

Sources for increasing the competitiveness of museums through studies on the perception of visitors towards cultural events

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Abstract : *The success stories from past years of many museums in the world have shown the need for a change in terms of management vision of this type of cultural organization, by addressing elements outside the organization as a driver for competitiveness. Thus, the opportunities generated by the relationship with customers or the positioning among competitors have become primordial. Taking into account the new trends, this study wanted to determine the propensity of the public towards museum cultural consumption and to identify the perception of visitors towards the National Military Museum.*

After administering the questionnaire and analysing the responses, we can say that the cultural organization that was analysed could become a viable option for recreation for residents of the capital. However, in order for this to happen, the museum should focus on using specific marketing tools of promotion, which can contribute to an aggressive popularization of cultural products and services of the museum.

Keywords: *culture, cultural organizations, museums, competitive advantages, visitors, competition, research on clients.*

JEL: *L32, L82.*

Introduction

Traditionally, museum management was seen as separate and distinct from other types of business administration. As a result of this belief, those who worked in museum organizations have felt the need to lead the organization as a business (Kolb, 2005, pp. 10-11). However, the reality of recent years has shown the need to change this vision by addressing managerial elements outside the organization as a driver for competitiveness:

- **Competition.** Although museums are not commercial organizations, they operate within a limited market, being forced "to adapt their actions according to the strategies and pressures adopted by their competitors" (Barbu, 2011, p 107). For consumers, the temptations are multiple: see a play, visit an exhibition, eat at a restaurant, watch a

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sporting event etc. This perspective is enriched by admitting the fact that for a museum the competition is perceived as such by visitors and should not be limited to institutions of similar nature. For example, if the individual consumer believes that a visit to the museum is in competition with the care of the garden or preparing a party for friends, then, according to experts (Kotler and Andreasen, 1987), these activities compete directly with that museum.

- **Customers and consumer research.** Lately, the people who work in museums have realized the importance that the visitors have, from a marketing perspective (Rentschler, 2007, p 354). In those museums where marketing is unimportant in the management approach, **consumer research** is neglected (Kotler and Andreasen, 1987). Thus, traditionally, museum organizations have focused their energy and efforts to product development, to the detriment of creating *studies on the needs of current and potential customers*. Improving public research methods represents an opportunity to increase the competitiveness of museums and to enable them to meet social and economic obligations.
- With the passing of time, **museums have become a key element in urban competition**, thanks to their potential to bring significant local revenue, thus **boosting the economies of cities**. Many authors (Andronicenu, 2009; Burlacu, 2011; Zamfir, 2011) have shown that in economically advanced countries, measuring the quality of life in big cities cannot be achieved without taking into account the opportunities for culture, arts and creative activities and education.

1. National Military Museum "King Ferdinand I"

A. Museum specifics

National Military Museum (NMM) is a public cultural institution of national interest, with legal personality, within the Ministry of Defence³. Also, NMM functions as an institution from the national museum network, ensuring the implementation of the policy of the Ministry of Culture⁴.

NMM coordinates, in terms of curatorial activities, all the museum structures (museums of military tradition, gun museums, educational and traditional workshops) operating in military units, which are part of the army structure.

As it results from its name, NMM is a museum established in a specific and complementary area to that covered by the National History Museum of

³ As stated in Art. 47, para. 4 of Law 346/2006 on the organization and functioning of the Ministry.

⁴ According to the Law of museums and public collections 311/2003.

Romania. The history of a nation, from its beginnings to its affirmation as a national identity and international recognition is identified with its military history. Through its exhibits related to the military area, but not limited solely to these, and its documentary, the museum illustrates the evolution of the man in the Carpatho-Danubian-Pontic and the history of the Romanian people from appearance up to present.

B. The material fund and the heritage of the museum

The material fund of the museum allows valorification by displaying the heritage that it holds. The museum occupies 11,200 square meters and comprises six buildings (four are exhibition pavilions, one building houses the library, the restoration laboratory and the warehouses, and the last body has an administrative functionality). In the central area there is a park that displays military equipment (Scafes, 2002, p.5).

The heritage NMM includes more than 1,280,000 landmarks and reference materials that are organized in **49 collections**, which are the scientific responsibility of the curators (NMM, 2010, p.5). Of these only a small part is exposed in the permanent exhibitions (about 6%), the rest is being held in storage or preservation, and presented to the public during temporary exhibitions.

