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MEDIA NARRATIVES ON IMMERSIVE EXHIBITIONS IN POLAND
AND THEIR DECODING BY STUDENTS
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS
AND RECEPTION FROM A STUART HALL PERSPECTIVE

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, immersive exhibitions have become one of the most visible forms of cultural participation, combining traditional exhibition practices with the logic of experience, spectacle, and mediatization. Their popularity is linked not only to the development of projection technologies, virtual reality, and augmented reality, but also to a visitor-centred turn in exhibition design, in which immersive formats use multisensory storytelling to engage visitors and reshape the exhibition experience (Popoli, Derda 2021). Multisensory experience and marketing-oriented communication, however, have a longer history in museum and cultural practice and are not specific to contemporary immersive exhibitions (Szlendak 2010; Macalik 2018). In immersive exhibitions, the tension between education and entertainment becomes particularly visible, as pedagogical and interpretive functions coexist with affective and spectacular forms of experience (Illsley et al. 2025). International research indicates that immersive solutions employed in museums and exhibition

spaces can enhance engagement and the sense of presence; at the same time, however, they shift the emphasis from encountering the object itself to experiencing a form designed by organisers (Popoli, Derda 2021; Liu, Sutunyarak 2024; Luo, Doucé, Nys 2026).

In Poland, this phenomenon has gained particular visibility through extensively promoted exhibitions such as *Van Gogh & Friends: The Immersive Experience*, *Klimt: The Immersive Exhibition*, and *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition*. Around such events, extensive communication has emerged, encompassing press articles, promotional materials, short-form video content, and messages published in both local and national media. These representations do not merely inform; they also construct imaginaries of immersion and shape audience expectations, which makes the question of their interpretation a central research problem.

In Polish academic literature, analyses to date have focused primarily on museums' marketing communication, the development of their digital offerings, and the presence of cultural institutions in new media (Gaweł 2020; Grzonkowska 2019; Sowińska-Pasek 2019). By contrast, the issue of immersive media has appeared mainly in the context of immersive journalism and the reception of VR narratives, and less frequently in relation to the promotion of exhibitions and their reception (Welskop 2025). Consequently, how the media encode the meaning of such exhibitions and how students interpret these media representations remain insufficiently explored.

A useful analytical perspective for addressing this issue is provided by Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model (2019 [1980]), which assumes that a message does not convey meaning in any fixed or unequivocal way, but rather offers a preferred horizon of meaning that may be accepted, negotiated, or rejected in the process of reception. In this article, encoding is understood as the reconstruction of preferred meanings embedded in completed media texts, rather than as an analysis of the institutional conditions of their production. Hall's model is employed here solely as an analytical framework, with due regard to later revisions within audience reception research (Ang 1991; Couldry 2012; Jenkins 2006; Livingstone 1998).

The aim of this article is to analyse media narratives surrounding immersive exhibitions in Poland and how students decode them. The

study comprised two stages. In the encoding stage, a corpus of Polish-language media materials concerning the three exhibitions mentioned above was analysed. In the decoding stage, moderated group discussions were conducted with students, whose responses were interpreted through dominant, negotiated, and oppositional readings.

Accordingly, three research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What dominant narratives of immersion, interpretative frames, and implied audiences are constructed in media representations of selected immersive exhibitions in Poland?

RQ2: How do the students participating in the study interpret these representations in terms of dominant, negotiated, and oppositional decoding?

RQ3: To what extent does the form of the medium, particularly the difference between a press text and an audiovisual item, shape the decoding of preferred meanings?

RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHOD

The study was qualitative in nature and encompassed two interrelated communicative moments: encoding and decoding (Hall 2019). In the encoding stage, nine Polish-language media materials concerning three immersive exhibitions presented in Poland in 2024–2025 were analysed: *Van Gogh & Friends: The Immersive Experience (VG&F)* (Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends... 2025; Kuryło 2024; *Immersyjna Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025), *Klimt: The Immersive Exhibition (Klimt)* (Klimt — *The Immersive Exhibition* 2025a; *Immersyjna wystawa Gustava Klimta...* 2024; *Klimt — The Immersive Exhibition* 2025b), and *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition (Titanic)* (Titanic: *The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025a; *Wystawa TITANIC w Warszawie...* 2024; *TITANIC: The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025b). The material was selected purposively, following the principle of maximum variation, to capture diversity across exhibition themes and media formats rather than to achieve statistical representativeness (Palinkas et al. 2015). The selection criteria included the exhibition's media visibility, the diversity of media formats, and the availability of materials online. For each exhibition, three media representations were selected: a promotional video, a text published in a national outlet, and a text published in a local

outlet, allowing comparison of different modes of communicating the same event.

Prior to the main analysis, each item was described using a standardised template covering the type of representation, source, title, length of the material, dominant narrative, principal visual and audio elements, the promise of immersion, and the implied audience (Lisowska-Magdziarz 2013; Mayring 2015). In the encoding stage, the unit of analysis was the individual media item. In written texts, the analysis focused on the title, lead, main body, and paratextual elements; in video materials, it examined the visual and audio layers, on-screen text, and editing.

The analysis of the encoding stage was based on a four-element categorisation key developed from the study's assumptions and the literature on media discourse analysis and framing (see Table 1). It comprised dominant narratives of immersion, interpretative frames, audience construction, and persuasive and sensory strategies. These categories enabled treating the encoding analysis as a reconstruction of the preferred meanings embedded in the materials under examination. With regard to interpretative frames, the study drew on the classical understanding of framing (Entman 1993). In written texts, rhetorical and lexical devices were analysed, while in video materials, the focus was on audiovisual elements.

The second stage of the study, corresponding to the decoding moment, was based on moderated group discussions (Maison 2001; Babbie 2019) conducted with first-year MA students in Journalism and Social Communication at the University of Silesia. The sample was purposive and non-probability in nature, and students enrolled in media education classes were invited to participate. The groups were diverse in terms of gender and prior experience of immersive exhibitions. Three sessions were conducted ($N = 45$), which, given their size, were treated as an exploratory audience study rather than a traditional focus group. In the analysis, respondents were identified using anonymous labels according to the scheme Gx_Py, where G denotes the group number and P the participant number within a given group. The study was conducted on 10 December 2025, and each session lasted approximately 80 minutes.

The research procedure was two-stage: participants were shown the same materials that had previously been analysed in the encoding stage,

Tabela 1

Categorisation Key Applied in the Encoding Analysis

Category	Analytical Questions	Illustrative Indicators
Dominant Narratives of Immersion ^a	How does the representation define immersion? What promise of experience does it formulate?	‘visual-auditory immersion’, ‘entry into a story/role’, ‘journey through time’, ‘intensification of emotional participation’, meaning attributed to technology
Interpretative Frames	Within what frame is the exhibition presented?	art, spectacle, education, technology, commercial product, aesthetic experience
Construction of the Implied Audience	Who is the implied audience of the representation? What kinds of responses is it expected to experience?	art lover, technology-oriented audience member, family visitor
Persuasive and Sensory Strategies	How does the representation construct attractiveness and credibility?	hyperbole, appeals to authority, light, colour, music, editing pace, the presence of people within the frame, practical information

Source: author’s own elaboration.

^aIn the present study, immersion is understood as a communicatively constructed promise of the audience member’s entry into the represented world through a combination of sensory stimuli and narrative-imaginative engagement (Nilsson, Nordahl, Serafin 2016; Luo, Doucé, Nys 2026; Illsley et al. 2025). This analytical use of the term refers to the media promise of immersion rather than to immersion as a subjective visitor experience.

after which a moderated discussion was conducted. All sessions followed the same discussion guide, and the conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed. The moderator’s questions concerned: understandings of immersion, the promise of experience conveyed by the representation, the relationship between art, technology, education, and commerce, the implied audience, and the credibility of the material. Participation in the study was voluntary and the material was used exclusively in anonymised form. Given the pedagogical relationship between the researcher and the participants, interpreting the material requires caution.

