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Article

## Brand-Oriented Operation of Art Exhibitions: From Curatorial Narrative to Audience Market Positioning Strategy

Fangxin Zhang <sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ArtCenter College of Design, Pasadena, USA

\* Correspondence: Fangxin Zhang, ArtCenter College of Design, Pasadena, USA

**Abstract:** This paper examines the brand-oriented operation of contemporary art exhibitions from the dual perspectives of curatorial narrative and audience market positioning. In an increasingly competitive global cultural economy, it argues that exhibition branding is no longer merely a matter of superficial visual promotion or conventional commercial marketing. Instead, it has evolved into a highly systematic process that intricately connects profound cultural meaning, immersive spatial experience, dynamic audience perception, and comprehensive operational strategy. Based on an in-depth comparative analysis of prominent international cases—including the Tate Modern, teamLab Borderless, the Louvre Abu Dhabi, and various Van Gogh immersive exhibitions—this study systematically analyzes how abstract curatorial themes are successfully transformed into highly recognizable brand identities. Furthermore, it explores how diverse audience groups are strategically positioned through targeted communication channels and innovative operational methods. The study reveals that successful exhibition branding fundamentally depends on three key interrelated factors: the establishment of a clear and compelling curatorial narrative, the creation of a distinctive spatial and experiential identity, and the execution of precise audience segmentation. Concurrently, modern art exhibitions face the critical challenge of balancing intrinsic cultural value with long-term commercial sustainability. An excessive emphasis on foot traffic, social media visibility, or pure entertainment risks weakening the academic depth and public cultural value of the institution. Therefore, effective exhibition branding must seamlessly integrate narrative construction, brand identification, audience positioning, and operational transformation to ensure both cultural integrity and market success.

**Keywords:** art exhibitions; exhibition branding; curatorial narrative; audience positioning; cultural consumption

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### 1. Introduction: Why Art Exhibitions Need Brand-Oriented Operation

#### 1.1. Research Background

In recent years, art exhibitions have moved beyond traditional museum spaces and entered the fields of urban cultural consumption, social media communication, and immersive experience economies. An exhibition is no longer only a place for displaying artworks, but has increasingly become a cultural product with brand attributes [1]. Its success depends not only on artistic value, but also on whether it can form a recognizable theme, effective communication discourse, and strong audience appeal.

This shift reflects three changes [2]. Audiences are no longer merely visitors, but also experience participants, consumers, and communicators. They expect aesthetic appreciation, emotional experience, educational value, and social sharing. Competition has intensified among museums, galleries, commercial art spaces, immersive exhibitions, art festivals, and cultural tourism projects. A clear brand identity helps an exhibition stand out. Social media has changed exhibition communication. Whether an exhibition is

visually attractive, shareable, and discussable directly affects its visibility and market influence.

A representative example is teamLab Borderless [1]. Its narrative emphasizes a "borderless" art world and a museum without fixed routes. Audiences move, explore, and interact within a changing digital environment. Its brand value is built through immersive space, digital technology, and audience participation, showing that contemporary exhibition branding increasingly depends on integrated experiential narrative.

### *1.2. Research Questions*

This paper examines the interplay between curatorial narrative, exhibition branding, and audience market positioning. It explores three key questions: how art exhibitions can establish unique brand identities through curatorial narratives, how exhibition branding shapes audience market perception and consumption motivation, and how art exhibitions can effectively balance cultural value with commercial operations [3].

### *1.3. Research Significance*

Theoretically, this study integrates curatorial studies, brand management, and audience research. It emphasizes that exhibition branding is not merely marketing or visual packaging but serves as a mechanism that connects cultural meaning production with market positioning [4]. This perspective elucidates how exhibitions transform artistic content into identifiable cultural brands.

Practically, this study offers valuable references for museums, art institutions, commercial exhibition companies, and urban cultural projects. It provides insights into exhibition planning, communication strategies, ticketing, cultural merchandise, membership operations, and audience segmentation, which are crucial for enhancing both cultural influence and operational sustainability.

### *1.4. Research Methods and Case Selection*

This paper employs literature analysis, case analysis, and comparative analysis. Literature analysis examines studies on exhibition branding, curatorial narrative, and audience positioning. Case analysis focuses on representative exhibitions and institutions. Comparative analysis highlights differences among public museums, immersive commercial exhibitions, and city-based cultural brand projects.