C. Visitors

Thanks to its heritage value, specific and spectacular exhibits, educational character and sense of national pride that it generates, the museum targets a general audience (all types of audience):

- ***Pupils and students***, especially those belonging to ***military educational institutions***⁵, who visit the museum in order to document themselves and to learn more about the Romanian history, and in particular about the military aspects. Pupils and students are **an important market segment**.
- For information and recreation purpose, the museum is visited by a ***large group of citizens, especially children and young people*** who are interested, and often fascinated, by the diversity of old and modern weapons that are exposed, and which they can investigate closely. This phenomenon has further increased once the obligativity to attend military service was eliminated in 2006. Thus, for a large part of the population, a visit to the NMM has become the only way to see "live" a weapon of war.

⁵ National Defence University "Carol I" and the National Defence College.

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- For most *foreign military delegations*, which come to Romania in order to participate in the activities of the Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior, often in the protocol it is also provided a visit to the NMM.
- A specific market segment, relatively small in number, but very important, is the *people seeking to consult the documentary fund*⁶ held by the museum in order to write studies or scientific papers (pupils and students, researchers, institutions from Romania or abroad with whom the museum is collaborating etc.).

Statistics on the number of visitors to NMM in recent years are shown in table 1.

Table 1. Evolution of visitors number between 2008 – 2012

YEAR		2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	
TOTAL NUMBER OF VISITORS		23.125	26.028	23.523	22.574	22.987	
of which	<i>Free pass</i>	9.277	9.501	8.276	6.744	7.635	
	<i>Payers</i>	Organized groups	5.983	7.300	6.598	15.830	15.352
		Individual visitors	7.865	9.227	8.649		
<i>Foreign official delegations</i>		35	31	27	33	35	

Source: Data provided by NMM

D. Competition

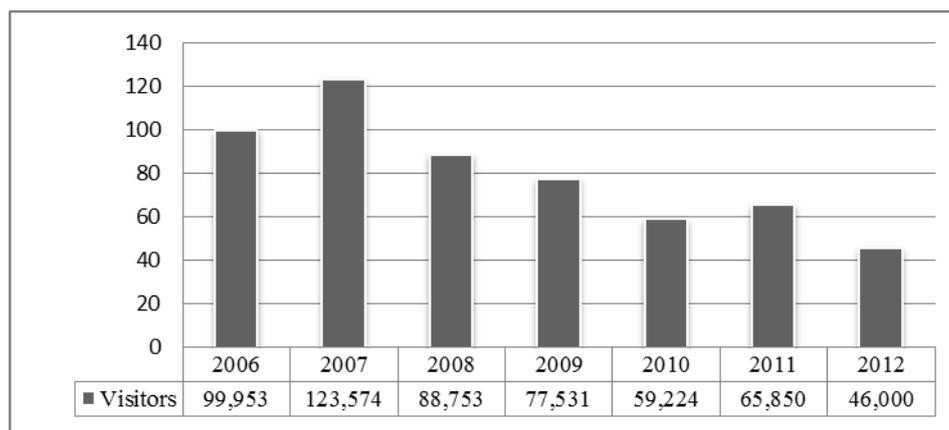
The competition can be direct or indirect.

Direct competition is represented by the museums whose offer is similar to a large extent to the NMM offer:

- *The Romanian National History Museum (RNHM)*, as a **main competitor**, occupies 8,000 square meters and has 60 exhibition halls. Its heritage (690 099 items) includes testimonies of human presence in Romania since the Palaeolithic, material and spiritual culture of the Geto-Dacian, Dacian-Roman wars, the emergence and completion of state power structures in the medieval society, the bourgeois-democratic revolution that took place in 1848, the independence war, the two World Wars and the Communism and overcoming this period (RNHM, 2011). "In recent years (2008-2012), RNHM has experienced generally a decrease in the number of visitors (Figure 1), but nevertheless, it remained among the most visited museums in Bucharest (No. 5 in 2012)" (Popescu și Corboș, 2013, p. 134).

⁶ The annual average of these requests for 2008-2010 was **1,250**.

