

Nights at the Museum: Immersive Marketing and the Rise of Experiential Culture

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Abstract

Art museums are undergoing significant transformations as they integrate immersive experiences aimed at engaging a more diverse audience, particularly younger generations who often perceive these institutions as distant or uninviting. The Centre Pompidou in Paris, for instance, combines free-access exhibitions with festive, event-based programming, thereby creating a dynamic and multifaceted cultural environment. Similar developments observed in two museums in Lyon reflect a broader institutional shift toward an experiential paradigm—one that privileges emotional resonance and participatory engagement over the traditional, passive reception of artworks. Preliminary findings from an exploratory study, grounded in participant observation and semi-structured interviews, underscore the positive influence of immersive and interactive formats on the attractiveness of art museums. Initiatives such as themed evenings and collaborative workshops facilitate the progressive integration of cultural practices and contribute to sustainable shifts in visitor behavior. Nevertheless, the implementation of such initiatives call for substantial organizational adaptations, including staff training, spatial reconfiguration, and strategic communication—particularly via social media platforms. By fostering more inclusive and affectively engaging encounters with art, the experiential approach not only enhances visitor loyalty but also expands the cultural reach and societal relevance of contemporary art museums.

Keywords

Emotional engagement; Museum experience; Immersion; Services marketing; *Retailtainment*

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank both reviewers of the 2026 Marketing Trends Conference in Berlin for their comments and suggestions, which have helped to improve an earlier draft of the manuscript.

Introduction

Over the past several decades, museums have undergone a significant redefinition of their mission, increasingly incorporating experiential and relational dimensions into their operations. No longer conceived solely as exhibition spaces, museums are progressively evolving into platforms for cultural interaction (Black, 2005). This transformation aligns with a broader shift in public cultural services, where insights from services marketing are being employed to reconceptualize the visitor experience (Carù & Cova, 2003). In this context, museums are expected to enrich their value proposition by integrating immersive technologies, narrative pathways, and event-driven formats designed to elicit emotional, cognitive, and participatory responses (Li *et al.*, 2023). The museum thus becomes a space for informal learning, hedonic exploration, and identity construction (Falk & Dierking, 2013). The experiential turn requires a fundamental rethinking of how museum experiences are designed, emphasizing co-creation processes with diverse audiences. At the same time, it presents substantial organizational challenges, requiring museum professionals to acquire new marketing competencies, adapt their operational models, and foster collaborations across artistic, educational, and community-based networks.

Recent academic literature highlights significant work on the transformation of museum visit experience from multisensory and participatory perspectives. Luo *et al.* (2026) notably proposes an integrated vision of multisensory museum experiences, emphasizing the importance of multidisciplinary approaches combining *psychology, design, and immersive technologies*. Chen *et al.* (2024) show how augmented reality (AR) in heritage museums mobilizes technical, individual, and situational factors to shape visitors' intended use, while Liu & Sutunyarak (2024) conclude that immersive technologies positively influence audience attitudes, satisfaction, and behavioral intentions. Davey *et al.* (2024) build on these insights by revisiting the foundations of experiential marketing and highlighting psychological mechanisms such as depth of immersion and motivation to immerse oneself. Echoing these findings, Yang *et al.* (2023) examine the dynamics of value co-creation within museums, underscoring the active participation of visitors in the construction of meaningful experiences. Collectively, academic contributions underscore that a nuanced understanding of the contemporary museum experience requires integrating perspectives from marketing, museology, cognitive science, and cultural studies.

