



BY RACHEL SAUNDERS
GLOBAL DIRECTOR OF CONSUMER RESEARCH
AND INSIGHTS, WE'RE MAGNETIC

THE EXPERIENTIAL POP-UP IS ABOUT TO EVOLVE



Ever since social media-friendly experiences like 29Rooms rose to prominence, marketers have stoically believed that offering Instagram bait is enough to entice consumers to attend an experience. But tastes are changing. The pendulum is swinging in a new direction where being “staged” is the kiss of death, and experiential pop-ups are about to evolve.

The Atlantic highlights how Gen Z and its influencers are abandoning the once-popular Instagram aesthetic, and glossy “Instagram museums” by extension. They’re cognizant that sharing staged shots will no longer reflect well on them because, as one 15-year-old explained, “It’s not cool anymore to be manufactured.”

The shift can also be chalked up to the dissonance of expectation vs. reality. Consumers visited these pop-ups hoping to be impressed only to discover that calling something an “immersive experience” doesn’t automatically make it one. The anticlimactic effect of waiting in line for what amounts to a rushed series of photo opps has left them wary.

The good news for marketers is that young people are still hungry for experiences—they just want something

more meaningful. Here are lessons from the brands getting it right.

THEY EMPHASIZE AUTHENTICITY.

LVMH’s heritage team recently launched the much-hyped Louis Vuitton X in LA, a historical retrospective spanning nine immersive rooms. The art expo goes the extra mile to take visitors on a journey of the company’s history of artist collaborations, showcasing artifacts from the 1800s, a case that transported Johannes Vermeer’s “The Milkmaid”, on-site craftsman and more. Given that 86% of consumers say authenticity is important to them when deciding what brands they like and support, these details make a difference.

THEY CREATE THEIR OWN MYTHOLOGY.

Santa Fe-based arts collective Meow Wolf amassed a cult following thanks in part to its unique origin story which now has its own documentary. The company recently raised \$158 million to expand its experiential spaces, which invite people be a part of—and even sleep in—the Meow Wolf universe. People feel invested in it, whereas pop-ups like Egg House, which invented an origin story as an afterthought, fell flat.

THEY OFFER SENSORY EXPLORATION.

NYC’s SHOWFIELDS combines theatre and retail for its House of Showfields experience that opened July 20. It invites consumers to touch, taste and smell all the products and art on site while taking part in a theatrical performance. All 10,000 reservations were booked before the experience launched, prompting an extended run. Research shows that marketing that appeals to more than three senses can increase brand impact and engagement by over 70%, so incorporating sensory elements could be a brand’s secret weapon for building more memorable experiences.

Gen Z and Millennials are still eager for experiences that inspire, educate, and offer opportunities to co-create. The marketers that evolve to offer these meaningful contexts will be better positioned to see their experiences shared--naturally, not because a staged backdrop suggested it.