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Immersive exhibition as a cultural phenomenon and an innovative form of event management

Abstract. The purpose of the study was to examine the immersive exhibition as a cultural phenomenon within the socio-cultural paradigm and explore the characteristics of immersive cultural practices as an innovative form of event management. The use of the immersive effect in cultural practices helped to gain new practical experiences through immersion, altered behaviour or thinking through reconsideration, and evoked unique and unforgettable emotions. In the era of globalisation and increasing cultural interaction, immersive exhibitions served not only as an innovative tool for event management, but also as a platform for the expression and interpretation of cultural codes. The use of immersive technologies in cultural practices fosters emotional engagement, provided new experiential learning opportunities through immersion, and influenced human behaviour and thinking through reinterpretation. The concept of “immersive cultural practices” defined as a special type of cultural practice that possessed the unique ability to create the effect of deep immersion in artistic or historical topics, interactivity, and emotional involvement. Besides, the immersive format of cultural practices, due to its unique capabilities and methods of information presentation, was highly appealing to audiences. Therefore, it was an effective means of showcasing Ukrainian culture to a global audience. In contemporary context, the creation and presentation of immersive exhibitions contributed to developing and implementing innovative approaches to exhibition activities. It also played a crucial role in promoting Ukraine’s cultural image on the global stage, positioning Ukraine as a hub of world-class cultural heritage that successfully integrated cutting-edge digital formats for artistic presentation

Keywords: culture; cultural practice; immersive cultural practice; mentality; cultural code; socio-cultural activities

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INTRODUCTION

The growing influence of globalisation, and information and communication processes on the cultural development of 21st century society has led to the emergence of innovative forms of socio-cultural practices. As the information society evolved, cultural and leisure practices were expanding and transforming, shifting towards individualisation, intellectualisation, and creativity. One of the key innovative cultural phenomena resulting from the development of cultural and creative industries in contemporary information and communication-driven society was the immersive exhibition.

The relevance of studying immersive exhibitions as an innovative form of event management was determined by several key factors. First, the demand for interactive and immersive experiences among audiences was steadily increasing, making immersive formats particularly appealing. Second, immersive technologies created a deeper emotional connection between art and viewers, enhancing information retention and engagement. Third, the organisation of immersive exhibitions offered new opportunities for monetisation, including increased ticket prices and sponsorship from companies interested in collaborating with innovative art projects. As a result, immersive exhibitions were gaining significant attention from researchers and professionals in the event industry.

O. Kopievska (2019) presented a scholarly reflection on methodological approaches to understanding the concept of cultural practices within cultural studies. The researcher described it as “a set of methodologically and disciplinarily heterogeneous yet thematically interconnected conceptual discourses through which contemporary culture is examined, characterised by mosaicism, fragmentation, diversity, and hybridity”. The author analysed the role of cultural practices in applied research. Researcher L. Skokova (2018) suggested using the concept of cultural omnivorousness and the concept of a culturally omnivorous individual, when studying cultural practices. According to the researcher, the concept of “cultural omnivorousness” reflected the process of destruction of the traditional classical disposition – high culture and low culture, hybridising culture and may mean “rejection of snobbery, exclusivity of tastes in favour of their “inclusiveness”, inclusion, and therefore democracy, cultural openness, tolerance”. V. Sudakova (2021) explored the characteristics of cultural practices as phenomena within the cultural space of a globalised social world. Researcher’s study examined their role in the transformation of everyday communication and grassroots initiatives. Scientist noted that “in the real cultural space, cultural practices change in accordance with historical, economic, and socio-cultural changes and, at the same time, retain their basic essential properties, that is, they have a transcultural nature and semantic predictive projections”.

The authors Ya. Antonyuk & I. Shindyrovskiy (2015) investigated the organisation of exhibition activities, focusing on managerial and organisational aspects that

ensured the effectiveness of cultural event implementation. L. Zelenska (2018) examined the sociocultural aspects of exhibition activities, emphasising their role in shaping the cultural space and interaction among participants in the cultural process. Scientists T. Povaliy & N. Svitaylo (2021) explored event management with consideration of the specifics of organising events in contemporary sociocultural conditions, highlighting the importance of innovative approaches in cultural practices. The exploration of immersive cultural practices and immersive art was greatly enriched by other researchers. For example, M. Beck (2023) considered immersive multisensorial art exhibitions as a new kind of “not that cheap images”, emphasising the experiential dimension formed during interaction with such art. The author H. Cecotti (2022) investigated the preservation of cultural heritage in fully immersive virtual reality, analysing the potential of technologies for cultural learning. M.K. Bekele & E. Champion (2019) compared different forms of immersive reality and interaction methods, underlining their significance for cultural learning in virtual heritage.

