriches the theoretical framework of fundraising and museum management, providing valuable insights for museums seeking financial support, deeper audience connections, and societal impact through crowdfunding.

In the following, we first present the theoretical background of crowdfunding in the museum context. The next section describes the methodological approach applied. Then, the narrative shifts to the findings, shedding light on the diverse models, motivations, and promotional strategies observed in museum crowdfunding. The study concludes with a discussion of the implications, focusing on the innovative role of crowdfunding in addressing financial sustainability challenges and enhancing audience engagement in museums.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Crowdfunding emerges in the literature as a transformative model for funding diverse projects, leveraging the collective might of broad communities through the Internet and social media (Mollick, 2014; Moysidou & Hausberg, 2020). This digital model transcends traditional funding avenues by offering real-time concept testing and enhanced consumer engagement, underscoring a crucial social dimension (Younkin & Kashkooli, 2016; Zhang & Chen, 2019). Distinct crowdfunding models – ranging from equity to reward-based systems – demonstrate the versatility and adaptability of crowdfunding across sectors, including museums (Magliacani, 2020; Sahaym *et al.*, 2021).

Crowdfunding bridges financial support and social engagement, moving beyond traditional funding to foster community involvement alongside capital gathering (Porter & Veenswijk, 2018; Sahaym *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, success in crowdfunding hinges on both these dimensions, necessitating well-structured projects characterized by clear objectives, attractive incentives, mission-aligned narratives, and effective digital media promotion (Shneor & Vik, 2020; Cavalcanti Junqueira & Discua Cruz, 2019).

A precise understanding of what the project aims to achieve is crucial, as having clearly defined goals ensures alignment with the campaign's purpose (Nielsen & Binder, 2021). Moreover, aligning the message framing with the personal values of the backers requires a deep understanding of the target audience (Nielsen & Binder, 2021). This alignment significantly influences the motivational approach and the composition of rewards – both tangible and intangible (Thürridl & Kamleitner, 2016). Duration choice for the campaign is equally important, as studies suggest a correlation between time and pro-

ject success (Lukkarinen *et al.*, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2023). Longer durations may create uncertain narratives, decrease interest, and demobilize potential backers (Frydrych *et al.*, 2014). Nevertheless, conflicting findings in certain studies leave the optimal duration unresolved (Salahaldin *et al.*, 2019).

Integrating financial aims with community engagement hinges on a strategic digital communication approach. Research highlights online crowdfunding platforms and social media as key factors in attracting support and building community (Borst *et al.*, 2017; Rykkja *et al.*, 2020). The combined use of digital channels enhances outreach, and sharing early pledges promotes campaign success, highlighting the critical role of social capital in crowdfunding (Riley-Huff *et al.*, 2016). However, existing studies suggest significant potential for further investigation into the impact of social media engagement, reach, and virality on campaign success (Shneor & Vik, 2020). Moreover, while the financial metrics of crowdfunding success are well-documented, non-financial success factors require further exploration (Shneor & Vik, 2020).

The scholarship indicates that crowdfunding's strategic importance lies in its ability to achieve and align with organizers' broader goals, integrating campaigns into larger objectives (Handke & Dalla Chiesa, 2022). Such integration requires a thoughtful strategic framework that navigates the complex dynamics between campaign structuring, effective communication, and the metrics of success (Mollick, 2014; Belleflamme *et al.*, 2014) aiming for financial goals while also enhancing community engagement and achieving long-term aims. This approach is vital for museums because project value extends to cultural enrichment and societal impact, highlighting the need to generate social capital as well as financial gains (Cavalcanti Junqueira & Discua Cruz, 2019).

Within the realm of cultural projects crowdfunding has found a distinctive niche. Museums have embraced crowdfunding to navigate financial constraints, competing against budget cuts and the broader entertainment industry for public attention and resources (O'Hagan, 2021). This shift towards diversified funding sources and digital integration reflects a broader trend of blending commercial activities with non-profit goals, evident in both private and public museum sectors (Prokúpek *et al.*, 2023; Riley-Huff *et al.*, 2016). The adaptation to crowdfunding within museums is further prompted by global crises, notably the COVID-19 pandemic, signalling a paradigm shift in museum financing (Prokúpek *et al.*, 2023).