Coding was performed by the author, reliability was supported through an analytical diary and repeated returns to the material. Statements were classified as dominant, negotiated, or oppositional relative to preferred meanings from the encoding stage, while thematic coding was applied in parallel, with single-coder analysis as the primary limitation. The study is exploratory in nature and is not intended to provide a representative

account of all audiences of immersive exhibitions in Poland, but rather to reconstruct patterns of media encoding and the ways in which they are interpreted by a selected group of recipients (Palinkas et al. 2015; Mayring 2015).

ENCODING MEANINGS IN MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS

The analysis of the corpus under study indicates that immersive exhibitions are encoded primarily as total experiences, combining art, technology, emotion, and spectacle. Across all the materials, despite differences between the individual cases, the logic of ‘immersion’ recurs: the audience is invited not merely to view the exhibition, but to enter its space and to treat contact with culture as an intense experience. The representations examined, therefore, serve not only an informative function, but also project a preferred way of understanding the exhibition (Hall 2019).

Narratives of Immersion

The exhibition is presented as a space where the viewer can enter the artist’s world, surround themselves with his paintings, and experience them visually, aurally, and affectively. The press materials emphasise such elements as multisensory quality, moving images, music, the artist’s biographical narrative, and the exceptional nature of the event itself. This is confirmed by phrases found in the press material (Kuryło 2024), where the audience is invited to ‘literally immerse themselves in van Gogh’s work’, take part in a ‘fascinating journey through time and space’, while the exhibition itself is described as one that ‘moves the heart and mind’. At the same time, the local media representation (*Immersyjna Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025) foregrounds the scale and uniqueness of the event, describing it as ‘the largest immersive art exhibition ever hosted in our country’. The promotional video (*Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025) reinforces this mode of encoding through 360° projections, a VR zone, dynamic editing, and music, all of which subordinate the representation to the logic of spectacle, culminating in the final ticket-sales message.

In the case of the *Klimt* exhibition, the narrative of immersion also remains strongly linked to technology, but it is encoded within a more aestheticised and contemplative order. Here, immersion does not signify

the stimulation of the senses through an excess of stimuli, but rather the viewer's absorption into a space dominated by image, light, colour, and music. The national media material employs formulations such as 'masterful art combined with cutting-edge technology' and 'works that come to life throughout the entire exhibition space' (*Immersyjna wystawa Gustava Klimta...* 2024). The text published in a local outlet, by contrast, announces 'an immersive journey into the world of Gustav Klimt's works' (*Klimt — The Immersive Exhibition* 2025b). In the promotional video (*Klimt — The Immersive Exhibition* 2025a), the constant technological markers (360°, VR, 1,500 m² of screens) are embedded within a calm, museum-like arrangement, created through golden images, a black background, and a solitary figure seated at the centre of the hall. The immersiveness of *Klimt* is therefore encoded as an experience that is more ceremonial than dynamic, and more prestigious than entertaining.

In the materials concerning the *Titanic* exhibition, the primary figure of immersion is not entry into the world of art, but entry into history. Here, narratives of travelling through time, contact with authentic artefacts, faithful reconstructions of the ship's spaces, and emotional participation in the story of the disaster predominate. The press materials are dominated by narratives of travelling through time ('a fascinating journey through time', 'experience the voyage of a lifetime aboard the Titanic') (*Wystawa TITANIC w Warszawie...* 2024), as well as by a language of authenticity ('real exhibits', 'original artefacts', 'faithful reconstructions of cabins and corridors') (*TITANIC: The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025b). The promotional video (*Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025a) combines images of museum artefacts with reconstructions, a VR zone, and an 'immersive display', all of which are constantly reinforced by an information strip foregrounding authenticity, the family-oriented character of the exhibition, and the technological components of the experience. As a result, immersion is encoded here as a combination of education, memory, and spectacle.