While the technological and theoretical advances help illuminate how museum experiences are evolving, they also raise broader questions about the institutional, social, and cultural implications of this shift. It would be misleading to assume that the ongoing transformation of museums pertains solely to the presentation of collections. In an era where cultural institutions seek greater legitimacy, museums are increasingly assessed based on their social impact, their ability to engage diverse audiences, and their capacity to foster meaningful connections within communities. Visitor-centered approaches—drawing from cultural studies—are driving the emergence of a more inclusive and participatory conception of the museum (Black, 2005). Departing from an elitist or self-referential model, the contemporary museum is increasingly envisioned as a space for cultural dialogue, democratic exchange, and collective learning. This evolution relies on participatory mechanisms, dynamic event programming, and interactive digital technologies that stimulate engagement and co-creation. It also entails a redefinition of professional roles within the institution, with mediators and scenographers now serving as “*architects of the experience*” (Leinhardt *et al.*, 2002), curating emotional, educational, and aesthetic dimensions of the visitor journey. The resulting tensions are significant, especially within art museums, which face growing pressure to innovate and diversify their practices without compromising their curatorial integrity or historical identity.

This exploratory paper examines the tensions inherent in the experiential transformation of museums, drawing on a qualitative study conducted at two institutions in Lyon with contrasting identities: the Museum of Fine Arts (MBA) and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC). Both museums are engaged in evolving their facilities, providing a rich empirical setting for observing how the visitor experience is being reconfigured in practice. By integrating concepts from experiential marketing and critical museology, the study explores how museums negotiate the dual imperatives of knowledge transmission and sensory engagement. The first section outlines the theoretical framework informing recent evolutions in museum experiences, while the second section highlights the managerial stakes associated with the experiential turn, particularly for institutions seeking to reconcile their cultural missions with new expectations regarding engagement. The third section presents the qualitative methodology employed, combining participant observation with semi-structured interviews. The fourth section discusses preliminary empirical findings, emphasizing the divergent strategies adopted by the MBA and the MAC to foster visitor engagement. Finally, the fifth section reflects on the symbolic implications of these transformations in a context where museums must balance demands for cultural excellence, audience development, and meaningful visitor experiences.

1. Theoretical Framework

Museums can be understood through the service classification proposed by Ng *et al.* (2007), which differentiates services along collective–individual and hedonic–utilitarian dimensions. Within this framework, museum visits fall predominantly on the hedonic side, as shown by Dou *et al.* (2021), since they provide pleasure, emotional immersion, cognitive stimulation, contemplation, and opportunities for social connection. This conceptualization positions museums as experiential environments in which sensory, affective, and social components are tightly interwoven. Recent multisensory studies reinforce this view: Jelinčić *et al.* (2022) demonstrate that visual and auditory elements influence both subjective emotions and psychophysiological responses, while Luo *et al.* (2024) highlight a shift from vision-centric models toward fully multisensory frameworks rooted in experiential marketing theory. Together, these contributions present museums as complex experiential ecosystems where sensory cues, narrative structures, and social contexts jointly shape perception and meaning making. This theoretical positioning underscores the idea that museums function as intentional orchestrators of multisensory encounters and calls for measurement approaches that integrate qualitative interpretation with physiological and behavioral indicators to capture the richness of lived experience.

Digital, augmented, and virtual technologies further enrich this theoretical foundation by expanding how experiential value is created, perceived, and enacted. Zhu & Wang (2022) show that AR implementations structured around Schmitt’s (1999) experiential modules—sensory, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and associative—can significantly reshape visitor attitudes and behavioral intentions, effectively extending experiential marketing logics into hybrid and virtual museum settings. Complementing these insights, Wang *et al.* (2025) identify both technological factors (perceived usefulness, ease of use, interactivity) and dimensions of cultural resonance as core determinants of VR immersion, underscoring how experiential intensity depends on the alignment between technological design and visitors’ cultural expectations. Khalil *et al.* (2024) add that social mimetism and satisfaction operate as key predictors of AR adoption, revealing the social embeddedness of technologically mediated experiences. Finally, Yang *et al.* (2023) highlight the mediating roles of participation and interaction in co-creating experiential value, while noting that prior knowledge moderates how motivations translate into hedonic and cognitive outcomes. Taken together, these works

advocate for integrative frameworks that account for technological affordances, cultural meaning, and visitor agency, thereby rejecting technologically deterministic interpretations of immersive museum experiences.