However, despite its potential to enhance museum initiatives, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding the specific application of crowdfunding within the museum context. While existing research provides valuable insights through case studies and discussions within the GLAM sector (galleries, libraries, archives, and museums), it often presents a fragmented picture by focusing on selected aspects of structuring, communication, and measuring success (Handke & Dalla Chiesa, 2022; Riley-Huff *et al.*, 2016). This approach largely overlooks the strategic interplay between these dimensions and lacks a detailed exploration of crowdfunding's adaptability to the varied needs and objectives of different museum types and projects (Pan, 2021; Cavalcanti Junqueira & Discua Cruz, 2019).

To date, research has primarily concentrated on larger, urban-based museums, overlooking how smaller institutions might harness crowdfunding (Kolbe *et al.*, 2022; Porter & Veenswijk, 2018). The literature suggests that larger museums are better equipped to implement innovative fundraising strategies, whereas smaller museums face challenges due to limited staffing and the significant preparation needed for crowdfunding campaigns (Prokúpek *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, there's a noticeable gap in the exploration of crowdfunding applications across various museum types, with scant details on campaign structures, reward types or campaign duration (Magliacani, 2020). Most studies have centred on private art and nature museums (Pan, 2021; Prokúpek *et al.*, 2023), potentially skewing insights towards those more inclined to engage in digital and interactive content creation (Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2021). Moreover, while the use of crowdfunding platforms and social media by museums for project promotion has been examined, the exploration into how these elements synergize within an 'outreach strategy' and their correlation with campaign success remains limited (Riley-Huff *et al.*, 2016; Pan, 2021). Current research on museum crowdfunding campaigns is narrowly focused, either highlighting isolated success stories (Pan, 2021; Prokúpek *et al.*, 2023; Cavalcanti Junqueira & Discua Cruz, 2019) or aggregating data without linking project structure to outcomes (Riley-Huff *et al.*, 2016). This results in a scant discussion on how different funding models

align with project types and supporter expectations, underscoring a gap in understanding the impact of crowdfunding models on museums' financial and social objectives.

The literature points to an emerging trend but highlights a gap in detailed exploration, especially regarding how museums structure their campaigns, communicate with potential backers, and measure the success of their crowdfunding endeavours. Our approach seeks to address this gap by focusing on the synergistic relationship between campaign structuring, communication strategies, and success evaluation in museum crowdfunding. Inspired by insights from Belleflamme *et al.* (2014) and Mollick (2014) and recognizing the strategic potential of crowdfunding in enhancing museums' missions and outreach, we formulated the following research questions to guide our inquiry:

- RQ1:** *How do different types of museums structure their crowdfunding projects?* This question probes the strategic decisions behind campaign structuring within the diverse museum landscape, seeking to uncover patterns or divergences in approach.
- RQ2:** *How do museums adapt their social communication strategies within the context of crowdfunding?* Recognizing the critical role of digital and social media platforms in campaign promotion, this question explores the nuances of how museums navigate these spaces to foster community engagement and support.
- RQ3:** *To what extent are museums successful in achieving the goals defined for their crowdfunding projects?* This inquiry examines the alignment of campaign outcomes with initial goals, delving into the effectiveness of different crowdfunding models in meeting both financial and non-financial objectives.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To address the research gap concerning the specificity of the crowdfunding process within museums, we adopted an explorative qualitative approach. Our empirical investigation was conducted within the context of museums operating in Poland. Poland boasts a rich and diverse cultural heritage, resulting in numerous museums dedicated to its preservation (NIMOZ, 2021). Consequently, the Polish museum landscape presents a complex mix of institutions, including state-owned, private, and community-based entities, covering a wide array of thematic areas such as art, history, science, and technology (*e.g.* Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2021). This diversity provides an opportunity to examine a broad spectrum of crowdfunding campaign types and themes, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of how crowdfunding can be applied across various facets of museum operations. Furthermore, Poland holds a significant position as a Central and Eastern European (CEE) country (Central European Times, 2023), and its experiences with crowdfunding may yield valuable insights into emerging trends within the CEE region.

Our investigation focused exclusively on institutions listed in the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage or National Institute for Museums databases, including their branches (Public Information Bulletin, 2023). We employed deliberate selection criteria to maintain the study's clarity and ensure that entities self-identified as 'museums' and undertake specific museum-related duties were included, while those operating primarily as enterprises or not fulfilling distinct museum functions were excluded from further analysis.

