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museum sector alliance

## **W03.2.1.A BUILDING AND MAINTAINING YOUR MUSEUM DIGITAL REPUTATION**

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Abstract:	This learning object introduces learners to what is digital identity and what it means for museums. Furthermore, it explores the importance of digital reputation and includes some guidance on how to build and maintain your museum digital reputation.
Keywords:	Museums digital identity, communication, digital reputation, digital footprint, digital strategy



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## Aim and objectives

The aim is to introduce what is digital identity and what it means for museums. In this context, we will explore the importance of digital reputation, including some guidance on how to build and maintain your museum digital reputation.

## Learning outcomes

After studying this resource, you will be able to: indicate what is digital reputation; indicate at least two steps that can help build and maintain your museum digital reputation; and identify the most important outcome of building and maintaining your museum digital reputation.

## Keywords

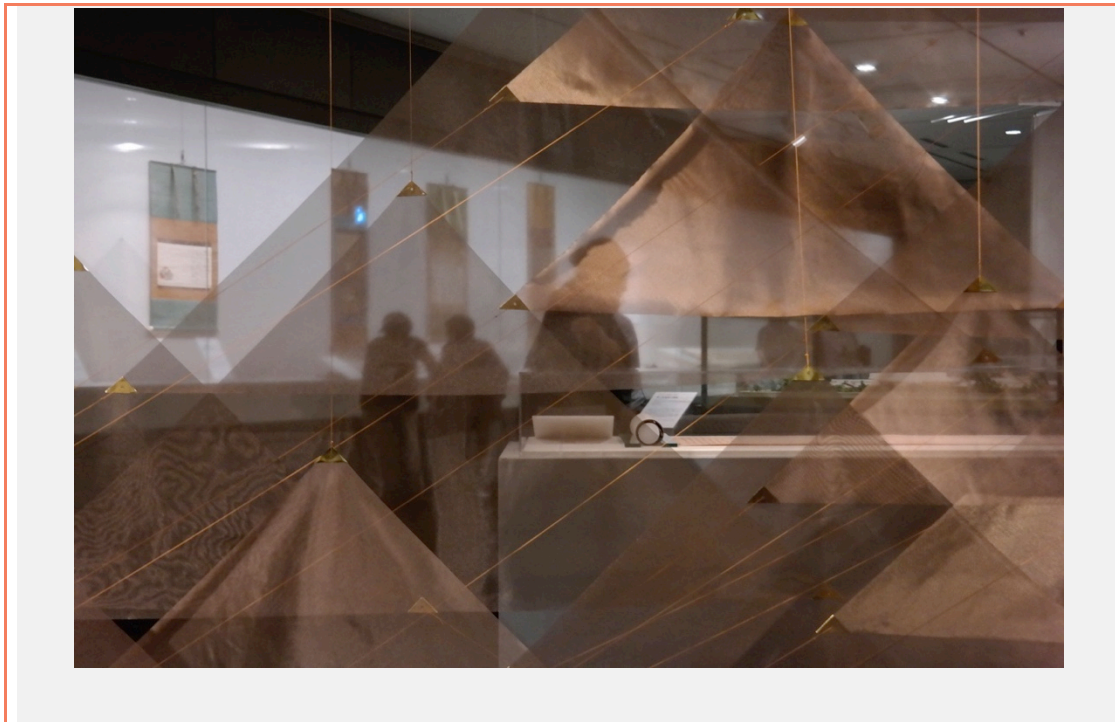
Museums digital identity, communication, reputation, digital reputation, digital footprint, digital strategy

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## 1. Introduction

Museums and cultural organizations alike engaged in digital transformation need to be aware of managing digital identity if they are going to thrive in this context.

Digital identity can mean many things and can be approached from many perspectives. For instance, it can be related to security and protection issues from the individual or the institutional standpoint (e.g. digital certificates).