Figure 1. Evolution of the number of visitors to Romanian National History
Museum (2008-2012)



Source: data was processed from the RNHM

As it can be seen, despite the fact that from its permanent exhibitions have been publicly available only the Historic Treasure and the Lapidarium (due to the restoration and rehabilitation works), RNHM was visited at least twice the number of people (for example, in 2012, was visited by 46,000 visitors, compared to NMM's 22,987 visitors). This was due to the fact that RNHM has organized several events and temporary exhibitions that have attracted many visitors, while the promotion was more "visible".

- Among the museums that contain in their offer elements of direct competition, but to a lesser extent can be listed: the *Bucharest City Museum* (which was visited in 2012 by a total of 29,000 people!!!), the *Technical Museum "Prof. Engineer Dimitrie Leonida"* and the *Aviation Museum*. Their heritage includes historical evidence related to the certification of Bucharest as the most important city of the country, and technical exhibits, which have common points with the military equipment.

Indirect competition is significant considering both the complete museum offer, as well as the entire cultural and entertainment offer of the capital. In Bucharest are the most important museums in Romania and most museums ranked as "national". Other cultural institutions (cinemas, theatres, etc.) address in particular the public who is seeking recreation and entertainment, providing a viable and convenient alternative for replacing a visit to the museum.

2. The study regarding the identification of visitors' perception on NMM

2.1. Methodology

The analysis that we've performed regarding the NMM activities for achieving its objectives was based on the information received from the following sources:

- the participation in the activities organized for the NMM Days in 2012 and 2013;
- the study of the existing information in most sources of information to which we had access;
- the observation of the public and museum staff during visits;
- the comparative analysis of existing data in the media regarding other museums.

A. The objectives and hypotheses of the research

The objectives of the research have taken into account the following:

- Determining the propensity of the public towards the museum cultural consumption;
- Identifying the visitors' perception regarding the NMM.

B. The hypothesis of the research

These have been identified in close correlation with the objectives described above:

- 1) ***Hypothesis 1: The propensity of public towards the museum cultural consumption is reduced. Variables*** related to this hypothesis are: the frequency of visiting a museum, the preference towards a particular type of museum, the reasons for seldom visiting a cultural organization, the main sources of information that lead to a visit to a museum, leisure activities unrelated to the cultural are.
- 2) ***Hypothesis 2: The degree of awareness of visitors towards NMM is reduced. Variables*** related to this hypothesis are: the number of visits to NMM, the sources of information that led to a visit, the level of popularity of the museum.
- 3) ***Hypothesis 3: The quality of the cultural offer and the services provided by NMM are high. Variables*** related to this hypothesis are: type of ticket, prices, educational offer, the quality of visit, complementary activities.
- 4) ***Hypothesis 4: The satisfaction felt after the visit is great. Variables*** related to this hypothesis are: the overall impression of the museum, the intention to return, the intention to recommend the museum to other people.

C. Research method

Sampling:

- **The characteristics of the sample:**
 - *Stratification:* sex, age, level of education, income, marital status and occupation;
 - *The method of sampling used* was random. This meant that every visitor of the museum had equal chances to be included in the sampling. I've used this method also because the museum has a general target.
- **The volume of the sampling:** From a total of 472 visitors to the museum, only 382 have agreed to fill in the questionnaire. The 382 respondents are grouped as follows:
 - 2 groups of eighth grade students accompanied by two teachers from a school in Bucharest (63 visitors);
 - a group of twelfth grade students accompanied by two teachers from the National College in Bucharest (22 visitors);
 - two groups of students (second year), accompanied by two professors from the Faculty of Administration and Public Management, Academy of Economic Studies (71 visitors);
 - 226 individual visitors.
- **The time frame then the data has been collected:** November 6 – November 15, 2013;
- **The method of data collection:** the questionnaire was handed out to be filled in to all the museum's visitors during that period.

The investigated population:

- the structure of visitors is not homogenous;
- 339.2% of visitors were pupils or students who come to the museum (free) as a school activity, as part of educational programs (school "obligation");

The research method that was used was analysed based on a questionnaire.