However, the Ukrainian scientific discourse lacked comprehensive studies on the transformation of innovative cultural practices, the organisation and development of immersive exhibitions, and their role as an innovative form of event management. Understanding immersive cultural practices was essential for designing and implementing effective management strategies for immersive exhibitions in contemporary Ukrainian society. This included refining artistic objectives and integrating advanced technologies into event management. The purpose of the study was to provide a theoretical analysis of immersive exhibitions as a cultural phenomenon within the socio-cultural paradigm and to examine the features of immersive cultural practices as an innovative approach to event management. The scientific originality of the study lied in the identification of specific features of immersive cultural practices as an innovative form of event management.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Throughout this study, several theoretical methods were applied, such as analysis, synthesis, comparison, and the generalisation of scholarly perspectives from various countries on different aspects of the problem in question. The method of analysis was employed to examine the phenomenon of immersive exhibitions as an innovative form of event management. This allowed for the clarification of the essence of the concepts of “cultural code” and “immersivity”, enabling the investigation of cultural practice as immersive, the identification of internal interrelations between the substantive and technical components of the exhibition environment, and the determination of key factors contributing to the effect of deep immersion of the subject. The method of synthesis was applied to integrate the results of the analytical review into a coherent conceptual model of the immersive exhibition as a specific cultural practice, where in artistic techniques, innovative

technologies, and the sociocultural context appeared as interrelated elements of a unified system of influence on the audience. The method of generalisation provided the opportunity to isolate universal principles for constructing immersive space, and used to reveal the general properties and connections between the understanding of immersivity, immersive technologies, and the influence of sociocultural factors on them.

The purpose and objectives of this study have necessitated the use of a socio-cultural method. It facilitated an understanding of the distinctive features of immersive cultural practices and immersive exhibitions as both a cultural phenomenon and an innovative form of event management. Within the framework of the socio-cultural method, the semantic parameters of the concept of “cultural practices” can be defined as a special type of cultural practice that possessed the unique ability to create the effect of deep immersion in artistic or historical topics, interactivity, and emotional involvement. For this study of immersive cultural practices, using immersive exhibitions as an example, socio-cultural approach held particular significance. It addressed key aspects such as the generation of meanings, images, myths, and rituals that shape both individual and collective experiences within culture. The study analysed successful examples of the practice of organising and conducting immersive exhibitions as an innovative form of event management created by the First Charitable Theatre Foundation: the immersive exhibition “The Immersive World of Taras Shevchenko” created in 2021 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of Ukraine’s Independence Day, and the immersive exhibition about the war in Ukraine, “Ukraine Land of the Brave”, created in 2022.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An immersive exhibition was not only an innovative form of event management that transformed traditional approaches to organising events and engaging audiences. It also served as a platform for expressing and interpreting cultural codes. The cultural code, as a set of deeply embedded values, symbols, beliefs, and historical narratives within a particular society or group, permeated all aspects of an immersive exhibition – from the conceptual idea to the choice of technologies and the design of interactive elements. In immersive exhibitions, the cultural code manifested on multiple levels, including visual, auditory, textual, and interactive elements, creating a multilayered experience that resonated with visitors’ cultural memory and identity.

One of the key areas of cultural research in contemporary socio-humanitarian discourse involved the study of socio-cultural phenomena through the new cultural theory. J.C. Alexander (2003) introduced a new theoretical framework for studying culture and cultural practices, which the researcher termed «cultural theory». The scholar offered examples of a new broad understanding of culture, and also analysed the process of creating cultural codes, the most important mechanism of which, according to the researcher, was performativity.

At the visual level, the cultural code was reflected through specific colours, patterns, architectural motifs, and imagery that held historical or symbolic significance for a particular culture. For example, an exhibition dedicated to Ukrainian culture might incorporate traditional embroidery, Easter eggs (pysanky), or folk instruments, visually encoding national identity and cultural values. The auditory code in immersive exhibitions may include traditional music, folk songs, natural sounds, or recordings of historical figures, fostering an atmosphere of deep cultural immersion. The textual code can be presented through quotes from literary works, historical documents, folktales, or legends that convey cultural narratives and values. Thus, immersive exhibitions acted as a powerful tool for expressing and interpreting cultural codes, enabling the creation of profound and emotionally resonant connections with audiences.

Despite the existence of scientific research on various aspects of cultural practices, the concept of “immersiveness” in the context of cultural practices and their inherent characteristics remained insufficiently defined and needs further clarification and supplementation. The concept of “immersiveness” referred to a special means of perception that created the effect of “immersion” in an artificially created environment or space. Immersiveness, as a property of certain types of cultural practices (such as performances and installations), was characterised by the intensity of the viewer’s involvement in the art project.