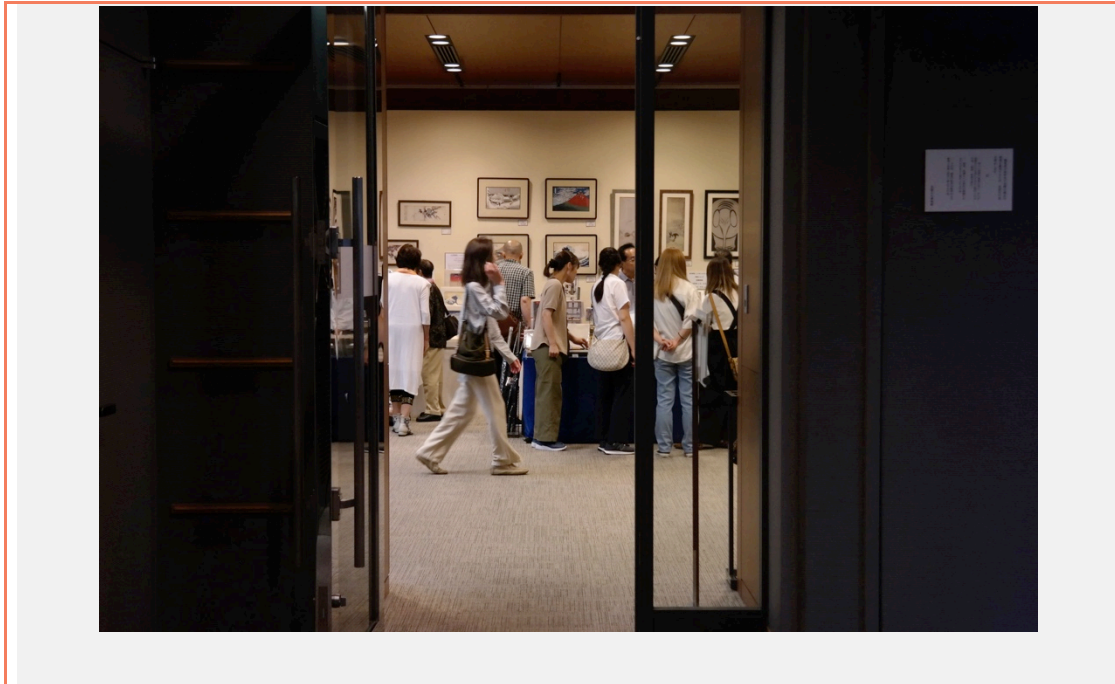
If we look at the definition presented by the DigComp – Digital Competence Framework for Citizens, which approaches it from the citizen or user perspective, the competence “managing digital identity” is presented as: “to create and manage one or multiple digital identities, to be able to protect one's own reputation, to deal with the data that one produces through several digital tools, environments and services”.





In this module we will rather focus on museums digital identity from the perspective of digital reputation, how to build and maintain it, and in that context how to deal with the data produced in the **digital environment**.

While underling the “digital” when talking about museum identity, we acknowledge the interconnectedness around the physical and the online dimensions, considering that both build the museum work and identity. The same applies for reputation. We will stress “digital reputation” in this module, but recognizing that reputation is intrinsically related both to offline and online museum performance, and altogether contributing to the overall image and perception of visitor and user experiences.



## 2. Digital identity: what it is and what does it mean for museums

We will start by discussing what is museum identity to approach what we mean by digital identity. Another idea to be introduced is reputation.

### 2.1. Museum identity

Before moving to what is digital identity, let's start by focusing on identity. The Oxford Dictionary defines identity as “the fact of being who or what a person **or thing is**”, and so relates it with “the **characteristics determining** who or **what** a person or **thing is**”. When we think about identity in relation to museums – what is museum identity?

Recalling the current museum definition by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) as a reference tool:

A museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires,



conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment. (ICOM, 2007)

From this definition we can find a glimpse of what is generally common to museums, their main characteristics (e.g. non-profit organization, permanent, open to the public), including their working object: collections (tangible and intangible heritage), but also the tools museums use – they acquire/collect, conserve, research, communicate and exhibit – and for what? For the purposes of education, study and enjoyment of the public. And in that context, also framing museums work and backbone in the benefit of society and its development.<sup>1</sup>

Museum identity is built up on what a museum is, its characteristics, as mentioned before. But we would also add the values it chooses to defend (e.g. inclusion, transparency, access, equity, diversity, quality, participation, professionalism, responsibility, independence, environmental sustainability, and so on). In sum, the museum characteristics (what), functions (how; seen a tool), purposes (for what), the public and society at large (for who), and values (guiding principles), altogether builds up a museum identity. We would also argue that the museum identity is also shaped by the aims, goals and vision that a museum chooses to address to drive their actions.