The investigation involved the analysis of digital data collected from May to July 2023, sourced from selected crowdfunding platforms, and used online promotional channels, such as official social media profiles and websites. To identify crowdfunding projects related to Polish museums, we performed a two-stage screening process.

In the first stage, we examined both international and national crowdfunding platforms. The results revealed the absence of crowdfunding projects from Polish museums on international crowdfunding platforms. Consequently, our investigation focused on Polish crowdfunding platforms. While this concentration on domestic platforms may limit the range of potential funders, it offers several advantages relevant to our research context. Specifically, it aligns with cultural nuances, enhances

communication effectiveness, ensures compliance with local regulations, and leverages community engagement – factors that hold significant relevance to the core issues addressed in this study.

Following the outcomes of the initial screening process, we identified five crowdfunding platforms featuring museum-related projects for inclusion in our investigation: Polakpotrafi, Odpalprojekt, Patronite, Zrzutka, and Pomagam. To precisely define the conditions governing the structuring of museum crowdfunding projects, we assessed these platforms based on several criteria, including the crowdfunding model, financial model, platform commission fees, campaign duration, and project categories relevant to the museum context (Appendix 1).

Recognizing the possibility that museums might implement and promote crowdfunding projects outside dedicated crowdfunding platforms, the second stage of our screening process involved the review of official online profiles and websites of museums. We examined all available historical data on social media platforms. After identifying posts on official museum profiles, we further investigated posts within social and thematic groups (Table 1). Next, we identified one crowdfunding project co-organized with other institutions and conducted on one of the co-organizers' websites, specifically the 'Restoration of Children's Shoes from Auschwitz' project. In total, we identified 28 museum crowdfunding projects.

**Table 1. Digital promotion channels**

Information sources	Number of pages/posts
1. Project showcase on a crowdfunding platform	27
2. Social media:	
a. Official Facebook profiles	28
b. Social and Thematic Facebook Groups	10
Posts	72
3. Official websites (including partners and local media)	30

Source: own study.

Our theoretical framework for analyzing museum crowdfunding focuses on the interplay and synergy between campaign structuring, communication strategies, and success evaluation, drawing on insights from Belleflamme *et al.* (2014) and Mollick (2014). It views crowdfunding as not just a financial tool but also a strategic asset supporting museums' missions and outreach (Cavalcanti Junqueira & Discua Cruz, 2019). At the core of this framework lies the careful crafting of structural elements – including objectives, funding goals, campaign duration, and alignment with museum types – to resonate with the needs of museums, thereby facilitating cultural preservation and community engagement. The framework further underscores the pivotal role of digital platforms and social media in fostering community bonds and stakeholder engagement. Central to our analysis is the belief that clearly defined campaign goals are indispensable for measuring success, encompassing fundraising performance, the realization of non-financial objectives, and the transparent communication of outcomes to stakeholders.

In our analysis, we applied theory-driven codes derived from museum crowdfunding literature, refining these codes through a systematic iterative consensus process undertaken by two researchers to ensure reliability (Table 2). This careful process involved analyzing and coding a wide array of digital materials, including texts, videos, and images from various platforms (Table 3). We aimed to enrich established analytical frameworks with novel insights, particularly focusing on how museums structure their crowdfunding campaigns and communicate their progress and achievements. The introduction of emergent codes, such as transparency challenges, duration ambiguity, post-campaign engagement, and personal involvement, serves to refine our understanding of campaign structuring. These codes highlight the significance of establishing clear objectives and precise timelines, thereby enhancing backer interest and fostering a deeper connection with the audience. This framework emphasizes the pivotal roles of accountability, clarity, and community engagement in driving the success of crowdfunding initiatives within the museum sector.