The primary cases include Tate Modern, teamLab Borderless, and Louvre Abu Dhabi. Tate Modern serves to analyze public museum branding and international audience engagement. teamLab Borderless exemplifies immersive digital art branding [5]. Louvre Abu Dhabi illustrates transnational cultural branding through its architecture, museum identity, and the concept of a "universal museum." Van Gogh immersive exhibitions are included as a supplementary case to explore classic artistic IP, commercialization, and the attention economy.

## **2. Theoretical Foundation: Curatorial Narrative, Branding, and Audience Positioning**

### *2.1. Concept and Function of Curatorial Narrative*

Curatorial narrative refers to the way an exhibition organizes artworks, space, text, media, and audience experience into a meaningful structure. Curating is not simply arranging artworks in a physical space, but a process of meaning production. Through exhibition titles, introductory texts, section divisions, object selection, spatial routes, lighting, digital media, and interactive devices, exhibitions guide audiences to understand artworks within a specific framework.

Curatorial narrative has three main dimensions. The first is thematic narrative, which builds the central story through the title, curatorial statement, section structure, and selection of works. The second is spatial narrative, in which the audience's route, viewing rhythm, bodily movement, and sensory experience influence the understanding of the theme [6]. The third is media narrative, where digital images, sound, interactive installations, AR/VR technologies, and social media content participate in meaning construction.

Louvre Abu Dhabi provides a useful example [6]. Its positioning as a "universal museum" in the Arab world is based not only on the Louvre name, but also on narratives of universality, cross-cultural dialogue, and shared human heritage. By connecting artworks from different cultures and periods, it constructs a story of human creativity and builds an independent brand image.

2.2. *The Meaning of Branding in Art Exhibitions*

Branding in art exhibitions should not be limited to logos, posters, slogans, or promotional design [7]. It represents a broader mechanism that integrates cultural value, visual recognition, audience experience, and public communication. A branded exhibition must convey why it is worth visiting, how it can be remembered, the experience it offers, how it is discussed, and the institutional resources that support its credibility.

As shown in Table 1, exhibition branding encompasses five key dimensions. Together, these dimensions facilitate the transformation of curatorial content into a recognizable cultural brand.

**Table 1.** Key Dimensions of Art Exhibition Branding

Dimension	Main Meaning	Operational Focus
Value proposition	Why the exhibition is worth visiting	Theme, cultural significance, curatorial concept
Visual identity	How the exhibition is remembered	Title, poster, color system, graphic design
Experiential identity	What the audience experiences	Space, route, interaction, atmosphere
Communication identity	How the exhibition is discussed	Media reports, social media, public discourse
Institutional endorsement	What supports credibility	Museum brand, artist reputation, curator, city image

For instance, Tate Modern has established its brand through exhibition promotion, visual systems, publications, brand guidelines, exhibition graphics, marketing campaigns, and merchandise design [8]. Its branding strategy extends beyond individual temporary exhibitions. Instead, these exhibitions are integrated into the broader Tate brand system, enhancing public recognition through a consistent yet adaptable visual and communicative language.

2.3. *Audience Market Positioning Theory*

Audience market positioning can be explained through the STP framework: segmentation, targeting, and positioning. Segmentation divides audiences according to interests, motivations, cultural habits, and consumption capacities. Targeting selects the most relevant audience groups for a particular exhibition. Positioning shapes a clear exhibition image in the minds of these audiences [4].

In art exhibitions, audiences should not be treated as a single "general public." They may include professional audiences such as artists, researchers, curators, and collectors; ordinary cultural audiences who value artistic and historical experience; young social-media-oriented audiences who care about immersion and photo sharing; family and educational audiences who focus on children's learning; tourists who connect exhibitions with urban travel; and high-end consumers interested in memberships, private tours, and art-related products [9].

This classification shows that market positioning is not only about increasing ticket sales. It also concerns how different audiences understand, experience, and remember an exhibition. Research on ticketed exhibitions emphasizes audiences' perceptions of

experiential and educational value, suggesting that exhibition operation should consider audience relationships, learning outcomes, and cultural value.

#### *2.4. Analytical Framework of This Study*

Based on the above discussion, this paper constructs a four-layer analytical framework. The first layer is curatorial narrative, including theme, artworks, space, text, and technological media [10]. The second is brand identity, including exhibition name, visual identity, institutional endorsement, cultural value, and memorable experience. The third is audience positioning, including target groups, visitor motivation, ticketing strategy, and communication channels. The fourth is operational transformation, including ticket sales, membership, cultural merchandise, educational programs, social media communication, and urban cultural tourism cooperation.