## 2.2. Museum digital identity

What about museum digital identity? What do we mean by that? “Museum digital identity” is used here to reinforce the museum performance in the digital environment. We acknowledge that the physical performance of a museum is not separate from its digital performance, they should work intrinsically together towards the

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<sup>1</sup> The ICOM museum definition is currently being discussed. We suggest reading: “[A New Museum Definition](#)” (Vlachou 2019) and also some other articles and comments on the new definition proposal available at: <http://bit.ly/2IVQ7Ze>

same goal: encouraging people to explore museum collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment. Having that in mind, we would argue that museum identity also comprises digital identity. While recognizing its interconnectedness, for the purposes of this module we will hereinafter use mainly the term “digital identity”.

Another idea very much associated with identity is reputation. The museum reputation is about the overall image and perception associated with the physical experiences in the museum, but including also the online experiences. In this module we will focus mainly in aspects concerning the “digital reputation”, although recognizing that it falls under the umbrella of “reputation” as a larger concept that needs to be addressed as a whole.

Further in this module we will go in detail on that it mean by digital reputation, why we should be aware and address it as shared concern in the museum.



### 3. Digital reputation

An overall idea about digital reputation will be presented, as well as the reasons to consider reputation management a shared concern that can benefit the museum.

#### 3.1. What is digital reputation?

As your museum moves around in the digital environment it leaves traces along the way. All these traces – the museum **digital footprint** – contribute to defining the image that users or visitors perceive of your museum. That is also linked to digital reputation.

In this regard it may be essential to have a **digital strategy** in place. Why? The digital is already embedded in our personal and professional lives, so the following step is taking the most of the **digital tools** to fulfil the museums mission and goals, in a critical and reflexive way. Museum digital transformation, however, entails a structured response to drive museums in that challenge – a



digital strategy. If, at this point of your learning journey, you are still unfamiliar with a museum digital strategy, have a look at this two examples for inspiration: "[Tate Digital Strategy 2013-15](#)" (Stack 2013) and "[Digital Public Library of America Strategic Roadmap 2019-2022](#)" (DPLA 2019) (includes libraries, archives and museums) or learn about what is a museum digital strategy from the practical guide "Digital Strategy for Museums" (2017).<sup>2</sup>

Digital reputation comprises two linked standpoints. One is about what the museum says about itself and the contents it produces in the digital environment. In this view, the museum constructs a narrative and determines the message, using specific modes of digital communication, to meet its mission and goals. Altogether, that builds your digital reputation, and, as we mention before, it contributes to defining the image that users or visitors perceive of your museum.

A second standpoint to consider about digital reputation is what users or visitors are saying about your museum – how they react to your content, comment or review it. That includes the articles that appear in Google searches, blogs, Facebook, Tweets, LinkedIn posts, including reviews or comments on culture, art and tourist related websites, and on other Internet formats of conversation. The list could go on.

In brief, digital reputation is the combination of what the museum is saying about itself and what others (e.g. users, visitors) are saying about the museum.

### 3.2 Why it matters?

Digital reputation matters because is likely to define expectations and influence the choices of potential visitors or users.

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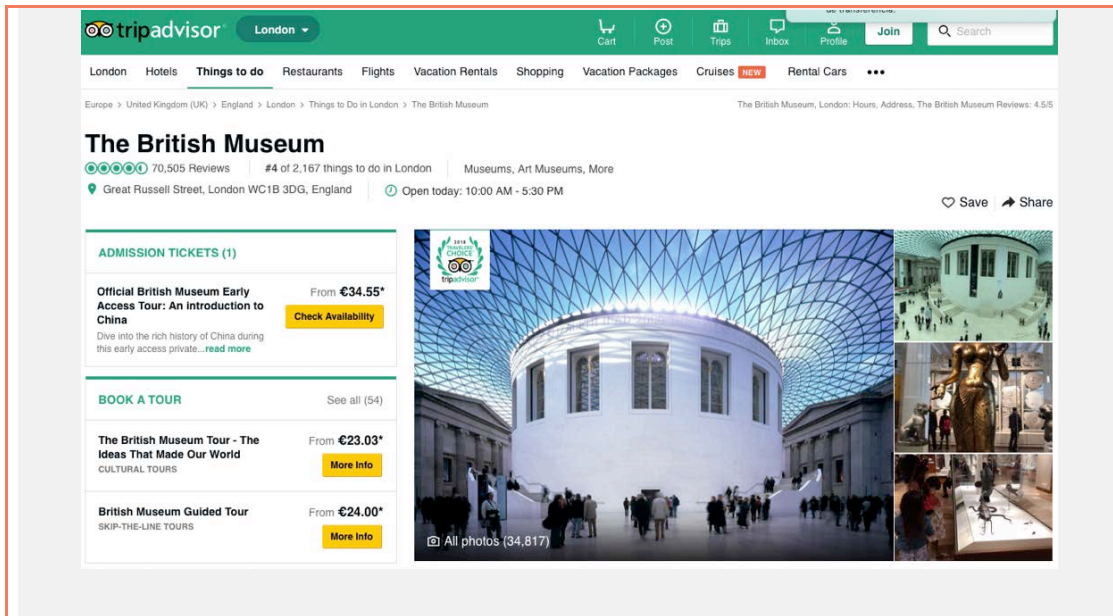
<sup>2</sup> There is a significant bibliography about management applied to museums. One recent book could be a useful resource: Lord & Market (2017). Mind also several reading suggestions from NEMO (Network of European Museum Organizations) regarding museums and the digital, specially in what refers to the digital strategy: <http://bit.ly/2myf4Km>