**Table 2. Theory-driven and emerging codes used for the analysis**

Code	Description	Source/emerging
<b>Structuring crowdfunding projects</b>		
Project purpose and objectives	specific objectives and purposes of crowdfunding projects within museums, their alignment with the museums' missions, and association with measurable outcomes	Riley-Huff <i>et al.</i> (2016); Handke & Dalla Chiesa (2022)
Campaign timeframe strategy	established timeframes for crowdfunding projects and any project duration adjustments, along with their role in generating a sense of urgency	Pan (2021)
Campaign timeline clarity	Clarity of the project duration or adjustments to campaign timelines	Emerging
Funding goals	financial objectives set by crowdfunding campaigns and their alignment with the needs of the projects being funded	Riley-Huff <i>et al.</i> (2016); Pan (2021); Handke & Dalla Chiesa (2022)
Backer incentives and acknowledgement	The tangible rewards and intangible aspects that backers receive, highlighting the reciprocal nature of crowdfunding	Handke & Dalla Chiesa (2022); Thürridl & Kamleitner (2016)
Campaign transparency	Clarity of the campaign's outcome and funding sources' divergence	Emerging
Museum type	thematic categories and ownership structures of museums	Magliacani (2020); Pan (2021)
<b>Social communication strategies</b>		
Social media presence and integration	presence on various social media platforms and their utilization for promoting crowdfunding campaigns and directing traffic to the crowdfunding platform	Riley-Huff <i>et al.</i> (2016); Pan (2021)
Audience and community engagement	interactions between the museum and its social media audience and community ( <i>e.g.</i> response to comments and questions, user-generated content)	Riley-Huff <i>et al.</i> (2016); Pan (2021)
Content consistency	posting schedule and coherence of the content shared by the museum on social media with the crowdfunding campaign's goals	Cavalcanti Junqueira & Discua Cruz, (2019); Handke & Dalla Chiesa (2022)
Communication style	formality/informality of the communication style, emotional appeal	Riley-Huff <i>et al.</i> (2016)
Post-fundraising engagement	communication and updates provided to backers and followers post-campaign, including sharing updates on the project's progress, developments, and milestones achieved with the funds raised and expressions of gratitude	Emerging
Personal involvement	Incorporation of personal identity, activity and images of museum employees, and members of associations, into campaign communication	Emerging
<b>Success in achieving goals</b>		
Fundraising achievement	financial performance and overall success of a crowdfunding campaign in terms of funds raised and their composition, progress toward the funding goal	Riley-Huff <i>et al.</i> (2016); Magliacani, (2020); Pan (2021)
Goal achievement	Achievement of non-financial objectives and goals	Riley-Huff <i>et al.</i> (2016); Pan (2021)
Achievement reporting	communication provided to backers and followers on achieved outcomes and goals	Pan (2021)

Source: own study.

**Table 3. Example of the coding procedure**

<b>Coded material</b>	<b>Structuring</b>	<b>Communicating</b>	<b>Success Reporting</b>
Pitch video on the platform polakpotrafi.pl [project_1_v]	<i>Project purpose and objectives</i> Outline of the project purpose and alignment with the museum mission	<i>Social media presence and integration</i> <i>Content consistency</i> Pitch video available on YouTube, accessible directly through a link provided on the crowdfunding platform <i>Communication style</i> Emotional appeal to community heritage and feelings of belonging <i>Personal involvement</i> Real visuals and narration by the play's producer <i>Post-fundraising engagement</i> Announcement of personal thanks to supporters during the premiere	–
photo-relation of the neon sign renovation process [project 5_f3]	<i>Project purpose and objectives</i> Confirming compliance with the broader mission of preserving cultural heritage Indicating measurable outcomes of the project <i>Museum type</i> Indication of the thematic scope of the museum and the project	<i>Social media presence and integration</i> Content provided on museum and central museum FB profile <i>Communication style</i> Emotional and informal appeal to supporters <i>Personal involvement</i> Real visuals of museum employees <i>Post-fundraising engagement</i> Updating on project progress post-fundraising	<i>Achievement reporting</i> Informing on completion of fundraising and initiation of financed tasks
Social media posts announcing the conclusion of the campaign [project 2_fb14]	<i>Project purpose and objectives</i> Underlined project title emphasizing compliance with the mission of preserving cultural heritage and indicating measurable outcomes of the project <i>Campaign timeline clarity</i> <i>Campaign transparency</i> Transparent information on achieving financial goals four days before the deadline <i>Funding goals</i> Clear information on the set and achieving the funding goal <i>Museum type</i> Indication of the thematic scope of the museum and the project	<i>Social media presence and integration</i> <i>Content consistency</i> Content provided on museum FB profile, linked to crowdfunding platform <i>Communication style</i> Emotional and informal appeal to supporters <i>Personal involvement</i> Real visuals of museum employees	<i>Fundraising achievement</i> completion of fundraising goal <i>Achievement reporting</i> Indication of achieving the financial goal before the deadline Underlining the 'shared success' – 'we did it'

Source: own study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis encompassed the entire identified population of crowdfunding campaigns within the museum context, totalling 28 projects (Appendix 2). Museums that organized, co-organized, or benefited from crowdfunding projects exhibited variation in terms of size and profile, encompassing: five military-themed, four technology and science-themed, three interdisciplinary, three regional, two artistic, two ethnographic, one biographical, one martyrdom, one historical and one categorized as 'other' (lacking a dominant collection theme). Moreover, three museums initiated more than one crowdfunding project, consisting of two private and one public museum.