The questionnaire (27 questions) is a structured questionnaire and it had 3 sections:

1. **First section** (6 questions) has identified the **socio-demographic variables** related to age, sex, education, income, marital status and occupation of the respondents, as follows:

- *sex:* 36% of the respondents are women and 64% are men;
- *age:* 50,2% of the respondents fall in the category under 19 years, followed by those between aged 19 and 25 years (27%), aged between 26 and 55 years (18%) and those over 55 years (4.8%).
- *level of education:* the persons with higher education (40%) are the most numerous, as shown in Table 2:

Table 2. NMM visitors distribution by level of education

Studies	Primary school	High School	Post-secondary	University degree	Post-University degree	TOTAL
Visitors number	107	85	22	151	17	382
%	28%	22%	6%	40%	4%	100%

- *the socio-professional distribution is shown in Table 3. Pupils and students (283 visitors) represent 74% of the total. This percentage indicates the fact that the museum is visited thanks to its scientific, documentary and educational value of its assets. The percentage of military (10%) is lower than our expectations, and confirms the fact that, although the museum has a particular specific and triggers a more well-defined market segment, in reality the visitors are from all social categories and the museum addresses a general public.*

Table 3. NMM visitors distribution by socio – professional categories

Categories	Pupils	Students	Military	Employees	Retirees	TOTAL
Visitors number	214	69	38	43	18	382
%	56%	18%	10%	11,2%	4,8%	100%

- *the income was another indicator that had to be taken into consideration when segmenting the population in order to see how it influences the results of the research. Thus 4% have income over 3,000 lei/month, 19% had incomes between 1,501 and 3,000 lei/month, 21% had incomes between 501 and 1,500 lei/month, 4% had incomes under 500 lei/month and 52% of respondents have no income.*

2. *The second section* (7 questions) aimed to demonstrate the general hypothesis about the *museum cultural consumption*.

3. *The third section* has included 14 questions and its purpose was to demonstrate the variables and hypothesis that have been set, thus trying to find out the *opinion of the public towards the NMM*:

- *hypothesis 2* wanted to identify the *degree of information of visitors* regarding *NMM* (questions 14-17);
- *the third hypothesis* has been proven with the help of questions 18-24, which targeted the know the perception of visitors concerning *the services offered* by *NMM*;
- *the last hypothesis (the satisfaction of the visit)* has been proved with the help of questions 25-27.

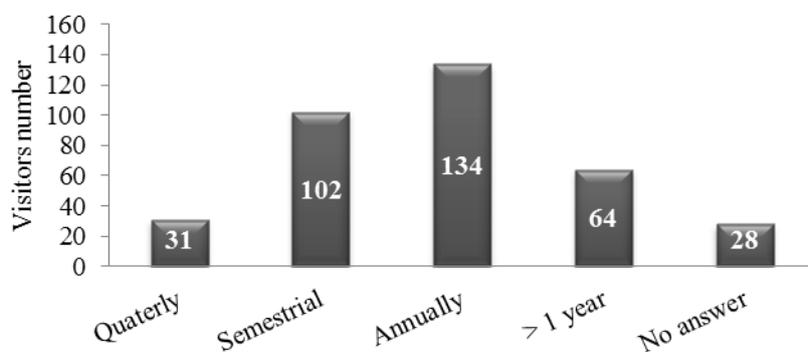
2.2. The results of the research

For this study we chose to analyse the most relevant questions from sections 2 and 3, which aimed to demonstrate the hypotheses and variables of the research.

Hypothesis 1: the inclination of the public towards museum cultural consumption is reduced. The hypothesis was verified by the answers to the following questions:

– *The frequency with which respondents visit museums in general:* of the 382 respondents, a total of 23 (6%) were for the first time in a museum, the remaining 359 (94%) were at least at their second visit. Of the 23 people who were at their first visit, 19 were children aged up to 10 years and four people were part of an organized group. The frequency of visiting a museum by respondents who have visited museums before (359 subjects) is shown in Figure 2. The option "once a month" was not marked by any respondent.

Figure 2. Frequency of visits to museums



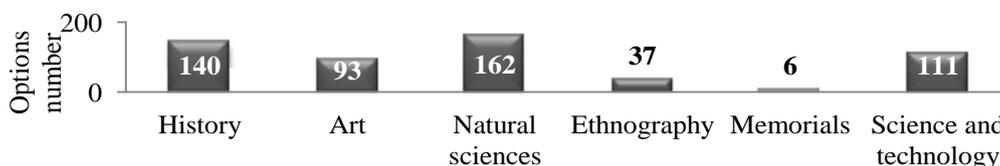
A higher frequency (quarterly, twice a year) was recorded mainly in people who attend school and who participate in various educational programs organized by museums (8.11% and 28%). Many visitors said they are used to visit a museum at time intervals bigger than one year (16.7%) or annually (35%). The questionnaire includes a large number of non-respondents, who are people with different cultural concerns and for whom the presence at the museum is purely coincidental.