This framework suggests that the key to brand-oriented operation is not simply increasing exposure [11]. More importantly, it is to transform curatorial narrative into stable brand value, and then use audience positioning to achieve communication, consumption, and cultural identification. In this process, curatorial narrative provides meaning, branding provides recognition, audience positioning provides direction, and operational strategy provides sustainability.

### **3. From Curatorial Narrative to Exhibition Brand Identity**

#### *3.1. How Curatorial Themes Generate Brand Core*

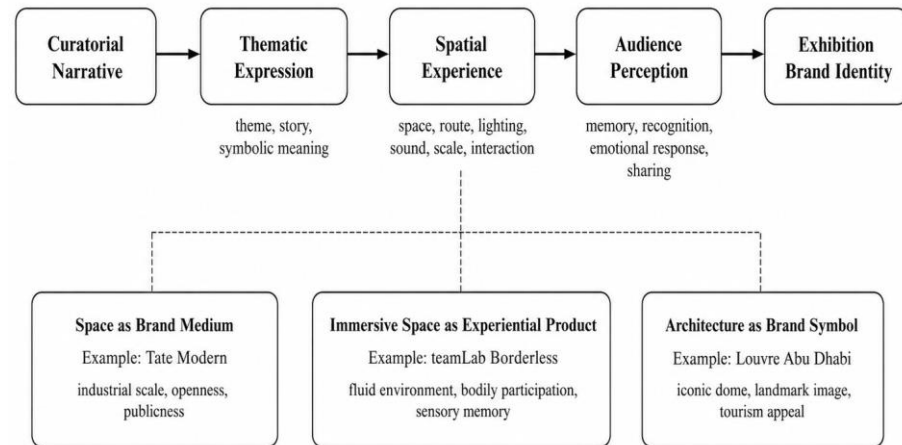
A successful exhibition brand typically features a concise, clear, and easily communicable theme. Concepts such as "borderless art," "immersive Van Gogh," "universal museum," "contemporary art landmark," and "urban cultural memory" are not merely curatorial ideas but can also be transformed into brand language that audiences can readily understand, remember, and share [12]. Consequently, the curatorial theme often serves as the foundation for exhibition branding.

teamLab Borderless serves as a notable example. Its core narrative revolves around the concept of "borderless." The exhibition does not merely invite audiences to "view digital artworks" but encourages them to "enter a borderless art world." Artworks transcend individual rooms, interact with one another, and create a continuous environment [6]. In this instance, the curatorial narrative, spatial design, interactive mechanisms, and promotional discourse are all centered on the idea of "borderless." This cohesive approach establishes a strong and recognizable brand identity for the exhibition.

Louvre Abu Dhabi offers another illustrative case [3]. Its brand identity is rooted in the principles of "universality" and "cross-cultural dialogue." By juxtaposing works from diverse civilizations, time periods, and cultural traditions, the museum positions itself as an international institution fostering connections between Eastern and Western cultures. Its branding extends beyond the borrowed prestige of the Louvre name, emphasizing a curatorial narrative that highlights shared human creativity and common heritage.

#### *3.2. How Spatial Experience Strengthens Brand Memory*

Exhibition branding is not confined to advertisements, posters, or media campaigns; it is also shaped by the physical experiences of audiences. Elements such as space, route, lighting, sound, scale, and interactive devices collectively contribute to brand memory [13]. As illustrated in Figure 1, curatorial narratives can be transformed into brand identity through three interconnected mechanisms: thematic expression, spatial experience, and audience perception.



**Figure 1.** Transformation from Curatorial Narrative to Exhibition Brand Identity

The first mechanism involves space as a brand medium. For instance, the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern serves not only as an exhibition space but also as a significant component of the museum's brand asset. Its industrial scale and openness reinforce the image of Tate Modern as a public institution dedicated to contemporary art. The building itself becomes a symbolic medium through which audiences identify the institution [14].

The second mechanism focuses on immersive space as an experiential product. teamLab Borderless employs continuous digital environments, interactive visuals, and bodily participation to create vivid sensory memories. Audiences recall the exhibition not merely for specific artworks but for the dynamic experience of navigating through a fluid and ever-changing space [15].

The third mechanism highlights architecture as a brand symbol. Louvre Abu Dhabi utilizes its architectural design, island location, and iconic dome to establish itself as a cultural landmark with significant tourism appeal. In this context, the exhibition experience is intertwined with architecture, urban imagery, and cultural tourism. The more distinctive the spatial experience, the more effectively the exhibition brand can be remembered and disseminated [16].

