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**Global Business Transformation in a Turbulent Era**

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## **Global Business Transformation in a Turbulent Era**

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# INCLUSIVE CULTURAL EXPERIENCES: AN EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATION OF METAVERSE ENHANCING EXPERIENCES FOR CUSTOMERS WITH DISABILITIES

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## ABSTRACT

The United Nations (2006) defined disabled individuals as “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments”. Also, disability hinders their ability to access public facilities and participate in daily activities (Bhagal-Nair *et al.*, 2023; Tuli *et al.*, 2023). Advancements in 21st-century technology have fostered discussions on accessibility and inclusion (Longo and Faraci, 2023) addressing a global social challenge for people with disabilities, who make up about 15% of the world’s population (World Health Organization, 2021; Tuli *et al.*, 2023). In particular, metaverse is emerging as a potential avenue for enhancing social and cultural implications (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023). This technology has created impacts across various disciplines like marketing, where emphasis is placed on customer experience (Gursoy *et al.*, 2022) and individual well-being.

Given that technological advancements, like the metaverse, are intended to enhance human life, it is essential to evaluate how they are adopted by all individuals, despite their relative novelty (Aburbeian *et al.*, 2022). Scientific research has advanced the understanding of Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Davis, 1989) among various groups, including able-bodied individuals and those with specific disabilities (Iftikhar *et al.*, 2023). However, based on existing literature and our knowledge, TAM has not been applied to assess the acceptance of metaverse across all types of disabilities. By understanding how the metaverse fosters accessibility and inclusion, this study seeks to fulfill museums’ commitment to openness, accessibility, and public education (Poria *et al.*, 2009). Removing physical, economic, and social barriers, the metaverse facilitates the integration of disabled individuals, empowering them to feel included (Vaz *et al.*, 2020; Iftikhar *et al.*, 2023). Despite recognition of the importance of including customer with disabilities (CwDs) in arts activities by both institutions and scholarly literature (European Commission, 2021; Lu *et al.*, 2022), there remains a notable gap in the research understanding of the role that metaverse has for CwDs. Due to the relevance of the above topics, this work-in-progress paper aims to explore how art-related spaces such as museums can enhance accessibility and inclusion for CwDs through the metaverse, with the ultimate goal of pinpointing a set of strategies (Buhalis *et al.*, 2023; European Commission, 2021; Lu *et al.*, 2023; Tuli *et al.*, 2023). So, the following research question will be investigated:

*RQ1. How can museums benefit from the implementation of the metaverse to enhance accessibility and inclusion for CwDs?*

Based on preliminary research regarding the integration of the metaverse within museums, we intend to gather data from worldwide museums actively engaged in promoting accessibility, as mentioned on their websites. The exploratory nature of our research necessitated the adoption of a qualitative approach following the Gioia methodology (Gioia et al., 2013) through a multiple-case study design. This approach will enable us to delve into the phenomenon within its real-world context and extract specific cases to generate broader insights. Such a methodology will be ideal for exploring and analyzing complex and emerging social and business phenomena (Yin, 2017), thus bolstering the reliability of our empirical findings (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Specifically, our analysis will focus on three museums that have implemented metaverse, employing semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection. Further details regarding the sample, where the museums are termed adopting Greek alphabet terms to ensure confidentiality, are provided in Table 1. Furthermore, for the collection of primary data, the authors will employ data triangulation, seeking the participation of different museum employee, to mitigate the limitations of relying solely on a single data source (Jack and Raturi, 2006). Moreover, secondary data from the museums' websites will be included in the data collection for a comprehensive analysis.

*Table 1. Analysis sample profile*

MUSEUMS	THE DATE OF INTRODUCTION OF THE METAVERSE	COUNTRY
A	2023	USA
B	2023	UK
Γ	2022	USA

As the research progresses, it is anticipated that several theoretical and practical implications will emerge from the results, alongside the originality of the study. From a theoretical perspective, it will deal with synthesizing the current body of knowledge regarding the use of the metaverse,

particularly within art-related contexts where the convergence of social issues and technology is garnering heightened interest among scholars and practitioners. Then, the research will contribute to the existing literature on metaverse application by extending it to CwDs without focusing on any specific disability, and consolidating knowledge on its impact. The focus on the metaverse as technology enrich its scientific comprehension, acknowledging the significance of continued substantial advancements (Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, the theoretical model derived from TAM with the integration of disabilities, that will be developed and tested in our study, will have the potential for future exploration in in other contexts and industries. Differently, practical implications will include the need to promote diversity through staff training, but also to foster inclusive practices among cultural operators as expanding accessibility to all customers can provide a competitive advantage over those who do not prioritize it. Additionally, the engagement of local authorities and political support will emerge as crucial for acquiring necessary resources, recognitions, and investments. Finally, this commitment will lead to the improvement of the reputation of artistic environments, directly contributing to the local economy.

*Keywords: Disabilities; Customers with Disabilities (CwDs); Accessibility; Inclusion; Technologies; Technology Acceptance Model (TAM); Metaverse; Museums; Qualitative Approach; Multiple-case study; Gioia Methodology.*

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