– *The preference towards a particular type of museum:* of the 359 respondents who have visited museums before, 72 visitors (20%) have no preference regarding the specific of the museums, while the remaining 287 visitors (80%) have expressed their preferences concerning the type of museum that they

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visit. They gave multiple answers to question 3, the results are presented in Figure 3. The preferences for science and natural history museums (29%) are the most numerous, followed by the museums of history and archaeology (25%), museums of science and technology (20%) and museums of art (17%). The museums of Ethnography (7%) and memorial museums (2%) are at the bottom of the references of the public questioned.

Figure 3. Types of museums preferred by visitors



– *The reasons for a low attendance of museum institutions:* in order to identify the *main obstacles that hinder* visiting museums have been accounted 591 answers, which distribution is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Reasons for low attendance in museums

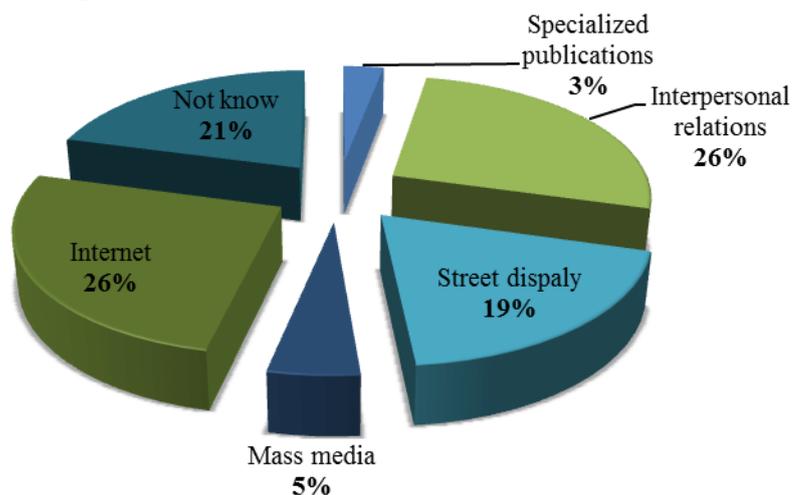
Reasons	Lack of time	Museums schedule	Poor material condition	Daily obligations	Lack of information	Unattractive offer	Other reasons	TOTAL
<i>Options number</i>	114	183	24	11	105	138	16	591
<i>%</i>	19,2%	31%	4%	1,8%	18%	23,3%	2,7%	100%

Most visitors have said that the timetable of the museums is not consistent with the daily schedule of the majority of the working population, that the offer of the museums is unattractive, and that they lack the time. To be notes that few respondents said that they lack the money. A significant percentage (18%) invokes the absence of information about museums and their offer. This mainly means that those people are not interested to seek information, and also are not interested to receive and appropriate it. Other four alternative reasons for why respondents do not choose to visit a museum are: the preference for the information transmitted through other means, especially TV; the big distance to the museums; the permanent existence of other priorities; easier alternatives for spending free time.

– *The main sources of information* about museums and the events organized by these result from the analysis of 506 choices marked by respondents. Their distribution and importance are presented in Figure 4. Two dominant sources of information, with and equal percentage (26 %) have been underlined: word-of-mouth (family, peers, colleagues, teachers, friends, etc.) and the Internet, especially among young people and persons with an average education. Street posters

represent the second source of information, due to the fact that lately this type of promotion has begun to be very aggressive, meaning that it occupies almost every space where passers might look. The small percentage occupied by the media (radio, TV) comes as a surprise. This is explained by the fact that commercial TV grants a limited space to such information, while specialised programs have a lower audience. "Pocket" publications have also an insignificant percentage, mainly due to the specific of the distribution (cafes, fast food etc.), which addresses a small and selective public. Many respondents (21 %) failed to identify any source of information that they could tick on the form.