It is noteworthy that crowdfunding finds application in both public and private museums officially registered in databases, with a particular prevalence among institutions from smaller towns or those with less established brands or recognition (*e.g.* The Village Museum in Maruszów and the Museum of Historical Costume). Conversely, larger state-owned museums show limited engagement with crowdfunding. Our research identified just two instances where such museums were involved but as beneficiaries, not organizers (the National Museum in Warsaw, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial). Museums initiated 20 campaigns, while eight projects were organized by community stakeholders (*e.g.* museum friends' associations, city or regional promotion associations, informal groups of enthusiasts):

The collection is organized with the assistance of Mr. Edward's friends, who wish to support him in continuing his passion and educating future generations about past eras (zrzutka.pl, 2023).

When examining the motives behind launching crowdfunding campaigns, we have identified several overarching categories all framed within the mission of the museums:

- **artefact acquisition and transport** – *e.g.* the National Museum of the Przemysł Land: 'Funds collected through the PolakPotrafi.pl platform will assist us in acquiring a painting and covering the costs of transporting the artwork, which is still located in Poland' (polakpotrafi.pl, 2023);
- **event organization** – *e.g.* the Museum of Warmia and Masuria in Olsztyn initiated a campaign to prepare a special theatrical performance coupled with interactive elements, allowing a glimpse into a morning in Copernicus's life;
- **artefact conservation/renovation** – *e.g.* the Association of Friends of the National Museum in Warsaw: 'Let's make a gift to the National Museum in Warsaw and fund the research and conservation of the extraordinary painting 'Palace steps' by Francesco Guardi. This exceptional work was stolen during World War II and returned to the National Museum in Warsaw only in 2014,' (odpalprojekt.pl, 2023);
- **general museum support** – *e.g.* the Museum of Historical Costume sought support for the daily museum's operations by emphasizing its non-governmental status and the lack of public funding for its activities;
- **commemoration of special occasions** – *e.g.* the Regional Museum in Bydgoszcz initiated a campaign to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the institution, inviting backers to contribute to acquiring a meaningful birthday gift for the museum's collection;
- **urgent aid in difficult situations** – *e.g.* The Museum of Archaeology at Przemysł Fortress experienced a break-in resulting in losses such as damage and theft. They have launched a fundraising campaign for security system installation to safeguard their artefacts.

Our analysis identified two crowdfunding models in the examined campaigns: the donation model and the reward-based model. Among these, the donation model was the most prevalent, being employed in 16 projects. Within this donation-based approach, six public and 10 private museums were identified. In all the cases except one (Conservation work on children's shoes – the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial) the projects were run on dedicated crowdfunding platforms. Campaign durations ranged between two and 12 months, although the transparency of this information varied and seven projects did not disclose the timeline. Platforms like Zrzutka.pl, for instance, do not strictly enforce project timelines and deadlines. Notably, all donation-based projects applied a flexible funding approach. Moreover, in three cases, we identified dual funding schemes, allowing parallel contributions through

dedicated crowdfunding platforms and direct donations to museum accounts. The funding targets exhibited significant diversity, ranging from 3 500 to 1 520 000 PLN, with an average of 500 000 PLN.

Six public museums and six private museums adopted the reward-based model. These campaigns had varying durations, ranging from 36 to 78 days (4 projects with no timeline), and were all organized on dedicated crowdfunding platforms. Only one project applied dual funding scheme (Henryk Sienkiewicz Museum). Public museums predominantly utilized a more stringent financial model, known as ‘all or nothing,’ whereas all private museums opted for either flexible or subscription modes. The reward-based model had two main variations: eight campaigns with multiple reward tiers and four campaigns with a single-tier model. There was a balanced mix of tangible and intangible rewards. Rewards were often scarce, enhancing their unique appeal (*e.g.* invitation to dress rehearsal, limited edition of a catalogue, participation in conservation workshop), but typically held low monetary value compared to their social and cultural significance. A remarkable exception was a weekend stay at a spa resort for six people as a reward for contributions of 350 PLN or more (Project 2). Recognition for contributions was predominantly private, favouring a more personalized acknowledgement approach. The targeted funding amounts spanned from 6 000 to 71 500 PLN, with an average of 73 500 PLN.