Immersive cultural practice created an immersive effect through the use of special technologies, including light and sound installations, video installations of varying complexity, and virtual/augmented reality. An immersive exhibition, based on the integration of virtual and augmented reality technologies, 3D projections, interactive installations, and multimedia elements, provided deep immersion for the visitor in an interactive environment, stimulating sensory perception and emotional involvement. Unlike traditional exhibition formats, where information was mostly presented statically, immersive formats engage all the senses, creating an unforgettable, personalised experience that was deeply imprinted in memory. Moreover, immersive exhibitions offered endless possibilities for creative expression and the realisation of non-standard concepts, allowing for the creation of unique events (Nesen, 2024).

A characteristic feature of immersiveness was taking the viewer in a new, virtual environment forced the viewer to concentrate as much as possible on the situation. Advanced media and information technologies helped to create virtual realities that would be unattainable in real social contexts. In creating the immersive effect, the impact on the peripheral anatomical and physiological system, particularly sight and hearing, was of primary importance. G. Calleja (2011) proposed two types of immersiveness based on the depth of the immersion experience: immersion in the environment (referred to as “immersion as absorption”), which required physical presence; immersion

in another reality (referred to as “immersion as transfer”), which requires mental presence. The technologies used in immersive cultural practices were continuously improving and actively developing due to the latest software (e.g., AI-driven programmes). As immersive cultural practices, including immersive exhibitions, evolved, there was a growing demand for immersive technologies that allowed for deeper engagement with the information and cultural context of an art project. The primary immersive technologies used in cultural activities included:

- augmented reality (AR). Also known as added reality, this technology added elements (such as animation, virtual images, effects, or titles) to real-world environments to enhance perception;
- virtual reality (VR). A fully simulated reality experienced through a helmet or glasses, created not only with 3D scenes, but also with sound, tactile sensations;
- mixed reality (MR). Also known as hybrid reality, this term emerged with the launch of Windows Mixed Reality and referred to both a specific type of device and methods for blending real and virtual worlds;
- extended reality (XR). A demonstration combining elements of augmented, virtual, and other realities.

360-degree photos and VR 180 videos referred to the content consisting of single or multiple combined 360-degree photos or videos, presented in monoscopic or stereoscopic formats. This content can be projected onto walls or other surfaces and was also available through “interactive computer displays, helmets, and virtual reality glasses” (Othman *et al.*, 2022). These technologies simulated full or partial immersion in an alternative, artificially created environment, altering the interaction with the subject and elevating the process of gaining practical experience in specific cultural or historical topics.

In the context of this study, the concept of “immersive cultural practices” can be defined as a special type of cultural practice that possessed the unique ability to create the effect of deep immersion in artistic or historical topics, interactivity, and emotional involvement. The use of the immersive effect in cultural practices helped to gain new practical experiences through immersion, altered behaviour or thinking through rethinking, and evoked unique and unforgettable emotions. Meanwhile, in the contemporary cultural and artistic context, immersiveness was often perceived as interactivity. However, these phenomena were not identical. The notion of interactivity implied active participation in cultural practices, whereas in immersive cultural practices, active participation was not mandatory. Viewers can interact with exhibits, which made the exhibition more dynamic and engaging, contributing to a deeper understanding and better retention of the experience. To achieve this, such technologies as virtual/augmented reality, 3D projections, interactive installations, and multimedia elements were used. Immersion in the atmosphere can trigger strong emotional reactions, thereby fostering a more personal connection between viewers and the art.

The most common immersive cultural practices included immersive exhibitions, immersive films, immersive tours, museum immersive exhibitions, and more. One of the key advantages of immersive exhibitions was their appeal to a diverse range of audiences, including young people, for whom the digital environment was a comfortable way to engage with cultural or historical topics. Immersive exhibitions can attract a broad audience due to their versatility and interactivity. Enhancing the emotional and intellectual involvement of visitors or viewers during an immersive exhibition created the conditions for internal cultural, axiological, and other transformations. The relevance of creating immersive exhibitions was driven by several factors. These involved: a) their growing popularity among a wide audience seeking unique and emotionally engaging experiences; b) the innovative approach to presenting information, which increased the effectiveness of communication and content retention; c) their significant economic potential due to the ability to implement premium pricing policies and attract additional funding sources through sponsorship and the sale of related products.