Figure 4. Information sources about museums



– In terms of respondents' preference to *other ways of spending their free time*, the vast majority preferred locations such are: cinema (44.8%), cafes / terraces (27.6%), shopping malls (14.1%) and parks (13.5%), which are a good way for recreation and to have fun for free. In most situations, the ways of spending free time are placed in the same location or nearby locations, which makes it easier for individuals to combine them.

Hypothesis 2: the degree of awareness of visitors towards NMM is reduced. The hypothesis was verified by the answers to the following questions:

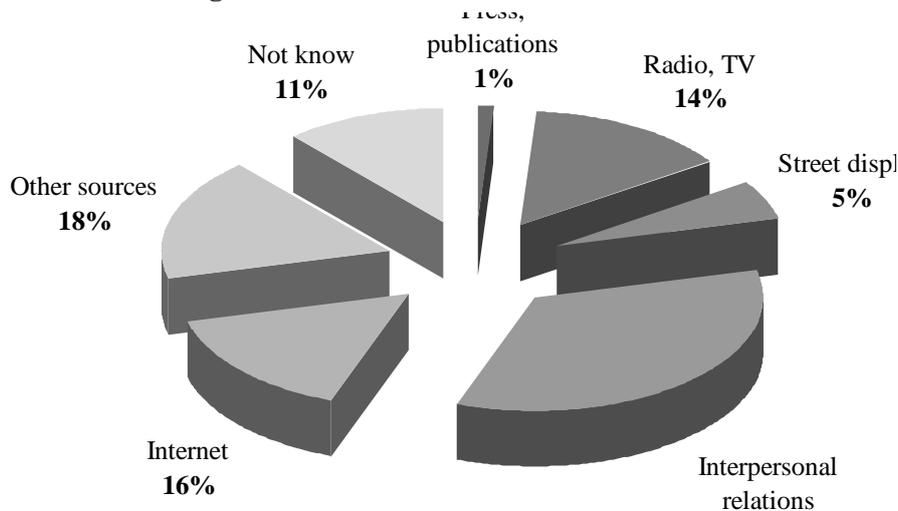
– *The frequency of attending NMM.* Of the 359 people who were not at their first visit to a museum, 91 people representing 25% visited the museum before. Of these, the majority (57 people, representing 62%) were at their second visit to the museum, 26 visitors (29%) were visiting the museum for the third time and 8 visitors (9%) were "regular visitors". This indicates the fact that once the museum is visited, and the visitors get to know its exhibits, the museum is appreciated at its true value. Many visitors come regularly to this museum for a

walk in the park with military equipment, which has a lot of green space, ornamental trees and outdoor furniture. In order to support this type of activity, beginning with 2011, the museum has started to issue weekly, monthly or yearly subscriptions at a very affordable price.

– In order to determine the *sources of information* regarding NMM have been considered 405 choices marked by respondents. The distribution is shown in Figure 5.

The museum is poorly promoted throughout the printed media and billboards due to the limited funds, which do not allow expenses of this nature. TV appearances were made occasionally in informative programs, as accounts of events celebrating the "Long Night of Museums" and "Days of the National Military Museum". More often, the NMM is mentioned in the "Pro Romania" program on TVR 1, however this is broadcasted at an inappropriate time and has a relatively small audience. NMM is mentioned on radio (interviews, reportages, events presentations) during the "Army time" show aired on the national radio station Radio Romania. The most efficient way to learn about NMM is through word-to-mouth, the information received from colleagues, friends, teachers, family, etc. Moreover, a large number of respondents (18 %) have filled in "school / high-school / college" as their answer for *Other resources*. The Internet, the main source of information (especially for the younger generation), has a low percentage (16%) compared to the number of Internet users.

Figure 5. Information sources about NMM



The answers to the question whether the *museum is enough promoted* characterizes the way the institution is perceived before the visitor gets to actual visit the museum. The proportion of the choices represents the effectiveness of the promotion of the museum. These results are illustrated in Table 5.

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Table 5. Public perception regarding NMM promotion activity

Promotion level	Very good	Good	Enough	Poor	Not know	TOTAL
Options number	12	74	79	196	21	382
%	4%	19%	20%	51%	6%	100%

The museum promotion is perceived at a low level compared to the public expectations and the opportunities to promote the museum. A total of 21 respondents did not express any opinion.