Crowdfunding campaigns predominantly used both social media, especially Facebook and YouTube, and direct links on crowdfunding platforms to promote projects. In 13 cases, direct links to organizers’ Facebook pages were provided, increasing accessibility and engagement. Campaign descriptions emphasized emotional context, social support, and local identity, often through compelling narratives that strengthened the connection to the mission. Pitch videos were utilized in two campaigns to convey the essence of the project and offer an additional layer of visual and emotional storytelling for potential backers. Updates and comments on these platforms, though sporadic, were more frequent in successful campaigns, helping maintain communication with backers. On Facebook, promotional strategies extended to sharing posts from local media and participating in region-focused thematic groups, broadening the outreach:

- **invitation posting:** Inviting potential backers to support the campaign,
- **reminders:** Occasional reminders about the ongoing campaign,
- **updates:** Providing real-time updates about funding progress and rewards,
- **project completion posting:** Sharing the successful completion of the crowdfunding campaign, although this was not a standard practice,
- **media coverage sharing:** Sharing media coverage related to their crowdfunding initiatives, though this was also not a common practice,
- **building and strengthening relations:** Engaging in dialogue, addressing critiques, and fostering conversations. This was not standard practice, as many posts received likes but did not engage in dialogue or comments.

[audience] *Legend I still remember Mr. Marian, the manager.*

[museum] *Do you have a favourite book that you bought there, one you eagerly awaited?*

[audience] *I remember a subscription for the complete works of Dostoevsky 😊*

*Mr Marian was friends with my Dad, and the ladies who worked there still remembered me as a little kid coming with my Grandma (who passed away in 1976).*

[museum] *wonderful stories! That’s why Facebook is sometimes a great thing: you can hear such beautiful stories from people like you (Facebook, 2021)*

Social media activity varied significantly in the campaigns examined. Some maintained a regular and systematic presence, while others provided sporadic updates or had no presence at all (3 projects). Commonly, campaigns with intensive promotional efforts highlighted individual employees, initiators, and creators involved in the crowdfunding project. Both crowdfunding platform materials and social media posts showcased these individuals along with their messages. Private museums displayed the most diversity in promotional activity with some lacking a social media presence and others actively sharing updates within enthusiast groups.

Evaluating the effectiveness of museum crowdfunding projects was challenging because the dual funding schemes added complexity in determining the success of these campaigns. While crowdfunding platforms readily display project progress, traditional contributions may not provide the same transparency level. For instance, in the cases where traditional bank transfers were encouraged, the information about the campaign's progress was not publicly available.

The Litwos foundation is on Facebook, where the purpose and scope of the project are described. You can donate there directly to sign up for donor cards (zrzutka.pl, 2023).

Based on the data from crowdfunding platforms and the dedicated project site for the Restoration of Children's Shoes from Auschwitz, only eight projects successfully met their financial goals (Table 4). However, 20 projects did not reach their targets, yet they were able to retain the funds collected thanks to the flexible funding mode they utilized.

**Table 4. Financial goal achievement**

Financial goal achievement	Types of museums
<i>Success</i>	
8	6 public, two private Interdisciplinary, regional, biographic, historical, martyrdom, and other
<i>Failure</i>	
20	6 public, 14 private Interdisciplinary, regional, biographic, military-themed, technology and science-themed, artistic, and other

Source: own study.

Moreover, reporting on the success and outcomes of completed campaigns beyond financial gains was not a standard practice. Only nine projects out of all the campaigns provided such information.

It was an extraordinary, intimate, and exclusive family evening. Yesterday, our neon sign 'Bookstore' lit up. This happened in the presence and thanks to the generosity of the donors invited to the event. The fortunate guests at the pre-premiere of the Podgórze glow contributed over 100 PLN for the restoration of the neon and, as per our agreement, had the privilege of lighting up our blue gem 😊 (Facebook, 2021).