In the late 2010s, Ukrainian society was transforming traditional cultural practices and developing innovative, immersive cultural practices. A detailed analysis of Ukrainian cultural and artistic projects created with the help of immersive technologies, specifically multimedia exhibitions, can be found in the paper by S. Leontiev *et al.* (2021). The researchers noted that in the late 2010s, immersive technologies were gradually developing and gaining popularity in Ukraine as “a rather new and complex phenomenon that has influenced almost all cultural industries”. They also provided illustrative examples of their use in the museum environment, including the multimedia exhibition of the People’s Artist of Ukraine and laureate of Taras Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine, I. Marchuk (2019, ARTAREA digital gallery), and the multimedia exhibition “The Immersive World of Taras Shevchenko” (2021, Vira Kholodna Art Centre, Odesa). A successful example of immersive exhibitions as an innovative form of event management was the immersive exhibitions created by the First Charitable Theatre Foundation (President – Natalia Deliyeva). As the experience of immersive exhibitions organised by the First Charitable Theatre Foundation around the world demonstrated, immersive exhibitions can play a significant role in supporting and promoting Ukraine’s cultural heritage worldwide (Deliyeva, 2023).

In 2021, the First Charitable Theatre Foundation, in partnership with Kostyuk Productions, RockNLight Multimedia, and Starvox Entertainment, formed a Ukrainian-Canadian partnership, which resulted in the exhibition “The Immersive World of Taras Shevchenko”. The exhibition premiered in 2021, on the 30th anniversary of Ukraine’s Independence Day, at the Odesa Film Studio. “The Immersive World of Taras Shevchenko” combined Ukrainian cultural traditions with cutting-edge art technologies. An important aspect of managing socio-cultural activities during the organisation of the exhibition was that the

funds needed to launch the project were raised in a short time via the Spilnokosht crowdfunding platform. The exhibition leaves a powerful impression on every visitor, as

it unveils the fascinating and unfamiliar world of Taras Shevchenko as an artist. Shevchenko's paintings appeared to come to life, acquiring new meanings (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Immersive exhibition “The Immersive World of Taras Shevchenko”

Source: The Immersive World of Taras Shevchenko (2021)

The exhibition's musical design was also unique: the organisers analysed musical compositions from 1814 to 1861 to create an original musical accompaniment that links Shevchenko's time with the present (Riznykova, 2021). After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the exhibition was shown in Canada, the United States, and the European Union, where it helped to raise funds to support Ukraine. In 2022, the team of the First Charitable Theatre Foundation, with the support of the Ministry of Culture and Information Policy of Ukraine, created a new immersive exhibition about the war in Ukraine, titled “Ukraine Land of the Brave”. This exhibition was created to convey truthful information about the events in Ukraine to audiences around the world. To produce the 32-minute immersive exhibition, many photos and videos from leading news agencies, photographers, and journalists were reviewed, documenting the heroic struggle of the Ukrainian people for their homeland. In the exhibition “Ukraine Land of the Brave”, visitors can witness the stories of Ukrainian defenders, view footage of the destruction of Ukrainian cities, learn about the tragedies experienced by children of war, and observe the farewells to fallen Ukrainian compatriots (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. Immersive exhibition “Ukraine Land of the Brave”

Source: Immersive exhibit, which shook the world. Ukraine Land of the Brave. The whole truth about the war in Ukraine (n.d.)

Since immersive exhibitions were artistic and emotional works, this cultural product was understandable and accessible even to foreigners, who, due to this exhibition, can connect with Ukrainian culture through modern art forms. The exhibition “Ukraine Land of the Brave” was intended not only to provide the international community with reliable, truthful information about the war in Ukraine, but also to offer an opportunity to experience it emotionally through the eyes of the participants in these events.

Thus, research on innovative forms of cultural practices in the context of leisure and cultural consumption was gaining increasing significance. To explore the relationship between culture and society, scholars examined cultural practices as fundamental to individual self-identification, the shaping of lifestyles, and the regulation of behaviour in both private and public spaces (Giddens, 1991). Understanding the role of cultural practices in society and their impact on the socio-humanitarian landscape was impossible without considering their moral dimension. Therefore, it was crucial to highlight the moral interpretation of culture, as presented in the paper of Ye. Borinshtein *et al.* (2023): “Culture is the process of creating Homo Moralis in the course of social and spiritual life”. J. Fiske (2002) noted that the concept of a cultural code can be understood as “a system of signs governed by certain rules that are common among members of a particular culture and intended to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture”. The author S. Eckert (2021) explored the concept of immersive theater, analysing contemporary practices and their impact on audience experience, and examining the specifics of organising such performances within the context of contemporary performance art. J.J. Cummings & J.N. Bailenson (2015) conducted a meta-analysis of the effects of immersive technologies on user presence, identifying levels of immersivity that most effectively facilitated deep engagement within virtual environments. Researcher A. Stevens (2021) analysed how virtual reality (VR) and

augmented reality (AR) technologies were transforming the world of immersive theatre, emphasising their influence on creating new forms of artistic interaction and cultural event management.