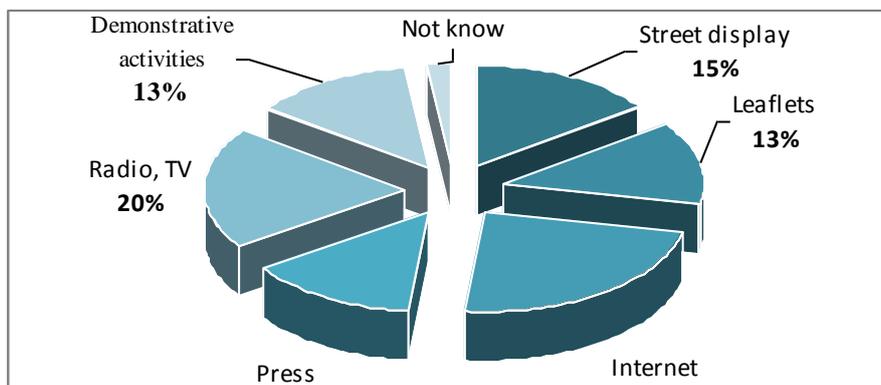
– Testing the public regarding the preference towards *certain means of promotion* of the image and activities of the museum led to the results shown in Table 6 and Figure 6. Being a multiple choice question, respondents have checked 609 choices. It can be noticed that the distribution of preferences of the means of promotion is almost uniform, comprising percentages between 13% and 23%. This finding shows that, in general, the public doesn't have a dominant preference. There are two peaks: 23% (Internet) and 20% (Radio, TV), which confirm the effectiveness of these two sources of information.

Table 6. Public perception regarding NMM means of promotion

Means	Street display	Leaflets	Internet	Press	Radio, TV	Demonstrative activities	Not know	TOTAL
Options number	91	82	142	84	119	79	12	609
%	15%	13%	23%	14%	20%	13%	2%	100%

An interesting alternative for promoting the museum activities suggested by one visitor was to send messages to subscribers of mobile networks concerning the events. This is a method used more and more often by major retailers and some banks.

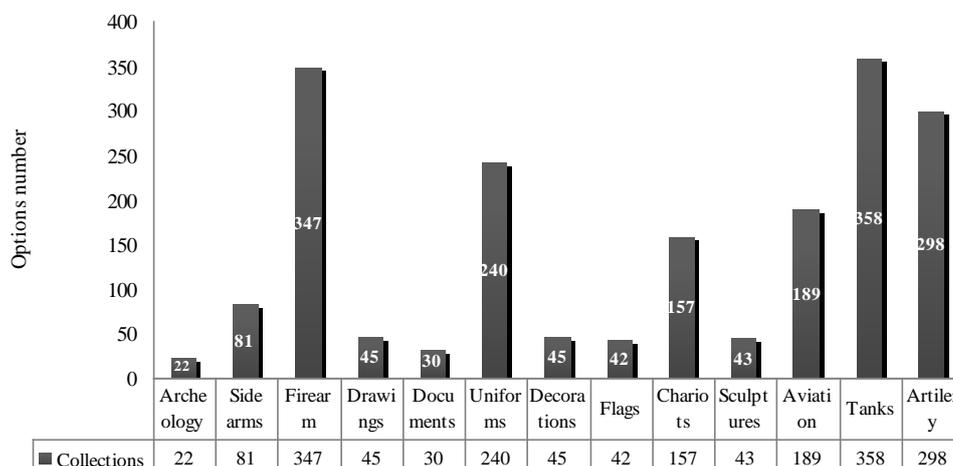
Figure 6. Public preferences regarding the means of promotion for NMM



Hypothesis 3: The quality of the cultural offer and the services provided by NMM is high. The hypothesis was verified by the answers to the following questions:

– *The preferences of the public expressed after visiting various collections* of the museum are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Public preferences for NMM collections



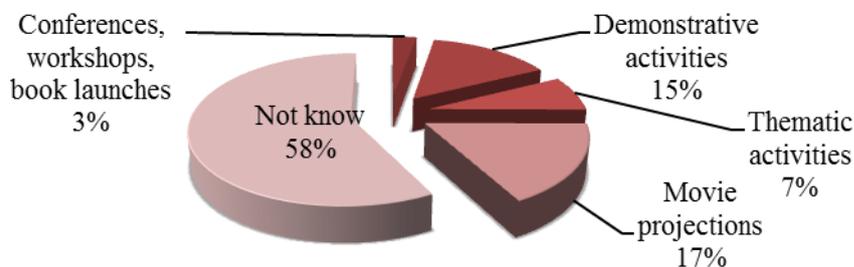
From the data presented (1,897 choices have been selected) it results, in an obvious and yet normal, that the general public has as main preference the exhibits that are impressive and spectacular to the detriment of those who are not so spectacular, but which may have an historical and documentary value of great importance.