The synthesis of campaign structuring and communication efforts reveals significant variations in campaign strategies, which can be pivotal for achieving both financial and broader non-financial goals. The interplay between these elements illustrates a consistent pattern. Successful crowdfunding campaigns often demonstrate strategic coherence, including well-defined goals, appropriate campaign duration, engaging funding methods, enticing incentives, and effective communication strategies. Conversely, campaigns that lacked in one or more of these areas tended to see diminished returns and engagement, highlighting the need for a strategic approach to campaign design and execution (Mollick, 2014; Belleflamme *et al.*, 2014):

- Reward-based projects outperformed donation-based ones, indicating a potential mismatch with backers' expectations or motivations for the latter (Nielsen & Binder, 2021; Handke & Dalla Chiesa, 2022). Campaigns offering multiple tiers of rewards, including diverse options from tangible items to unique experiences, engaged backers more effectively (Thürriidl & Kamleitner, 2016; Arshad *et al.*, 2024). This highlights the importance of tailoring campaign structures to match backer preferences for optimal results (Handke & Dalla Chiesa, 2022). Notably, museums relying on public subsidies may face audience resistance when using donation-based models, as evidenced by only one public museum achieving its financial target in the study sample.
- The funding mode chosen by museums often reflects the risk level they were willing to undertake based on their objectives (Salahaldin *et al.*, 2019). Flexible funding ensures that all raised funds are retained, while all-or-nothing funding carries the risk of receiving no funds unless the target is met.

The latter mode presents a high-risk, high-reward scenario, potentially driving urgency and stronger motivation (Mollick, 2014). Notably, all three projects by public museums employing this mode exceeded their financial targets. In contrast, only four out of 20 projects using the flexible mode were successful. This mode lacks the same sense of urgency, which was further highlighted by the investigated projects having also longer durations (over two months), lacking clear deadlines, and in four cases, employing dual funding streams. The opacity in project funding streams poses a threat to the trust and credibility of museum initiatives (Handke & Dalla Chiesa, 2022; Pan, 2021).

- The sample comprised campaigns of varying durations, with shorter ones aligning more closely with recommended timelines for crowdfunding projects (Frydrych *et al.*, 2014; Liu *et al.*, 2023). These shorter durations tended to encourage a sense of urgency and led to faster and more successful funding outcomes. In contrast, projects lasting over three months or lacking a clearly defined deadline risked decreased motivation, prolonged consideration by potential supporters, or even being forgotten altogether (Lukkarinen *et al.*, 2016). However, it's important for the campaign duration to not only adhere to general recommendations from crowdfunding platforms (Frydrych *et al.*, 2014) but also align with the nature and complexity of the set objectives (Salahaldin *et al.*, 2019). Projects with clear, specific objectives such as acquiring an artefact are expected to have moderate durations that match the urgency and scope of the goal. Conversely, more complex goals, such as conservation work (Project 3, 28), may require a longer duration to give backers enough time to engage with and fund the campaign. Nevertheless, longer durations pose the additional challenge of sustaining interest and engagement from both organizers and supporters (Chemla & Tinn, 2020).
- We found the integration of digital and social media strategies to be crucial in driving the success of museum crowdfunding campaigns (Shneor & Vik, 2020). Intense communication, including frequent updates and interaction, across multiple platforms ensured high visibility and engagement, which are essential for reaching financial targets in crowdfunding (Rykkja *et al.*, 2020; Borst *et al.*, 2017). Projects with clear objectives but longer durations and sporadic digital media communication often failed to meet funding targets, unlike Project 28, which lasted a year but had strong digital visibility and outreach. The standout success of Project 18 (483 funders, achieving 130% of the financial target) despite its donation and flexible mode, was largely attributed to a clear objective and viral spread across social media, driven by YouTuber content – though this was an exceptional case. Typically, systematic online communication before the crowdfunding campaign played a pivotal role, emphasizing the significance of early support from an established 'fan-base' (Handke & Dalla Chiesa, 2022) and dedicated staff commitment (Riley-Huff *et al.*, 2016).
- Maintaining and fostering engagement to achieve broader non-financial goals requires transparency and interaction not only during but also after completing the crowdfunding campaign (Porter & Veenswijk, 2018). This involves clear and timely reporting of campaign success and outcomes, detailing how funds were utilized, and demonstrating the community's impact and responsibility for cultural heritage (Riley-Huff *et al.*, 2016; Moysidou & Hausberg, 2020). Merely indicating the end and achieving a financial target of the campaign on the crowdfunding platform is not engaging enough. In the examined sample post-campaign communication was often overlooked, despite its pivotal role in preserving trust, sustaining engagement, and garnering ongoing support for future museum endeavours (Porter & Veenswijk, 2018; Pan, 2021). This oversight raises concerns about the viability of potential future crowdfunding initiatives for those museums.

