



XXII SIM Conference 2025

The Marketing-Innovation Nexus: Past Insights for Future Challenges

Università degli Studi di Napoli "Parthenope"
Dipartimento di Studi Aziendali e Quantitativi
10-12 settembre 2025

PROCEEDINGS

Editors: Maria Rosaria Napolitano, Michele Simoni, Paola Signori, Tindara Abbate

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Reimagining Science Communication through Experiential Marketing: Immersion, Emotion, and Co-Creation

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Abstract

Science communication today faces a profound paradox: while scientific knowledge is expanding in complexity and relevance, public engagement often remains superficial, fragmented, or absent. This short paper proposes a conceptual reflection on how experiential marketing can inform a renewed approach to science communication—one that prioritizes immersion, emotional resonance, and co-created meaning. Borrowing tools and principles from experiential marketing—originally developed in consumer and cultural branding—we argue that science communication can be reimagined as an emotionally credible and sensorially rich encounter. Through immersive environments, affective design, and identity-based storytelling, public engagement with science can move beyond information transmission and become a participatory, memorable experience. This vision opens up new possibilities for museums, installations, and festivals, offering an alternative to the linear, deficit-driven communication models still prevalent in institutional contexts.

Keywords: Science Communication – Experiential Marketing – Immersion – Emotional Engagement – Co-creation – Authenticity

1. Background and Conceptual Positioning

Science communication has long been shaped by a diversity of models—ranging from the deficit model, focused on correcting knowledge gaps, to dialogue and participation-based models that emphasize interaction, reflexivity, and co-production. While the deficit model is often critiqued for assuming passive publics and linear knowledge transfer, it continues to serve useful purposes in certain institutional and educational settings—particularly when clarity, authority, and scientific literacy are required.

Rather than opposing these models in a rigid hierarchy, current scholarship increasingly recognizes their coexistence and contextual validity. Depending on institutional goals, public expectations, and the nature of the scientific topic, different modes of engagement may be more or less appropriate. However, what remains consistent across this spectrum is a growing awareness of the limits of purely cognitive engagement, especially in a media landscape saturated with fragmented information, affective polarization, and declining public trust.

In this evolving scenario, experiential approaches—which incorporate sensory immersion, emotional resonance, and participatory dynamics—are emerging as powerful complements to traditional forms of science communication. Experiential marketing, in particular, offers

conceptual and practical resources to design science engagement formats that are not only informative, but also felt, remembered, and personally meaningful.

2. Experiential Marketing as a Lever For Science Communication

Experiential marketing (EM) provides a valuable conceptual and methodological toolkit for rethinking science communication as an immersive and affective encounter. At its core, EM shifts the focus from the transmission of information to the design of memorable, multisensory, and emotionally resonant experiences—intended not merely to inform, but to engage, involve, and transform.

In experiential formats such as science museums, festivals, exhibitions, and installations, audiences are no longer passive recipients of content, but active participants in meaning-making. They connect with scientific knowledge through embodied engagement, emotional resonance, and narrative identification. The objective is not simplification or dramatization, but the activation of cognitive, emotional, and sensory dimensions within a coherent and authentic experience.

This experiential logic is already visible in many science communication contexts, where techniques such as multisensory environments, symbolic storytelling, and scenographic staging are used to translate abstract or technical content into situated, emotionally rich experiences. These are what we refer to as “experience events”—formats that structurally align the goals of science communication with spatial, symbolic, and affective design.

Crucially, we argue that the value of EM in science communication lies not simply in its capacity to capture attention, but in its potential to foster what we define as emotional coherence: a structural alignment between the emotional tone of the experience and the epistemic nature of the content. When this coherence is achieved, it enhances credibility, memorability, and public trust in scientific institutions.

However, this potential must be approached critically. Experiential strategies risk turning science into spectacle or reducing engagement to fleeting emotional reactions if applied without epistemic grounding. To avoid this, EM must be reinterpreted—not as a marketing tactic, but as a design orientation that supports both affective connection and scientific integrity.

This contribution proposes a conceptual reorientation: from a commercially inspired logic of attraction to an epistemically grounded experiential design. We do not call for a general expansion of EM in science communication, but for its careful, situated application in formats where immersion, co-creation, and emotional resonance can meaningfully enhance public engagement. Future research may explore how diverse publics interact with these experiential events, and how such encounters shape trust, learning, and identity in relation to science.

References upon request