### 3.3. Artists, IP, and Institutional Endorsement

The brand identity of an art exhibition is often supported by various forms of endorsement. One significant form is artist branding. Names such as Van Gogh, Monet, Yayoi Kusama, and Picasso already serve as powerful cultural intellectual properties (IPs). Their names can attract audiences even before the specific curatorial concept is introduced.

Another form is institutional branding. Museums and art institutions such as Tate, Louvre, MoMA, and UCCA hold cultural credibility and symbolic capital [4]. When an exhibition is organized by these institutions, audiences generally expect a certain level of artistic quality, academic value, and professional authority.

A further form is technology and experience branding. teamLab does not primarily rely on a single artist's name. Its brand is established through digital technology, collective artistic production, immersive aesthetics, and interactive experiences. This demonstrates that in contemporary exhibition culture, technology itself can also serve as a source of brand recognition.

Van Gogh immersive exhibitions provide a notable example of artist IP commercialization. These exhibitions transform the classic image of Van Gogh into a popular experiential product through digital projection, music, and immersive spaces. Their advantage lies in lowering the threshold for art appreciation and attracting non-professional audiences. However, they may also diminish the significance of original artworks, historical context, and art-historical interpretation. Consequently, such exhibitions may lean more toward entertainment consumption rather than critical art engagement.

### 3.4. Risks of Branding Curatorial Narrative

Although branding can enhance the visibility and influence of art exhibitions, it also introduces several risks. Excessive commercialization may reduce curatorial themes to marketing slogans, potentially diminishing the academic depth of the exhibition by oversimplifying its cultural significance [17].

Aesthetic homogenization may also arise. Exhibitions that prioritize being "photogenic" or "shareable" might adopt similar visual strategies and spatial designs, leading to a uniform appearance across different exhibitions despite variations in artistic content [7].

Furthermore, academic depth may suffer. When visitor numbers and online popularity become the primary measures of success, curatorial research risks being overshadowed by market-driven priorities. In such cases, exhibitions may focus more on spectacle and entertainment rather than critical interpretation.

Audiences may also misinterpret exhibitions. They might recall the visual effects, immersive atmosphere, or social media imagery while overlooking the artworks, historical context, and curatorial arguments. For instance, Van Gogh immersive exhibitions broaden public access to his art but raise concerns about the absence of original works, the entertainment-focused consumption of art, and the superficiality of the viewing experience.

Ultimately, the shift from curatorial narrative to exhibition brand identity should not be viewed as a mere marketing process. A robust exhibition brand must be grounded in meaningful curatorial concepts, distinctive spatial experiences, and effective audience communication. This approach ensures that branding reinforces rather than undermines the cultural value of art exhibitions.

## 4. Audience Market Positioning and Exhibition Operation Strategies

### 4.1. Audience Segmentation: From "General Public" to Precise Audience Profiles

Art exhibitions should not merely claim to target the "general public." Different audience groups possess varying motivations, expectations, cultural backgrounds, and consumption capacities. Therefore, audience segmentation forms the foundation of effective exhibition operations [14]. It enables institutions to identify the intended audience, design appropriate experiences, and select suitable communication channels.

As shown in Table 2, art exhibition audiences can be categorized into several major groups, including professional audiences, young audiences, family audiences, tourist audiences, and high-consumption audiences. Each group has distinct core needs and requires tailored operational strategies.

**Table 2.** Audience Segmentation and Operation Strategies for Art Exhibitions

Audience Type	Core Needs	Suitable Operation Strategies	Representative Case
Professional audiences	Academic depth, artwork research, curatorial logic	Lectures, catalogues, seminars, expert-guided tours	Tate Modern
Young audiences	Experience, social sharing, visual impact	Short videos, photo spots, co-branded merchandise	teamLab
Family audiences	Education, safety, interaction	Family tickets, workshops, children's tours	Public museum education exhibitions

Tourist audiences	Landmark value, urban cultural experience	Cultural tourism packages, city-brand cooperation	Louvre Abu Dhabi
High-consumption audiences	Exclusiveness, identity, in-depth service	VIP previews, membership, private tours	Major museum special exhibitions

Audience segmentation is not merely a market-driven approach. More importantly, it ensures that the cultural content of an exhibition reaches audiences through the most suitable forms. For instance, professional audiences may prioritize curatorial texts and academic interpretations, while young audiences might first engage with the exhibition through short videos or social media visuals. Family audiences may focus on educational activities and safe interactive experiences, whereas tourists might associate the exhibition with the cultural identity of a city. Thus, audience segmentation facilitates the transformation of curatorial value into targeted audience experiences.