User experience (UX) and personalization frameworks further illuminate how visitors perceive and navigate exhibitions, enriching the experiential and immersive perspectives outlined above. King *et al.* (2023) introduce the MEUX model, which differentiates pragmatic qualities (clarity, usability, accessibility) from hedonic ones (aesthetic, emotional, interpretive), thereby bridging museum studies and UX design. AI-driven spatial design and affective computing now enable adaptive layouts responsive to visitors’ emotional cues (Lei, 2025), while Ivanov & Velkova (2025) identify AI-powered personalization and location-based technologies as key tools for tailoring routes and content. Collectively, these perspectives portray museums as adaptive, multisensory, user-centered ecosystems in which cognitive, affective, social, and technological dimensions interact to shape meaning. To consolidate these academic contributions and clarify how they frame contemporary expectations of the museum visit, Table 1 summarizes the major theoretical lenses, main works, and experiential implications. The synthesis reveals a model of museums as intentional *orchestrators of visitor journeys*—institutions in which design decisions, interpretive orientations, and technological affordances converge to shape engagement, emotional resonance, and cultural accessibility.

Table 1. Summary of Theoretical Contributions to Museum Experience Research

Theoretical lens	Main works	Implications for museum experience
<i>Experiential and multisensory approaches</i>	Ng <i>et al.</i> (2007) Dou <i>et al.</i> (2021) Jelinčić <i>et al.</i> (2022) Luo <i>et al.</i> (2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museums operate as multisensory experiential ecosystems • Calls for integrating sensory cues, narrative structures, and social context
<i>Digital, AR/VR, and immersive technologies</i>	Zhu & Wang (2022) Wang <i>et al.</i> (2025) Yang <i>et al.</i> (2023) Khalil <i>et al.</i> (2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immersion arises from alignment between technological design and cultural/motivational factors • Experiences are socially embedded and co-created
<i>User experience and personalization</i>	King <i>et al.</i> (2023) Ivanov & Velkova (2025) Lei (2025)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Museums function as adaptive, user-centered systems • Personalized routes and affective design shape meaningful engagement

Source: The authors.

2. Managerial Stakes

The International Council of Museums (ICOM) defines museums not only as custodial institutions but as spaces for reflection, participation, and community engagement. This broader mandate contrasts with the French Ministry of Culture’s continued emphasis on collection stewardship, conservation, and national promotion. As the Director of the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Lille observes, scenography, interpretation, and the presentation of works distinguish a museum from a mere storage facility and become essential managerial levers for shaping visitor experience. Dou *et al.* (2021) similarly describe museums as cognitive and emotional spaces where design choices directly affect visitors’ affect, learning, and satisfaction (Chan & Yeoh, 2010). Recent exhibitions—such as the 2024 Brancusi show at the Centre Pompidou and the Tarsila do Amaral retrospective at the Musée du Luxembourg—illustrate how curatorial framing and atmospheric design produce powerful aesthetic and cultural resonance. These cases

highlight that managerial decisions around mediation, layout, narrative sequencing, and interpretive devices now carry strategic significance for public engagement, requiring managers to balance interpretive depth with accessibility and emotional impact.

The 2017 “21st-century museums” mission report urges institutions to revise managerial priorities to attract younger, more diverse publics by reducing barriers, improving accessibility, and encouraging participation (Eidelman, 2017). Operationalizing this agenda implies a shift from a service-access model toward relational and experiential forms of engagement that facilitate active visitor involvement. Digital transformation is central to this move: AR and virtual reality (VR) initiatives demonstrate how immersive programming can renew institutional appeal and align with contemporary expectations (Zhu & Wang, 2022; Khalil *et al.*, 2024; Wang *et al.*, 2025), while AI-driven layout and affective systems offer predictive capacity to manage flows, reduce bottlenecks, and personalize visits (Lei, 2025). Philippopoulos *et al.* (2024) propose integrated performance frameworks combining movement tracking, personalized content delivery, and administrative dashboards to measure and enhance experience. Practically, managers must therefore combine curatorial strategies, technological governance, and educational programming to implement inclusive, evidence-based engagement strategies that respect ethical and cultural constraints.