Colleen Dilenschneider, author and publisher of the popular website *Know Your Own Bone*, in her article about [“The Critical Role of Reputation in Cultural Center Success \(DATA\)”](#) (2015) points out some of the key reasons why to consider reputation as shared concern in a cultural organization, underlining its benefits. From Colleen’s article, we adapted and highlight 4 reasons, considering museums:

- **A good reputation shows *why* your museum exists (and naturally attracts people who share a passion for your mission).** A museum reputation is linked to the museum identity, its characteristics, values and mission, but also relates to how the museums performs and engages towards that. Thus, a strong and consistent reputation will benefit your museum.
- **Reputation drives success (by way of attendance, relationships, but also donations).** Reputation can have a relevant role in driving museum visitation, not ignoring also possible outcomes of increasing revenue and financial sustainability.
- **Talking about reputation is also about acknowledging the importance of online engagement.** Reputation is intrinsically related both to offline and online museum engagement. The critical role of reputation in the digital environment should not be ignored and should be handle it in a way that benefits the museum.
- **Understanding your museum reputation requires understanding your audience** (another best practice increasingly necessary for success). It requires that you actively listen to feedback from your visitors and users, to what they are saying about your museum.

In sum, the most important outcome of building and maintaining your museum digital reputation is to help improve the museum performance and thus attracting more people who share a passion for your museum.





## 4. Building and maintaining your museum digital reputation

In this final chapter we will focus on the shared responsibility of dealing with reputation management and how can we approach digital reputation management. Looking at the example of the British Museum, we will emphasise the use of analyzing online users reviews to understand visitors' conceptions of the museum experience and use that knowledge to improve visitors' experiences in the museum. In our final topic, we will introduce you to a digital reputation management checklist.

### 4.1. Reputation management: who deals wit it?

Hardly you will find any museum that has a job post devoted to the management of the museum reputation (e.g. "chief reputation officer"). As Colleen Dilenschneider argues, this responsibility "falls to everybody, because it falls to nobody" (2015, n.p.). It is a task that needs to have the whole museum on board, since it involves strategic planning and monitoring.

It becomes clear that you, while in your learning journey as Digital Strategy Manager, Digital Interactive Experience Developer, Digital Collections Manager or Online Community Manager can also be aware of the importance of digital reputation and get familiar with some guidelines that can help building and maintaining your museum digital reputation.

Another topic related to reputation and identity is branding, a subject that museums and museum professionals may need to also consider and be aware. While not exploring it in this module, we do recommend reading: "[Museum Branding that Stands Out from the Crowd](#)" (Coates 2019) and "[Shall we Re-brand?](#)" (Vlachou 2015).

#### 4.2. Managing listings and content

There are many ways to build and maintain your museum digital reputation and we do not claim to go through all of them in this module. However, one way is to use effectively your own social media, digital platforms and digital tools to put your message out, making clear who you are and what you are about. From this perspective, you have some sort of control; you can engage directly with users comments (positive and negative) and handle it in a positive manner, build and manage your reputation from that point of view.

Another way is dealing with users reviews that appear in review sites (e.g. TripAdvisor, Yelp and others), social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter), forums. Why? Because online consumer opinions can also be influential in decision-making, for instance whether someone visits a museum or not, specially if you consider tourists.