Noteworthy, our empirical findings challenge prior research focused on large art museums, private institutions, and major cities (Pan, 2021; Prokůpek *et al.*, 2023; Riley-Huff *et al.*, 2016). It turned out that crowdfunding spans diverse museum types, including regional, interdisciplinary, and historical themes, involving both private and public institutions. This diversification highlights the need to broaden our understanding of crowdfunding dynamics within the museum sector. Empirical evidence suggests crowdfunding is a vital financial source, especially beneficial for smaller museums lacking recognition (Pan, 2021; Cavalcanti Junqueira & Soetanto, 2022). Unlike traditional funding, crowdfunding democratizes fundraising, empowering communities to support causes they care about (*e.g.* Project 18). Strategic crowdfunding that leverages campaign structuring, communication strategies, and

success evaluation, can deepen audience engagement, strengthen community ties, and amplify cultural institutions' societal impact (Porter & Veenswijk, 2018; Najda-Janoszka & Sawczuk, 2023).

## CONCLUSIONS

The study on the applicability of crowdfunding within the museum context significantly enriches the existing literature by providing empirical insights into how diverse types of museums, particularly smaller and lesser-known ones, can leverage crowdfunding. This research was instrumental in demonstrating the feasibility of crowdfunding as an alternative financial model that supports museums in achieving financial sustainability, enhancing visibility, and fostering community engagement. Although crowdfunding can serve as a critical financial strategy for museums struggling with budget constraints, it also validates new project ideas and gauges public interest during times of heightened competition from the entertainment industry (O'Hagan, 2021). A strategic approach to crowdfunding can strengthen the bond between museums and their communities. Successful campaigns typically involve high levels of interaction with the community, underscoring the importance of active engagement strategies such as social media outreach, which can extend beyond fundraising to encompass broader museum activities. The research highlights that crowdfunding increases museum's visibility making them more accessible. This not only helps attract more visitors but also enhances the museum's role as a cultural custodian and educational resource.

However, the observed varied success emphasizes the demanding nature as well as the inherent risks and uncertainties of crowdfunding campaigns, highlighting the potential impacts on organizational reputation and brand. This suggests a nuanced landscape for museums considering crowdfunding, where the strategic advantages of this alternative source of support must be balanced against the unique challenges and uncertainties of the crowdfunding model. Crowdfunding is becoming a method of capital formation increasingly used in the entertainment industry, creating a market with an oversupply of available potential 'candidates' for commercialization (Rykkja *et al.*, 2020). To successfully navigate this market, museums need to strategically leverage structuring and communication efforts. For this, museum management and staff need to enhance their knowledge of crowdfunding methods (structuring) and improve their digital literacy and capabilities (communication). In this matter, policymakers play a pivotal role in fostering the integration of digital tools within cultural institutions, which is crucial for adapting to the evolving landscape of modern fundraising. By supporting initiatives that enhance digital literacy and promote digital transformation, they not only empower museums to effectively engage with contemporary audiences but also ensure these institutions remain competitive and relevant in the digital age.

Nevertheless, this study was bound by limitations. Primarily, they stemmed from the reliance on secondary data and the specificity of the country context. To overcome these constraints, future research should delve into the viewpoints of museum employees, aiming to uncover motivations, identify knowledge gaps, and establish best practices. This approach could also facilitate the use of the gathered material for comparative cross-country studies. Furthermore, there is a pressing need for additional research to explore emerging forms of alternative financing, like 'artefacts' adoption, block-chain technologies, and their strategic integration within the museum funding mix. This exploration should extend beyond financial strategies to encompass the influence of communication and marketing strategies within these cultural institutions.

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The contribution share of authors is equal and amounted to 50% for each of them. MNJ – conceptualisation, literature writing, methodology, discussion, MS – literature writing, findings, discussion.

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### Acknowledgements and Financial Disclosure

The authors would like to thank the anonymous referees for their useful comments, which allowed to increase the value of this article.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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Published by Krakow University of Economics – Krakow, Poland



Ministry of Education and Science  
Republic of Poland

The journal is co-financed in the years 2022-2024 by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Poland in the framework of the ministerial programme “Development of Scientific Journals” (RCN) on the basis of contract no. RCN/SP/0583/2021/1 concluded on 13 October 2022 and being in force until 13 October 2024.