According to ICOM, art, fine arts, and decorative arts museums are France’s largest category (35% of institutions; 58% of visits), so managerial adaptation is crucial. Museums now pilot sensory installations, co-creation formats, hybrid digital–physical projects, and community-led programs, each posing operational challenges (staffing, training, budgets, partnerships, and ethical data use). Personalization demands AI-based content systems (Ivanov & Velkova, 2025), and multisensory initiatives require new design skills (Jelinčić *et al.*, 2022; Luo *et al.*, 2024). Managers must balance artistic integrity, accessibility, inclusivity, and operational limits while preserving cultural relevance. As these pressures intensify, the key issue is how art museums can redesign the visitor journey to deepen emotional resonance and broaden participation across diverse publics. From this perspective, it is particularly relevant to explore how these institutions are adapting within the context of the evolving experiential relationship with their audiences. Specifically, how are art museums attracting new visitors while fostering greater participation, inclusivity, and conviviality? What new types of visitor experiences are being developed, and what organizational challenges do these changes entail? This evolution raises important questions about managing varying levels of public engagement, including interactive creative workshops, collaborative events, community consultations, and other innovative museum practices.

3. Methodology

To address the research questions outlined above, this study employs observant participation, following DeWalt & DeWalt’s (2011) methodological framework. Fieldwork was conducted between September 2022 and January 2025 in two Lyon art museums—the Museum of Fine Arts (MBA) and the Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC)—selected to capitalize on opportunities arising from repeated site visits, in accordance with the principle of methodical opportunism (Journé, 2010). Observant participation at the MBA began in September 2022, resulting in 18 visits, while research at the MAC commenced in March 2024 and totaled 6 visits. After these extensive observational phases, the principal researcher triangulated the collected data by integrating documentary analysis—including the 2023 Activity Reports produced by both institutions as well as regional press coverage—with 15 semi-structured interviews conducted with visitors, staff, and management to capture diverse and nuanced perspectives. The triangulation fosters a plurality of viewpoints, enhances the depth and rigor of the analysis, improves the credibility of the data, and ultimately strengthens both the

internal validity and the overall robustness of the research findings by grounding them in multiple, convergent sources of evidence.

Although exploratory in nature, the approach adopted in this study is anchored in a well-established methodological tradition in services marketing, where on-site observation is widely recognized as an appropriate means for capturing emerging experiential dynamics. Several influential studies published in international journals since the early 2010s have drawn on similar protocols, combining extended immersion and qualitative analysis to better understand complex and evolving service phenomena. Edvardsson *et al.* (2011), for instance, rely on an inductive perspective to analyze under-documented situations of value co-creation, underscoring the importance of exploratory work when practices are still forming. Similarly, Helkkula *et al.* (2012) demonstrate the relevance of in-depth qualitative inquiry for apprehending the subjectivity inherent in users lived service experiences. More recently, Wirtz *et al.* (2018) employ an exploratory research design to examine how experiential environments shape consumer behavior, further reinforcing the legitimacy of such methodological choices when addressing emergent or rapidly transforming service contexts. By situating our protocol within this scholarly lineage, we clarify the methodological positioning and emphasize that exploratory inquiry is a necessary step when analyzing systems—here, festive and immersive museum events—that continue to evolve.