*4.2. Market Positioning: How Exhibition Brands Find Their Audiences*

Market positioning refers to how an exhibition defines its image and value in relation to specific audiences. Different types of exhibitions require tailored positioning strategies [18].

The first type is the public museum exhibition. Its positioning typically emphasizes public education, cultural authority, and art-historical narrative. Tate Modern serves as an example. As a public art institution, it balances the experimental nature of contemporary art with the need to engage a broad public audience. Its brand is built on professional credibility and public accessibility. Research on ticketed exhibitions highlights that audience relationships involve not only consumption but also experience, learning, and educational value.

The second type is the immersive commercial exhibition. Its positioning prioritizes experience consumption, visual communication, and mass participation. Examples include teamLab Borderless and Van Gogh immersive exhibitions. These exhibitions attract audiences through immersive spaces, digital technology, striking visual effects, and social media engagement. Their market value stems not only from artistic content but also from the audience's willingness to participate, photograph, share, and recommend the experience.

The third type is the city cultural landmark exhibition. Its positioning highlights urban image, cultural diplomacy, and tourism appeal. Louvre Abu Dhabi exemplifies this category. As a "universal museum" in the Arab world, it integrates exhibition operations with national cultural identity, urban tourism, and international cultural exchange [6]. In this context, the exhibition brand functions not only as an art brand but also as a component of broader urban and cultural strategies.

*4.3. Communication Strategy: From Exhibition Promotion to Brand Community Operation*

The communication of art exhibitions has evolved beyond basic advertising. It now encompasses visual communication, content communication, social media communication, and community-based communication.

Visual communication includes posters, key visuals, exhibition titles, color systems, and symbolic images. These elements enable audiences to quickly identify and remember the exhibition. Content communication involves curator interviews, artist stories, artwork interpretation, short videos, and behind-the-scenes materials. This approach helps audiences gain a deeper understanding of the exhibition both before and after their visit [15].

Social media communication plays a crucial role in contemporary exhibition operations. Platforms such as Xiaohongshu, Instagram, TikTok, Weibo, and WeChat enable audiences to act as secondary communicators. teamLab Borderless is particularly well-suited for this form of communication due to its visually impactful and interactive

spaces. When audiences capture photos and share their experiences online, they contribute to the exhibition's brand communication process [6].

Community communication emphasizes building long-term relationships rather than focusing solely on one-time exposure. Museums and art institutions can foster communities through membership programs, volunteer groups, art education initiatives, and city cultural networks. Compared to temporary advertising, community operations are more effective in enhancing loyalty, encouraging repeat visits, and fostering cultural identification. Tate Modern, for instance, prioritizes institutional brand consistency through exhibition graphics, publications, marketing campaigns, merchandise, and brand guidelines. This systematic approach strengthens the long-term recognition of the Tate brand.

#### *4.4. Ticketing, Cultural Merchandise, and Derivative Operation*

Brand-oriented exhibition operation also needs to consider how cultural value can be transformed into sustainable operational income. Ticketing is the most direct form [3]. Exhibitions can adopt layered ticketing strategies, including standard tickets, student tickets, family tickets, early-bird tickets, joint tickets, and membership tickets. This approach allows different audience groups to access the exhibition through varied price structures.

Membership mechanisms can further enhance audience loyalty. Member previews, exclusive guided tours, lectures, and special events can foster a sense of participation and identity [10, 13]. Cultural merchandise is another significant form of derivative operation. Exhibition visuals, artist elements, and curatorial themes can be transformed into books, posters, stationery, accessories, and co-branded products. When designed effectively, merchandise can extend the exhibition experience beyond the museum space.

Educational activities also play a vital role in exhibition operations [11]. Workshops, lectures, children's programs, and online courses can deepen audience understanding and reinforce the public value of the exhibition. Cross-sector cooperation is another effective strategy. Exhibitions can collaborate with cultural tourism projects, commercial complexes, brands, hotels, and transport platforms to broaden their influence.

Van Gogh immersive exhibitions illustrate how a classic artistic IP can be transformed into a replicable exhibition brand. Their business model often relies on strong artist recognition, ticket sales, merchandise, media exposure, and touring exhibitions. However, this model also highlights a potential issue: when commercial reproduction becomes overly dominant, the exhibition risks falling into superficial content and diminishing art-historical interpretation.