– Appreciating *the way the exhibits are presented* has almost the same value as the overall impression of the museum, more precisely: 72% consider the way the exhibits are presented as "very good", 25% as "good", while only 3% consider it to be "satisfactory". As a means of guidance, most visitors said they prefer labels (39%) and explanatory leaflets (35%) of the exhibit to the detriment of a guide tours with one of the museum's specialists, which is preferred by only 19% of respondents. This is due to the fact that in the case of a guided tour, even if you can ask questions and get more information, there is the disadvantage that the tour imposes a certain pace and route of the museum. Moreover, a significant part of those who have received a guided tour (33%) have not been too satisfied with this service, saying that the tour has a certain rigidity due to the "automatism" of the visit and the fact that they see the exhibits as a compact group.

– When asked to indicate *other museum activities* at which they would be willing to participate, the responses (Figure 8) have showed that the respondents have been somewhat confused, and they mostly not aware that the museum also

offers more than a simple visit. Most of them did not know what to answer (58%), the rest choosing activities that involved a more entertainment side (seeing movies - 17%, demonstrative activities - 15%).

Figure 8. Public preferences for activities within the complementary offer of NMM museum



Hypothesis 4: The satisfaction felt after visiting the museum is great. The hypothesis was verified by the answers to the following questions:

- *The museum left mostly a "very good" (70%) impression on the visitors; "good" for 25% of the visitors and "satisfactory" for only 5% of them.*
- *The visitors' intention to return to NMM is presented in Figure 9.*

Figure 9. Intention of returning to NMM



The answers to this question were somewhat predictable, and the choices of the visitors have confirmed these expectations, also taking into account the fact that 85% of them said they were unable to see the entire museum.

Most part of the public (81%) intends to return to the museum to a certain point. No visitor is categorically against this possibility and a small number of people (3%) were undecided.

3. The conclusions of the research

The exploratory approach has achieved all its targets and *has confirmed the four hypotheses*.

Thus, unfortunately, *the public inclination towards museum cultural consumption is reduced*, and this was proven by the frequency the respondents visit the museums in Bucharest. According to the results of this study, a higher frequency (quarterly, twice a year) was recorded mainly at pupils and students who participate in various educational programs organized by museums (8.11% and 28%). Many visitors said that they used to visit a museum less than once a year (16.7%) or once a year (35%). It was a surprise the rather large number of non-respondents, who are people with different cultural concerns and for whom the presence at the museum was more or less coincidental.

Although the *quality of the cultural offer and the services provided by NMM is high* [the impression left by the museum on visitors is mostly a "very good" one (70%)], and the *satisfaction felt after the visit is high* (most respondents intend to return to the museum), *due to a poorly informative activity*, the promotion of the museum is seen at a low level (51%) compared to the public expectations and the possibilities for promoting of the museum. The lack of concern of the museum staff for informing visitors about the NMM offer was obvious in the question regarding the complementary activities of the museum. The respondents didn't know that the museum has something else to offer other than a simple visit.

The study has revealed that young people represent a big percentage from the total number of visitors, 77.2% of respondents falling in the category under 19 years and between 19-25. Thus, it can be stated that young people have a clear interest for the history of the country and a desire to enrich their general culture, taking into account that the ways for spending their free time have become more varied. According to the results, many respondents prefer leisure venues such as: cinema, cafes / terraces, shopping malls and parks.

The results have helped to identify the NMM type of visitor. The organization is visited mainly by young people (under 25 years), who have graduated from high-school and university, and who come mainly from urban areas.

In conclusion, we can say that NMM could become a viable option for recreation for the residents of the capital, but in order for this to happen, the museum should focus to use marketing as an effective tool for achieving, under optimal conditions, the museum's objectives, which can contribute to an aggressive promotion of the cultural products and services offered by NMM.

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