Interpretative Frames

In the materials concerning *VG&F*, a clear tension is visible between the frame of art and the frame of spectacle. On the one hand, the

representation refers to the artist's biography, emotional contact with the work, and the value of aesthetic experience (Kuryło 2024); on the other, it foregrounds 360° projections, VR, the scale of the event, and its uniqueness at the national level (*Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025; *Immersyjna Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025). The exhibition is thus encoded as a hybrid of education, emotion, and technological attraction, with a clearly marked commercial frame (*Immersyjna Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025).

In the case of *Klimt*, the interpretative frame is more coherent. Even though technology remains constantly present, the representation subordinates it to an aura of aesthetic prestige. The exhibition is presented above all as an artistic event whose distinctiveness lies in the possibility of experiencing the work in a new and more profound way. The artistic frame is reinforced here by visual gravitas, the dominance of gold and black, a more measured pace in the construction of atmosphere, and the absence of aggressive promotional language (*Klimt — The Immersive Exhibition* 2025a; *Immersyjna wystawa Gustava Klimta...* 2024; *Klimt — The Immersive Exhibition* 2025b).

The interpretative frame of *Titanic*, by contrast, is constructed differently. Here, the most important element is the combination of museum, historical narrative, and educational spectacle (*Wystawa TITANIC w Warszawie...* 2024; *TITANIC: The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025b), while the technological layer performs a supporting function and comes to the fore most clearly in the film material (*Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025a). As a result, the exhibition is encoded as an event that combines cognitive value with emotional experience, while authenticity and immersiveness are presented not as competing qualities, but as mutually reinforcing ones.

Construction of the Implied Audience

In the materials devoted to *VG&F*, the audience member is presented simultaneously as an art lover, a user of technology (*Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025; Kuryło 2024; *Immersyjna Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025), and a participant in a multisensory event (Kuryło 2024). The representation assumes that this viewer will be open to a combination

of art, VR, moving image, and music (*Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025; Kuryło 2024) and also ready for an emotional experience. In the press materials, the audience member appears as an emotional participant (Kuryło 2024), whereas in the film material, they are constructed as a user of technology (*Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025).

In the case of *Klimt*, the implied audience is narrower and symbolically more elitist. The implied viewer is rather someone seeking contemplation, aesthetic intensity, and an experience more refined than mere entertainment. The press materials do not construct this viewer solely as a user of technology, but above all as a participant in an artistic event, for whom the aura of the work, prestige, and the harmonious combination of light, colour, and sound are of central importance (*Immersyjna wystawa Gustava Klimta...* 2024; *Klimt — The Immersive Exhibition* 2025b). The film does not show a crowd, but rather solitary, anonymous figures, which encourages a reading of the exhibition as a more individual than mass experience (*Klimt — The Immersive Exhibition* 2025a).

In representations of *Titanic*, by contrast, the audience takes the form of a family and intergenerational visitor, as well as an empathetic individual interested in history (*Wystawa TITANIC w Warszawie...* 2024; *TITANIC: The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025b). The messages suggest that the participant is expected not merely to view the exhibits, but to enter into a relationship with the past, experience history, and feel its emotional weight. The film (*Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025a) reinforces this construction very clearly through the pictogram ‘for visitors of all ages’, a scene of a family with two children in the immersive room, a child putting on VR goggles, and shots designed to evoke empathy towards the passengers, such as a boarding pass, ‘saved’ lists, and everyday objects recovered from the wreck. This implied audience thus combines cognitive curiosity with a willingness to experience historical narrative in an immersive format.