Building on these methodological foundations, the various materials collected were analyzed thematically using a reading grid grounded in the experiential approach within services marketing. Conceptual tools from the field of experiential retailing were adapted and mobilized for the museum context by establishing an analytical parallel with strategies based on immersive practices commonly associated with shopping malls and, more broadly, retail environments (Antéblian *et al.*, 2013; Lang & Hooker, 2013; Skandalis *et al.*, 2019). This analytical extension is especially relevant given the parallels between experiential orchestration in retail and the experiential orientation of contemporary museums. Accordingly, the core challenge was to identify and differentiate the transaction-, relationship-, and experience-based components as they operate uniquely within art museums, and to cross-reference these dynamics with the strategic objectives articulated in the 21st-century museums mission report (Eidelman, 2017). Ultimately, this research seeks to understand how festive and immersive events contribute to the potential (re)discovery of artworks, the diversification and broadening of target audiences, the growth in attendance figures, and the geographic expansion of the catchment area surrounding the selected institutions. Through this analytical strategy, the study highlights how such initiatives strengthen cultural relevance, deepen community engagement, and support the long-term sustainability of art museums within a competitive cultural landscape.

4. Initial Findings

Observant participation reveals the innovative experiences that the two Lyon art museums are actively co-constructing with their emerging and diverse audiences. Overall, the initial findings underscore the critical role of immersive experiences as powerful vectors of attraction, particularly for teenagers and young adults (such as DJ-hosted evenings and the introduction of “street-food” alongside exhibitions open during select evening hours) (see Appendix A and B), as well as for families (including music concerts, interactive workshops, and creative activities), aligning with recent research by Erdogan & Enginkaya (2023). This experiential immersion clearly appears to “move the lines” in audience engagement. Indeed, the concept of *retailtainment*, as defined by Ritzer (1996), effectively dismantles the traditional barriers—namely, the reluctance to visit art museums often perceived as quiet, sterile, or boring spaces—by transforming them into accessible, enjoyable, and socially vibrant environments. Furthermore, scripted guided tours and live artistic performances

substantially enrich the immersive and participatory visitor experience. Consequently, the challenge of interpreting complex artworks, which can be daunting for uninitiated visitors, often becomes a secondary concern, as emotional and sensory engagement takes precedence.

The immersive strategy enables the new audiences reached to develop diverse cultural practices, whose common denominator lies in initially experiencing playful, engaging moments and evoking strong emotions. Subsequently, these immersive encounters encourage visitors to embrace a unique aesthetic experience to which they may have initially been reluctant or indifferent. This observation aligns with the findings of Joule & Beauvois (2017), who argue that freely consented submission transforms individuals' behaviors and practices when they have previously agreed without any coercion or pressure. These principles are particularly evident during cultural evenings, where art is presented in a relaxed, informal, and participatory environment. Mechanisms promoting autonomous exploration, collaborative workshops, and immersive, scripted narratives play a crucial role in facilitating this transition. However, it remains essential to identify and establish a meaningful anchor—something personally significant to individuals—that fosters long-term engagement and, consequently, sustains the desired behavioral change over time.

Based on the initial findings, we propose the following conjecture: the experiential dimension within art museums operates as an anchoring process that gradually transforms visitors' cultural practices, particularly among adolescents and young adults. This anchoring unfolds within a broader context of institutional renewal, where the central challenge is to attract new audiences by offering playful and engaging experiences capable of generating shared emotions and meaningful social interactions. Such transformation depends not only on the managerial decisions shaping the museum environment but also on visitors' own willingness to participate in immersive, socially embedded encounters. By adopting an experiential relationship, art museums foreground co-construction, consistent with Ng *et al.*'s (2007) understanding of museum service as a collective *servuction*. In this perspective, visitors jointly experience pleasure, emotional resonance, and aesthetic connection—immersions that closely echo the logic of *retailtainment*, blending education, entertainment, social engagement, and cultural enrichment into a unified experiential fabric. The main experiential mechanisms identified through the observations are synthesized in Table 2, which outlines the core dynamics through which the immersive practices shape evolving visitor behaviors.