#### *4.5. Evaluation of Operational Effectiveness*

The success of an art exhibition should not be measured solely by visitor numbers. A comprehensive evaluation system should incorporate cultural indicators, market indicators, and brand indicators.

Cultural indicators assess whether audiences understand the exhibition theme, whether the exhibition enhances artistic knowledge, and whether it stimulates public discussion. Market indicators include ticket revenue, visitor flow, membership growth, merchandise sales, and media exposure. Brand indicators encompass social media visibility, audience satisfaction, revisit intention, brand association, and urban cultural influence.

Thus, brand-oriented operations should avoid prioritizing traffic or ticket sales over cultural value. A successful exhibition must balance cultural communication with operational sustainability. It should attract audiences while guiding them to engage with the curatorial narrative, recognize the exhibition brand, and establish a deeper connection with the institution or cultural project [7].

## **5. Conclusion: Paths and Reflections on Brand-Oriented Operation of Art Exhibitions**

### *5.1. Major Findings*

This paper argues that curatorial narrative serves as the foundation for art exhibition branding. An exhibition brand is not solely created through promotional efforts or visual packaging in later stages. Instead, it evolves progressively through theme setting, artwork selection, spatial design, media utilization, and audience engagement. A compelling curatorial narrative can effectively transform artistic content into a distinct and communicable brand identity.

Audience market positioning plays a pivotal role in converting exhibition brands into operational value. Different audience groups have varied motivations, such as academic research, aesthetic appreciation, social interaction, family-oriented education, tourism, and identity-driven consumption. Consequently, exhibition operations should avoid treating audiences as a homogeneous "general public" and instead employ precise positioning strategies to align cultural content with the appropriate audience segments.

Simultaneously, art exhibition branding must strike a balance between cultural significance and commercial considerations. Branding can enhance public outreach and ensure operational sustainability. However, an excessive focus on metrics such as visitor traffic, photo opportunities, and commercial returns may undermine the academic rigor, curatorial depth, and broader cultural value of exhibitions.

5.2. Strategic Model of Exhibition Branding

Based on the above analysis, this paper proposes a four-stage model for brand-oriented exhibition operation. The first stage is narrative construction, which defines the exhibition theme, curatorial question, and cultural value. The second stage is brand identification, which establishes the exhibition name, visual system, spatial memory points, and communication discourse. The third stage is audience positioning, which segments target audiences and identifies core and secondary visitor groups. The fourth stage is operational transformation, which incorporates ticketing, communication, merchandise, education, membership, and city collaboration to foster sustainable influence.

In summary, the effective approach to art exhibition branding involves building cultural value through curatorial narrative, creating public memory through brand identity, achieving precise communication via audience positioning, and ensuring long-term development through diversified operations.

5.3. Case Comparison

Table 3 provides a comparative summary of the primary exhibition branding cases analyzed in this paper.

Table 3. Comparative Summary of Exhibition Branding Cases

Case	Core Narrative	Brand Positioning	Target Audiences	Operation Features	Risk
Tate Modern	Publicness of contemporary art	International contemporary art institution	Professional, public, tourists	Exhibitions, publication, education, membership, merchandise	Balancing avant-garde art and public accessibility
teamLab Borderless	Borderless immersive experience	Digital art experience brand	Young audiences, families, tourists	Immersive space, social media,	May be viewed as entertainment-oriented

					ticket economy	
Louvre Abu Dhabi	Universal museum and cross-cultural dialogue	International cultural landmark	International tourists, local public, cultural elites	Architectural landmark, national cultural brand, tourism linkage	Dependence on strong institutional endorsement	
Van Gogh immersive exhibitions	Re-experiencing classic artistic IP	Popular art consumption brand	Non-professional public, young consumers	Touring exhibitions, tickets, social media, merchandise	Original context may be weakened	

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

This paper primarily relies on case analysis and does not incorporate first-hand audience interviews or questionnaire data. Future research could integrate audience surveys, social media analytics, and ticketing data to explore how various branding strategies impact satisfaction, revisit intentions, and cultural identification.

Future exhibition branding is likely to emphasize digital technology, community engagement, cross-sector collaboration, and urban cultural strategies. However, irrespective of advancements in technology or shifts in market dynamics, the essence of exhibition branding should remain rooted in curatorial narratives and cultural value.

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