Persuasive and Sensory Strategies

In representations of *VG&F*, hyperbole, a language of intensification, emphasis on uniqueness, and references to international prestige predominate. These are accompanied by a strong technological frame: 360° projections, VR, large-format images, light, and sound (*Wystawa VAN*

GOGH & Friends... 2025; *Immersyjna Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025). In the text published in a local outlet, explicit hyperbolic formulations prevail: 'the largest immersive art exhibition ever hosted in our country', 'a unique opportunity not to be missed' (*Immersyjna Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025). The film reinforces these devices through dynamic editing, culminating in an overt sales message (*Wystawa VAN GOGH & Friends...* 2025). Persuasion here combines an aesthetic promise with the logic of spectacle.

In the materials concerning *Klimt*, the persuasive devices are more restrained, yet equally pronounced. The most important roles here are played by gold, the contrast between light and darkness, the slower rhythm of the images, and music that creates a sense of sublimity (*Klimt — The Immersive Exhibition* 2025a; *Immersyjna wystawa Gustava Klimta...* 2024; *Klimt — The Immersive Exhibition* 2025b). At the same time, the press text does not abandon the language of prestige, using expressions such as 'a unique exhibition', 'an unforgettable experience', and a reference to 'the world-renowned Polish composer Zbigniew Preisner' (*Immersyjna wystawa Gustava Klimta...* 2024).

In the case of *Titanic*, persuasive strategies combine the documentary-museum register with the register of spectacle. At the level of the press text, this is achieved primarily through a language of authenticity, namely 'the real story', 'real exhibits', 'original artefacts', and 'authentic fragments of the ship' (*Wystawa TITANIC w Warszawie...* 2024; *TITANIC: The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025b). The promotional film employs changing music, dynamic transitions between exhibits and reconstruction scenes, and clear textual messages that organise the core meanings of the representation, namely authenticity, accessibility, immersion, and modernity. Particularly significant is the constant information strip featuring the slogans '170 authentic artefacts', 'for visitors of all ages', 'immersive display', and 'VR zone', which in one place combines the frames of authenticity, accessibility, and technology (*Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition...* 2025a).

STUDENTS' DECODING OF THE REPRESENTATIONS

The analysis of the three moderated group discussions indicates that responses to materials promoting immersive exhibitions varied.

Van Gogh & Friends:
From Emotionalisation to Spectacle

In the case of the materials concerning the *VG&F* exhibition, a clear difference emerged between the reception of the press texts and that of the promotional film. The texts more often elicited readings close to the dominant position or moderately negotiated ones. Participants emphasised their emotional intensity, multisensory qualities, and capacity to construct an image of the exhibition as a spiritual or reflective experience. One participant expressed this as follows: 'It says that the exhibition moves the heart and mind, which suggests an almost spiritual experience' (G1_P1). In another group, attention was drawn to the fact that 'this text gives the impression that the exhibition has meaning' (G3_P1). Statements of this kind indicate that some students accepted the proposed narrative of immersion in the artist's work and of a deepened encounter with art. In other groups, it was stressed that the article created a 'unique atmosphere' and suggested that the exhibition was 'something greater than an ordinary visit to a museum' (G2_P1).

At the same time, negotiated readings were already emerging in the press materials. Some participants observed that the promise of multi-sensory quality could easily slide into the language of advertising and overstimulation. One participant stated quite directly that the representation sounded like 'a promise of being overstimulated' (G3_P2), while another described it as 'art sold in the form of entertainment' (G3_P3). This suggests that even where the text was evaluated positively, awareness of its promotional character did not disappear. In other groups, this ambivalence was articulated very explicitly: one comment noted that the author 'uses incredibly colourful language' and that 'it borders somewhat on advertising' (G1_P6).

More emphatic reactions emerged after viewing the promotional film. Across all three groups, negotiated and oppositional readings predominated in response to it. Participants described it as chaotic, excessively intense, and overly focused on effect. One respondent stated that 'there was melancholy in the text, whereas in the film there is only euphoria, as if it were a huge stadium event' (G1_P2), while another

judged that ‘the text itself suggested an enriching experience, whereas the video is pure entertainment geared towards a dopamine rush’ (G1_P3). A participant in the second group expressed a similar view, saying: ‘For me, the film was terribly chaotic’ (G2_P1). In the first group, the criticism was even more direct, with the material being compared to ‘a purely entertainment-driven advert for Energylandia’ (G1_P3).