Table 2. Emerging Immersive Dynamics and Their Impact on Visitor Practices

Key concepts	Empirical manifestations	Observed effects
<i>Immersive and social experiences</i>	DJ-led events, street-food offerings, concerts, and late-night openings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong attraction • Reduced symbolic and cultural barriers
<i>Playful creative engagement</i>	Workshops, interactive installations, scripted and narrative-driven tours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Active participation • Heightened emotional engagement
<i>Retailtainment</i>	Festive, informal and socially vibrant atmospheres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destigmatization of the museum • Enhanced sense of accessibility
<i>Aesthetic anchoring</i>	Transition from playful entry points toward deeper aesthetic appreciation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Openness to more complex artistic experiences
<i>Behavioral transformation</i>	Voluntary and pressure-free involvement in cultural activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gradual transformation of cultural practices over time
<i>Co-construction and collective servuction</i>	Shared emotions and socially embedded experiential encounters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening of the museum as a collectively lived experiential space

Source: The authors.

5. Implications, Limitations and Perspectives

The choices made by the two Lyon museums raise important questions about their managerial implications. The first managerial implication concerns human resources management, particularly regarding the staff involved. The MAC is evolving its internal processes to present new immersive exhibitions first to the entire team, before unveiling them to visitors. This approach provides effective opportunities for employees to learn, enabling them to better guide visitors and confidently respond to their questions. In this respect, as in other areas of distribution and services marketing, the experiential approach drives the development of new skills within teams, including organizing events related to exhibitions and managing visitor engagement. Co-constructing events with the public enriches interactions with visitors while simultaneously fostering the emergence of new professional roles within the art museum sector. Consequently, a proactive training component would benefit from early implementation, as emphasized by Minkiewicz *et al.* (2016), who highlight that museum teams represent a valuable portfolio of “*operational resources*” critical to successfully co-producing meaningful cultural experiences and enhancing institutional reputation.

The second managerial implication concerns museum design and their communication strategy. In terms of museum design, it should be noted that the activities offered by the two Lyon art museums required interior design. The immersive approaches proposed are in line with Erdogan & Enginkaya (2023), indicating that the general atmosphere of an art museum is one of the most relevant indicators of the perceived performance of the museum experience. Regarding the communication strategy, the art museums studied have also invested in digital social networks, such as Instagram, adapting to their target audience of adolescents and young adults. Their communication also aims to develop “word of mouth” among peers, even more important since the social experience strongly affects the decision to visit with family and/or friends (Falk & Dierking, 2013; Kempniak *et al.*, 2017). The mobilization of digital tools contributes to disseminating new cultural practices to a wider audience, and in this sense, it could address visitors beyond the elites, beyond the mere 2% of individuals with *multiple cultural practices* (Bryson, 1996), *omnivore* (Peterson & Kern, 1996), or *dissonant* (Lahire, 2011).

More generally, these two managerial implications align with the contribution of Rouquet *et al.* (2017) on consumer logistics. Drawing on the notion of transferring supply chain activities to the end customer, these authors show that an organization’s performance relies on the capacity of diverse, cross-functional teams to coordinate effectively in creating value. They further stress that service co-production requires continual adjustment and sustained interaction between frontline personnel and users. In this regard, co-production amplifies the importance of talent and skills management, consistent with the premises of resource-based theory (Penrose, 2009 [1959]; Barney, 1991). In the museum sector, similar dynamics are evident: institutions depend on the coordinated efforts of heterogeneous teams, the quality of staff–visitor encounters, and the emergence of new professional competencies. These developments resonate with broader trends in service innovation and value co-creation, where organizations must integrate operational flexibility with relational expertise. They also point to the need for marketing strategies capable of supporting participatory forms of engagement and accompanying audiences through increasingly complex cultural experiences over time.

However, this investigation is not without limitations. The data underpinning the research were primarily gathered through observant participation, which, although valuable for capturing contextual nuances, restricts the generalizability of the findings and limits the assessment of broader patterns. To strengthen the analysis, future studies should incorporate quantitative approaches that measure how evolving cultural practices affect visitors’

relationships with traditionally legitimate forms of cultural engagement. Longitudinal designs would be especially useful for examining whether the observed changes endure and for determining the frequency with which renewed stimuli might be required to sustain them. In this regard, the memory-based framework developed by Flacandji & Krey (2020) provides a valuable foundation: by focusing on how individuals encode and reconstruct experiential episodes, it clarifies why certain encounters continue to influence future behavior long after they occur. This perspective, echoed in behavioral economics (Kahneman, 2011), complements emerging work such as Dou *et al.* (2021), who highlight the central yet underexplored role of memory in museum experiences. Together, these insights open promising avenues for investigating how cultural institutions can design experiences that generate durable and meaningful forms of engagement.