This study defined a cultural code as a system of ideas about culture, values, symbols, traditions, stereotypes, and behavioural norms. In this context, such concepts as “mentality”, “worldview”, and “perception of the world” were closely related to the notion of a cultural code. While a worldview existed as a conscious representation, mentality and cultural codes were more often reflected in specific behaviours and experienced on an emotional level. Similar to mentality, a cultural code integrated both rational and intuitive elements, and conscious and unconscious aspects. However, in the case of the Ukrainian mentality, despite the transformation of its structural elements under the influence of social and socio-cultural factors, the core components of the Ukrainian cultural code remain unchanged. These foundational elements, rooted in both the conscious and subconscious, and in logic and emotion, serve as a deep source of national identity and thought (Liseienko, 2022). The cultural code not only defined national mentality, but also had practical applications in the cultural sphere, shaping cultural practices.

CONCLUSIONS

An immersive exhibition is an innovative form of event management that can transform traditional approaches to organising cultural events and engaging audiences. The use of immersive technologies in cultural practices enhanced emotional expression, facilitated new experiential learning through immersion, and influenced human behaviour and thinking by encouraging reinterpretation. Immersive exhibitions created new meanings, evoked strong emotional responses in viewers, and prompted reflection, often bringing forgotten information to the forefront.

In the era of globalisation and increasing cultural interaction, immersive exhibitions served not only as an innovative event management tool, but also as a platform for

expressing and interpreting cultural codes. These cultural codes within immersive exhibitions can foster intercultural dialogue and promote mutual understanding between different cultures. By presenting diverse cultural contexts and narratives, immersive exhibitions helped visitors to broaden their perspectives and gain a deeper appreciation of other cultures. This study defined the semantic parameters of the concept of “immersive cultural practices”, referring to a unique category of cultural practices characterised by deep environmental immersion in artistic or historical themes, interactivity, and emotional engagement. In the contemporary context, the development and display of immersive exhibitions foster the adoption of innovative methods in exhibition practices. They have also been instrumental in enhancing Ukraine’s cultural image internationally, showcasing the country as a centre of world-class cultural heritage that effectively incorporated advanced digital technologies for artistic expression. Additionally, immersive exhibitions acted as an effective tool for cultural diplomacy, particularly in conveying authentic and emotionally resonant narratives about the war in Ukraine to the international community. Due to their ability to present information compellingly and engagingly, immersive cultural practices were highly relevant for showcasing Ukrainian culture to a global audience and facilitating participation in international projects. Further research in this area may focus on the impact of immersive exhibitions on the establishment of cultural identity, the development of intercultural dialogue, and the preservation of cultural heritage.

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Імерсивна виставка як культурний феномен та інноваційна форма організації подій

Анотація. Метою дослідження було розглянути імерсивну виставку як культурний феномен у межах соціокультурної парадигми та дослідити характеристики імерсивних культурних практик як інноваційної форми івент-менеджменту. Використання ефекту занурення у культурних практиках допомогло отримати новий практичний досвід, змінити поведінку чи мислення шляхом переосмислення та викликати унікальні й незабутні емоції. В епоху глобалізації та зростаючої культурної взаємодії імерсивні виставки слугували не лише інноваційним інструментом івент-менеджменту, але й платформою для вираження та інтерпретації культурних кодів. Використання імерсивних технологій у культурних практиках сприяло емоційній залученості, забезпечувало нові можливості досвіду навчання через занурення та впливало на людську поведінку і мислення через переінтерпретацію. Поняття «імерсивні культурні практики» було визначено як особливий тип культурної практики, що має унікальну здатність створювати ефект глибокого занурення в художні чи історичні теми, інтерактивність та емоційну включеність. Крім того, імерсивний формат культурних практик завдяки своїм унікальним можливостям і методам подання інформації був привабливим для аудиторії. Тому він став ефективним засобом представлення української культури світовій спільноті. У сучасному контексті створення та презентація імерсивних виставок сприяли розробці й упровадженню інноваційних підходів до виставкової діяльності. Вони також відігравали важливу роль у просуванні культурного іміджу України на світовій арені, позиціонуючи Україну як центр світової культурної спадщини, що успішно інтегрував передові цифрові формати для художньої презентації

Ключові слова: культура; культурна практика; імерсивна культурна практика; ментальність; культурний код; соціокультурна діяльність