What is particularly significant is that the criticism concerned not only the form, but also the implied audience inscribed in the representation. One participant observed that ‘the film presents the viewer as a consumer: “come, see, buy”, and VR technology here is merely a gimmick’ (G1_P2). The *VG&F* film clearly elicited oppositional readings: respondents recognised the logic of spectacle, yet challenged it as a form that trivialised the artist. In the same group, the film was seen as aimed at a mass consumer rather than an art audience: ‘the message is directed at the “general crowd”, not at connoisseurs of art’ (G1_P4).

Klimt: The Greatest Degree of Alignment Between Encoding and Reception

The material concerning the *Klimt* exhibition proved to be the most coherent and was clearly received in a manner close to the dominant position. In the case of the text, participants primarily recognised an aura of uniqueness, prestige, and the artist’s stature. In one group, it was emphasised that the representation was concerned ‘more with art and culture than simply with technology’ (G3_P4), while another participant noted that the text was more structured and less overstimulating than the materials on *VG&F* because it ‘shows a division into zones’ and does not create a sense of VR overload (G3_P2). Negotiated responses included a degree of distance from certain conventions or pathos, but this did not usually lead to a rejection of the representation as a whole. In the second group, the text was perceived as ‘formulaic’ (G2_P2), yet at the same time as encouraging the reader ‘rather to explore the artist’s life than to participate in the event itself’ (G2_P3). The first of these responses is difficult to assign unequivocally to one of Hall’s three decoding positions, as it expresses criticism of the message convention without clearly rejecting its preferred meaning. In the first group, the same

representation was described as ‘museum plus’, that is, a space in which ‘we are meant to experience everything slowly’ (G1_P2).

An even clearer alignment between encoding and reception can be seen in the case of the film. Unlike *VG&F*, the material on *Klimt* was found to be calm, harmonious, and conducive to focusing on the image. One participant stated: ‘a huge advantage was the absence of a voice-over; the music enhanced the atmosphere rather than overwhelming the image’ (G3_P2), while another spoke of a ‘celebration of art’ created through the music and the camera work (G2_P3). In the third group, the film was also described as a ‘sublime and serious’ experience, to which the music gave almost ‘a sacred character’ (G3_P5). In the second group, a similar reception was shaped more by the formal qualities of the material than by general declarations: participants noted that the film ‘maintains a single composition and the depth of the space, rather than using incoherent shots’ (G2_P2), and that ‘the slow-paced shots made me feel as though I was really entering that room’ (G2_P1). In the first group, it was likewise emphasised that ‘a smaller number of devices produced a greater impression’ and that ‘the minimalism works well with the text’ (G1_P1).

Participants also interpreted the anonymous silhouettes positively: the absence of recognisable faces was seen as allowing the viewer to project their own presence into the space, strengthening the sense of an individual encounter with art (G2_P2). *Klimt* was often received in line with its preferred meaning, as an aesthetic and prestigious event in which technology supports, rather than overshadows, the work itself.

Titanic: Between Authenticity and Ethical Discomfort

The material concerning *Titanic* elicited the most complex and ambivalent reactions. The press text was generally received relatively positively, as less overtly promotional, more detailed, and more firmly grounded in a logic of authenticity. Participants often interpreted it as promising truthfulness, a journey through time, and education through contact with real artefacts. One participant spoke of a ‘promise of authenticity’, linked to the possibility of seeing ‘authentic objects and people’s stories’ (G1_P5), while another described the text as ‘a quiet

invitation' to see something real (G1_P6). In this sense, the text about the *Titanic* exhibition activated a particularly clear dominant reading: students accepted the proposed frame of authenticity and historical immersion. This dominant quality was reinforced by specific narrative elements; for example, in the second group, participants emphasised 'the detailed description of the artefacts and the idea of the boarding cards, which makes it possible to feel like a passenger' (G2_P2).