Conclusion

This paper underscores the value of cross-fertilization between experiential marketing and critical museology for understanding the profound reconfigurations currently affecting cultural institutions. Rather than concentrating exclusively on visitors, it emphasizes the organizational tensions that emerge when designing immersive and engaging experiences, thereby enriching museum-oriented marketing research with an alternative analytical angle. The originality of the approach lies in the controlled adaptation of conceptual tools from experiential retailing to environments where symbolic, cultural, and historical stakes remain central. This theoretical hybridization reveals key trade-offs that museum professionals must navigate, particularly between aesthetic enhancement, accessibility for diverse audiences, and alignment with the institution's cultural mission. By examining the materiality of experiential *dispositifs*, the backstage of design processes, and the evolving professional identities involved in shaping visitor journeys, the paper shows that experience is not a decorative addition but a strategically managed construct. This perspective challenges prescriptive narratives on cultural innovation by foregrounding practitioners' lived realities and acknowledging the practical and symbolic constraints that influence experiential strategies. Ultimately, the contribution invites scholars to recognize museums as complex organizations where experiential ambitions coexist with disciplinary legacies, institutional responsibilities, and cultural expectations.

Building on these insights, our investigation—conceived as the initial stage of a broader research program—underlines that a multidisciplinary perspective is essential for both understanding and guiding the experiential transformation of museums. The increasingly intertwined technological, sensory, and psychological components of visitor engagement make it difficult for any single theoretical lens to capture the richness and complexity of contemporary museum experiences. Moreover, the growing involvement of visitors in meaning-making processes means that audiences can no longer be described as passive recipients; they must instead be conceptualized as active partners in the production of the experience. This shift generates analytical challenges that require a careful integration of insights from museology, marketing, design, and cognitive science. Such convergence offers promising avenues for developing operational guidelines capable of helping museum professionals create visitor journeys that are relevant, inclusive, and meaningful. It also emphasizes the necessity for institutions to rethink their internal practices, organizational routines, and forms of collaboration to sustain experiential innovations while preserving their scholarly and artistic integrity. By highlighting a multidimensional transformation, the study reinforces the need for flexible, reflective, and context-sensitive approaches within cultural institutions.

Beyond the two cases examined, this exploratory paper opens promising avenues for research in services marketing by encouraging a reconceptualization of cultural institutions as service organizations increasingly confronted with expectations of clarity, appeal, and social impact. By focusing specifically on experiential strategies within art museums—a category comparatively understudied in marketing—the research expands the qualitative corpus on *servitization* while drawing attention to the growing importance of hedonic and affective value creation. It also highlights the need for marketing approaches that remain attentive to professional identities, aesthetic mediation, and the subtle ways in which nonverbal elements shape the visitor experience. In a context marked by shifting cultural policies, heightened competition for attention, and pressure to broaden access, marketing contributions must evolve beyond utilitarian or prescriptive frameworks. Instead, the findings suggest the potential of a reflexive marketing perspective that takes seriously relational dynamics, co-creation processes, and the singularity of cultural spaces. This orientation calls for deeper collaboration between marketing scholars and cultural practitioners to jointly explore and shape the evolving role of art museums, demonstrating how experiential strategies can strengthen institutional sustainability while enriching the public’s encounter with art and culture.

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Appendix A
Immersive artistic experience at the MAC in Lyon



Source: © Tatiana Henriquez (2023).

Appendix B
Street food at the MAC in Lyon



Source: <https://tribunedelyon.fr/> (Accessed April 16, 2025).