One aspect you can approach is monitoring: be aware and find in which websites your museum is listed (meaning others than your museum website) and ensure that your museum information (address, contact, etc.) is correct in those listings. Sometimes that is not the case, the information presented is inaccurate or not updated.

On the other hand, you will not be able to control online user reviews, but you can take it to the advantage of your museum. How? In the following section we will look at the British Museum approach to online user reviews as a tool to provide useful information and make improvements in the museum.

### 4.3. Analysing users reviews: insights from the British Museum

Online reviews written by museum visitors and posted on the Internet have been increasing (Alexander, Blank & Hale 2018). Websites such as the TripAdvisor, for instance, have called the attention of museums and researchers. Being one of the most visited travel website in the world, TripAdvisor (launched in 2001) frequently appears on the first page of Google results when you do search for a museum. It is one of websites where potential visitors access before visiting and leave their reviews after visiting the museum.

Seen as primary material, online user reviews can provide useful information and “offer museums the opportunity to understand visitors’ conceptions of the museum experience and possibly to use this knowledge to improve visitors’ experiences”, as argued in the recent article “TripAdvisor Reviews of London Museums: A New Approach to Understanding Visitors” (Alexander, Blank & Hale 2018, p. 164).

Some museums are not ignoring the potential use of analysing online users reviews to make improvements. That's the case of the British Museum.

In 2016, the British Museum created the team “Visitor Insights”. The team collects feedback and enquiries from visitors received by the museum. Coline Cuau (Visitor Insights Manager) and Harrison Pim (Digital Analyst) explain the team focus:

The team’s goal is to identify conversation topics, measure trends over time and report on the learnings to other teams around the

Museum, informing decisions with real-time data about what visitors think. (Cuau & Pim, 2018, n.p.)

The team scope also includes digital feedback from tweets and Facebook direct messages and, later, started to analyse also the online user reviews from TripAdvisor. Coline Cuau and Harrison Pim emphasize the advantages of looking at user online reviews from TripAdvisor:

The British Museum gets on average 1,000 TripAdvisor reviews a month, with an average rating of just over 4.6 out of five. These come in multiple languages, describing visits in great detail and giving unprecedented insight into the visitor experience. **The comments include things that emails to the Museum rarely, or never mention: the temperature in the galleries, the size of the crowds on specific days, language and wayfinding issues, how overwhelming the Museum can seem, who they visited with and how amazing it is that it's all on display for free. Each of these thousands of reviews holds an indication of what visitors like and what we can improve** — having scores with the reviews means that we can also figure out which topics have the strongest impact on satisfaction. This dataset is not only much larger in size than the one we previously built using direct messages. It is also more representative of our international audience, and features much a much broader range of conversation topics. (Cuau & Pim, 2018, n.p.)

From a manual approach to the topics identified in TripAdvisor online users reviews, the team in the British Museum went on to create a database with some level of automation (using a code) to systematize the information collected. The analyses results are now being used to inform long-term strategy decisions in the British Museum.

About the usability of the reviews from TripAdvisor online users, it's noteworthy to mention a few aspects highlighted by Alexander, Blank & Hale (2018) research. One is that TripAdvisor in itself is not a “perfect source of data”. As the authors claim, in the same way as visitor books, the data retrieved from the TripAdvisor

reviews “are not representative of the museums visitors as whole” (p. 164). However, this data can offer some glimpses on helping museum’s change to improve visitors’ experiences and meet their expectations. Of course, this kind of analysis should also be complemented with other types of audience research and approaches.

#### 4.4. A digital reputation management checklist

Now that you have learned the importance of building and managing your museum digital reputation, it is time to guide you with some steps to get you started. We will not present an exhaustive list of steps, but some key guidelines are introduced.

The list of steps presented bellow was based and adapted from the New England Museum Association (NEMA) “Online Reputation Management Checklist for Museums” (2017).