At the same time, negotiated and critical responses were already evident in the press materials. In one of the groups, it was stated quite explicitly that 'turning a tragedy in which 1,500 people died into entertainment leaves a bad taste' (G3_P2), while another participant added that the phrase 'immersing oneself in authentic experiences' in the context of a sinking ship was 'slightly off-putting', because it creates 'a spectacle out of someone else's tragedy' (G3_P6). The negotiated reading thus arose from the tension between the attractiveness of the historical narrative and the ethical discomfort associated with its spectacular packaging.

This feature became even more pronounced after viewing the film. On the one hand, respondents acknowledged the value of authentic objects and indicated that it was precisely these that created 'real immersion'. One participant stated quite explicitly: 'here there are authentic objects from the seabed that I would never see at home on a screen; that is real immersion' (G1_P4). On the other hand, the film prompted questions about the boundary between education, the museum, and entertainment. In one group, a participant commented: 'The film is off-putting because it shows crowds of people. It is difficult to focus on the tragedy when tour groups are walking around nearby' (G3_P1). In the second group, the film was at times received as resembling a school reconstruction: 'I felt as though I were back in primary school, with the teacher putting on a film and saying: "look, this is what it was like"' (G2_P1).

Unlike in the case of *VG&F*, oppositional responses to *Titanic* stemmed not from a rejection of technology, but from moral and interpretative discomfort. Some participants drew a clear distinction between VR ('VR feels artificial to me; what draws me in are real objects', G1_P4) and the value of authentic artefacts not accessible elsewhere. This response is similarly ambiguous within Hall's typology, as it combines acceptance of authenticity as a source of immersion with a rejection of its technological

component. *Titanic*, therefore, generated primarily negotiated readings: recipients accepted the frame of authenticity and educational value, while questioning the spectacular and pop-cultural packaging.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings confirm the usefulness of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model for analysing media narratives about immersive exhibitions and their reception. The ways in which meanings were encoded by the media did not translate directly into their decoding by students: the representations constructed preferred images of immersion as an intense and desirable experience, yet this did not entail the audience's automatic acceptance of those meanings (Hall 2019). At the same time, the encoding stage revealed distinct configurations of narratives of immersion and interpretative frames: in the case of *VG&F*, the dominant frame was that of spectacle and emotion; in the case of *Klimt*, that of aesthetic prestige and contemplation; and in the case of *Titanic*, that of authenticity, historicity, and educational experience.

One of the most important findings of the study was the significance of the communication medium. Although the materials analysed referred to the same events, students interpreted press texts and promotional films differently. This was most clearly visible in the case of *VG&F*, where the text more often led to dominant or negotiated readings, as it situated the exhibition within the frames of art, biography, and emotional experience, whereas the film was perceived as excessively aggressive, overstimulating, and subordinated to the logic of spectacle. The form of the representation, and not merely its content, genuinely co-shaped the decoding of preferred meanings. This finding is consistent with reception research emphasising audience activity in negotiating textual meanings (Livingstone 1998) and with studies of immersive exhibitions that stress the role of visitor-centred storytelling in shaping the experience (Popoli, Derda 2021).

Against this background, *Klimt* proved the most coherent case: both text and film were received as aesthetically credible, with technology perceived as supporting the aura of the work rather than overriding it, providing the strongest confirmation of the dominant code in reception (Hall 2019).

The responses to the media representations of the *Titanic* exhibition were of a different character, with negotiated decoding emerging especially clearly in this case. Students readily accepted the frames of authenticity and historicity, as well as the exhibition's educational value, particularly when the message foregrounded real artefacts and the material traces of the past. At the same time, however, they maintained a degree of distance from the spectacular framing of this narrative, particularly where the representation aestheticised the disaster or transformed it into an appealing consumer experience.

The findings also lead to a broader conclusion about the audience model that emerges from communication promoting immersive exhibitions. These representations constructed the viewer as an immersed participant open to technology. However, the students clearly recognised the commercial character of such strategies, distinguishing aesthetic experience from marketing-driven stimulation.

From the perspective of communication and media studies, the article makes several important contributions. First, within the analysed corpus, the media promise of immersion took three distinct communicative configurations: spectacle and emotion in *VG&F*, aesthetic prestige and contemplation in *Klimt*, and authenticity, historicity, and education in *Titanic*. Second, the promise of immersion itself became an object of decoding: students evaluated whether technological and sensory devices supported the exhibition's proposed meaning or functioned primarily as spectacle, promotion, or artificiality. Third, in the analysed cases, audiovisual intensity did not correspond to stronger acceptance of preferred meanings: the dynamic *VG&F* film was predominantly decoded through negotiated and oppositional readings, whereas the restrained *Klimt* film showed the strongest alignment between encoding and decoding.

The findings obtained, however, should be treated as exploratory. The aim of the study was not to formulate statistical generalisations concerning immersive exhibition audiences or Polish media coverage as a whole, but rather to reconstruct selected patterns of encoding and decoding within a carefully selected corpus of materials and among a group of journalism students. The limitations of the study include the specificity of the sample, composed of journalism students, as well as the

researcher's dual role as both course instructor and discussion moderator. This dual role may have influenced participants' willingness to express critical views, while the absence of researcher triangulation increased the role of the author's interpretive judgement in coding. Prior attendance at the three analysed exhibitions was not recorded and may also have influenced decoding. Further research should expand the analysis to include social media, short-form video, and user-generated content; compare the responses of different audience groups; and juxtapose the media promise of immersion with the actual experience of participation in the exhibition.

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Abstract

The article analyses media narratives about immersive exhibitions in Poland and the ways in which they are decoded by students from the perspective of Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model. The study was qualitative and consisted of two stages: encoding and decoding. In the former, nine Polish-language media accounts concerning three exhibitions were analysed: *Van Gogh & Friends: The Immersive Experience*; *Klimt: The Immersive Exhibition*; and *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition*. In the decoding stage, three moderated group discussions were conducted with MA students of journalism and social communication (N = 45). The findings show that the media encode immersion mainly as an intense experience combining art, technology and spectacle, whereas audiences decode these messages in varied ways. The greatest discrepancies concerned promotional films, which were particularly likely to trigger negotiated and oppositional readings.

keywords: immersive exhibitions, media narratives, audience research, encoding/decoding, visual communication, framing

MEDIALNE NARRACJE O WYSTAWACH IMMERSYJNYCH W POLSCE I ICH DEKODOWANIE PRZEZ STUDENTÓW. JAKOŚCIOWA ANALIZA PRZEKAZÓW I ODBIORU W UJĘCIU STUARTA HALLA

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Abstrakt

Celem artykułu jest analiza medialnych narracji o wystawach immersyjnych w Polsce oraz sposobów ich odczytywania przez studentów z perspektywy modelu encoding/decoding Stuarta Halla. Badanie miało charakter jakościowy i obejmowało dwa etapy. W części encoding przeanalizowano dziewięć polskojęzycznych materiałów medialnych, dotyczących trzech wystaw: *Van Gogh & Friends: The Immersive Experience*, *Klimt: The Immersive Exhibition* i *Titanic: The Artifact Exhibition*. W części decoding przeprowadzono trzy moderowane dyskusje grupowe ze studentami dziennikarstwa i komunikacji społecznej (N = 45). Wyniki pokazują, że media kodują immersję głównie jako intensywne doświadczenie łączące sztukę, technologię i spektakl, natomiast odbiorcy dekodują te przekazy w zróżnicowany sposób. Największe rozbieżności dotyczyły materiałów filmowych, które częściej uruchamiały odczytania negocjowane i opozycyjne.

słowa kluczowe: wystawy immersyjne, narracje medialne, badania odbioru, encoding/decoding, komunikacja wizualna, framing