##### **Some steps to getting started:**

1. Work with colleagues across museum departments to establish your strategy and goals for managing your digital reputation.
2. Share your strategy with all staff members, and make sure relevant departments/individuals are all on board.
3. Use search engines to find what’s currently being said about your museum online. Search for the museum’s full name as well as any short forms or acronyms that visitors might use (e.g. “Victoria and Albert Museum” and “V&A”). In this step you should open a private search window so your searches can be less influenced by your cache or browser history:
  - Chrome: More → New Incognito Window (Command+Shift+N or CTRL+Shift+N)
  - Safari: Pages → Private (Command+Shift+N)



- Firefox: Menu → New Private Window (Command+Shift+N or CTRL+Shift+N)
- Internet Explorer: Settings → Safety → InPrivate Browsing (CTRL+Shift+P)

4. Choose the top result and follow these steps:

- a) Confirm that your museum's information is correct, and if not, correct it. This may require registering as a representative of the organization.
- b) Upload recent photos, if possible.
- c) Read the most recent reviews, posts or tweets from visitors. This information can provide you insights about improvements in your museum.
- d) Systematically collect review/post data (including text and images). Consider saving this data in a shared folder so all interested departments/staff have access to it.

5. Repeat the process above for the rest of the relevant search results. Prioritize results closer to the top, as these will be more applicable and have more impact for those searching for your museum.
6. Create a list of popular sites customers use to learn about your museum and register for each site.
7. Analyse the data collected to answer questions you may have about your visitors' experiences. You may also want to note any trends that you see emerging even if they are not related to your areas of interest.
8. Consider using an alert service (such as Google Alerts) so you're notified when your museum's name comes up as a new result on a public website.

**On a regular basis (weekly or monthly), consider the following steps:**





1. Encourage visitors to share feedback, reviews, posts and tweets on your social media and user review sites.
2. Visit each of the most popular sites. On each site:
  - a) Review and collect the latest visitor feedback.
  - b) Respond to feedback where needed/possible.
  - c) If possible, engage users by adding your own posts and tweets.
3. As trends emerge, prioritize improvements based on visitor feedback. When you do make improvements, respond to the reviews, posts or tweets that prompted the change (or, if there are many, consider one update post on each site, where possible).
4. Continue responding to visitor feedback, becoming part of the conversation. Use your digital reputation management strategy as a guide.
5. Consider adding highlights and trends as updates in regular staff meetings.
6. Ensure that collect review data are being analysed, including being incorporated into larger visitor studies in your museum. Also, ensure that the data collected can be used to inform long-term strategy decisions.

**From time to time (seasonally or annually), consider the following steps:**

1. Revisit your digital reputation management strategy and discuss it with your colleagues.
2. Add new photos and update information about your museum on popular sites.
3. Complete a fresh search for your museum to find any new sites visitors may be using.

## 5. Synopsis

We started by discussing ideas around museum identity, museum digital identity and reputation.

An overall idea about digital reputation was also presented, as well as the reasons to consider reputation management a shared concern that can benefit museums.

In the last part of the module we focused on the shared responsibility of dealing with reputation management and how digital reputation management can be approached. From the example of the British Museum, we looked at the significance of analysing online users reviews to understand visitors' conceptions of the museum experience and use that knowledge to improve visitors' experiences in the museum. In our final topic, we introduced a digital reputation management checklist.

## 6. List of references

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## 7. Glossary

**Digital environment:** a context, or a "place", that is enabled by technology and digital devices, often transmitted over the internet, or other digital means, e.g. mobile phone network. Records and evidence of an individual's interaction with a digital environment constitute their digital footprint. The term digital environment is



used here as a backdrop for digital actions without naming a specific technology or tool. (Adapted from the DigComp – Digital Competence Framework for Citizens - glossary of new terms)

**Digital footprint:** is related to the records and evidence of an individual's interaction with a digital environment. When thinking of its application in museums, we mean the museum interaction with a digital environment. (Adapted from the DigComp – Digital Competence Framework for Citizens - glossary of new terms)

**Digital reputation:** can be described as the combination of what the museum is saying about itself and what others (e.g. users, visitors) are saying about the museum. Digital reputation should be approached as part of reputation, a larger concept. This means that reputation is intrinsically related both to offline and online museum performance, and altogether contributing to the overall image and perception of visitor and user experiences.

**Digital strategy:** is about addressing digital transformation in your museum as a recognized challenge that contributes to the museum mission and goals. It is a cohesive response to those challenges, making the best use of limited resources. It is about coming up with a set of actions that are efficient, coherent and mutually reinforcing. In sum, digital strategy interconnects all aspects of museum work towards effectively fulfilling the museum mission and goals. (Adapted from Morrison 2017)

**Digital tools:** digital technologies used for a given purpose or for carrying out a particular function of information processing, communication, content creation, safety or problem solving. (Adapted from the DigComp – Digital Competence Framework for Citizens - glossary of new terms)