

FROM POINT-OF-SALE EXECUTION TO CHANNEL ORCHESTRATION: TRADE MARKETING IN EXPERIENTIAL SERVICE MARKETS

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how trade marketing evolves from point-of-sale execution toward channel orchestration in experiential service markets. Although traditionally associated with consumer goods and manufacturer–retailer relationships, trade marketing remains underexplored in service-based, hedonic, and omnichannel contexts. Using Brazilian cinema exhibition as the empirical setting, the study analyzes how film distributors, cinema operators, digital sales interfaces, and in-theatre promotional resources jointly shape consumer decision-making. The research draws on semi-structured interviews with eight industry professionals, document analysis of digital sales interfaces, and direct observation in cinema environments. The findings develop an empirically grounded framework composed of three interrelated dimensions: collaborative coordination, experiential value creation, and omnichannel coordination. The article contributes to marketing and channel management research by conceptualizing trade marketing as channel orchestration: a capability for coordinating actors, touchpoints, promotional resources, service environments, and customer experience across interconnected physical and digital interfaces.

Keywords: Trade marketing, Channel orchestration, Experiential service retailing, Omnichannel retailing, Consumer decision-making, Cinema exhibition.

INTRODUCTION

Retailing and consumer services are increasingly organized across physical venues, digital interfaces, data-enabled touchpoints, and experience-oriented journeys. Consumers search, compare, purchase, consume, and evaluate offerings through connected online and offline encounters, making channel integration and customer experience central issues in contemporary retail research (Verhoef et al., 2015; Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). At the same time, physical venues remain strategically relevant as experiential, sensory, and relational interfaces that complement digital channels rather than being replaced by them (Alexander & Blazquez Cano, 2020; Alexander & Varley, 2025).

In experiential service settings, consumer choice is shaped not only by price, availability, or functional information, but also by cues that frame the expected experience before consumption. Atmosphere, visual merchandising, digital communication, symbolic appeal, service environment, and anticipation may influence how consumers interpret value and decide (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Bitner, 1992; Becker & Jaakkola, 2020; Basu, Paul & Singh, 2022; Batat, 2024; Valentini, Roederer & Castéran, 2024). This is especially relevant in hedonic services, where the core offering is inseparable from the physical and symbolic conditions under which it is accessed, promoted, and consumed.

Trade marketing sits at the practical intersection of these issues. Traditionally associated with consumer goods and conventional manufacturer–retailer relationships, trade marketing has been understood as a managerial approach aimed at improving supplier–channel interaction through promotional planning, merchandising, sales support, visibility, and point-of-sale execution (Randall, 1994; Castillo, 2000; Basheer, 2017). Classical models, including (Castillo's, 2000) evolutionary framework, remain useful for understanding the movement from operational execution toward greater channel integration. However, they were developed before the consolidation of omnichannel retailing, phygital service interfaces, digital sales platforms, data-enabled communication, and experience-oriented consumer journeys. They therefore offer limited explanation of how trade marketing operates when value depends on the coordination of firms, channels, technologies, physical spaces, promotional cues, and consumer experience.

Brazilian cinema exhibition provides a relevant empirical context for examining this transformation. Cinemas are rarely treated as retail-service environments, yet they operate as hybrid consumption spaces in which film distributors, cinema operators, digital sales interfaces, trailers, posters, lobby activations, pricing strategies, loyalty programs, and in-theatre promotional materials jointly influence consumer decision-making. The cinema is not only the place where the film is consumed; it is also a retail interface where information search, persuasion, symbolic engagement, and purchase conversion may occur close to the moment of choice. In Brazil, this setting is also commercially significant, with cinema exhibition reaching 125.35 million admissions in 2024 (Brazilian National Film Agency, 2025).

Despite the relevance of such environments, limited attention has been given to how trade marketing evolves in experiential service retailing contexts characterized by distributor–retailer collaboration, physical–digital integration, and hedonic consumption. Omnichannel retailing research has advanced the discussion of channel integration, service consistency, customer journey design, and experience incongruence across online and offline channels (Gao et al., 2021; Quach et al., 2022). Less is known, however, about how channel actors coordinate promotional execution, experiential cues, and consumer influence mechanisms when the physical venue remains central to the consumption experience.

This study investigates the evolution of trade marketing from point-of-sale execution toward channel orchestration in experiential service retailing. Using Brazilian cinema exhibition as the empirical context, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with eight film industry professionals, document analysis of digital sales interfaces, and direct observation in cinema environments. The analysis examines how trade marketing practices coordinate channel actors, promotional resources, physical and digital touchpoints, and experiential cues across the consumer journey.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Experiential Service Retailing and Customer Experience

Experiential service retailing refers to contexts in which value is shaped not only by the core offering, but also by the conditions under which the service is accessed, interpreted, and consumed. The experiential perspective on consumption provides an important foundation for understanding this transformation. (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) argue that consumption cannot be explained solely through utilitarian and information-processing models, since many consumer decisions are also shaped by fantasies, feelings, and fun. (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) later reinforced this view by suggesting that experiences may constitute a distinct form of economic offering when firms intentionally stage memorable events around products or services. In experiential service retailing, the consumption environment therefore

becomes part of the value proposition rather than merely the context in which the transaction occurs.

Customer experience research extends this view by conceptualizing experience as a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon shaped by consumer responses to multiple stimuli. (Becker & Jaakkola, 2020) emphasize that customer experience emerges from cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensory, and social responses to firm-related stimuli, while (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016) show that experience unfolds across multiple stages and touchpoints in the customer journey. This perspective is useful for examining service retailing contexts in which consumers encounter different cues before, during, and after purchase, and where value depends on how these cues are interpreted throughout the consumption process.

The physical environment remains central to this discussion. Servicescape theory provides a foundation for understanding how physical surroundings influence consumer perceptions and behavior in service settings (Bitner, 1992). In experiential service retailing, servicescapes include functional, atmospheric, symbolic, and sensory elements that may affect consumer evaluation and decision-making. Recent studies have also connected servicescape design, visual merchandising, and store atmospherics with customer outcomes, reinforcing the managerial relevance of environmental cues in retail services (Basu, Paul & Singh, 2022; Valentini, Roederer & Castéran, 2024).

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that experiential service retailing should be understood as a setting in which value emerges from the interaction between service offerings, physical environments, communication cues, digital interfaces, and consumer interpretation. This framing is especially relevant for cinema exhibition. Cinemas are not merely venues where films are shown; they are consumer-facing service retail environments in which promotional resources, digital sales interfaces, lobby displays, trailers, pricing strategies, loyalty mechanisms, and in-theatre atmospherics may jointly influence consumer decision-making. Analyzing cinemas through the lens of experiential service retailing therefore makes it possible to examine how channel actors coordinate touchpoints to shape consumer choice and value perception.

Omnichannel, Phygital Touch points, and Services cape Integration

Omnichannel retailing shifts the managerial challenge from operating multiple channels to integrating them into a coherent system of interaction, information, service delivery, and value creation. Rather than treating physical and digital channels as separate routes to market, omnichannel retailing emphasizes their interdependence across the customer journey (Piotrowicz & Cuthbertson, 2014; Verhoef, Kannan & Inman, 2015). The strategic issue is therefore not the coexistence of channels, but the consistency and coordination of the experience they produce.

This integration has direct implications for customer experience. Consumers increasingly expect continuity across touchpoints, including service consistency, process coordination, information availability, and transparent communication (Hossain et al., 2019; Quach et al., 2022). When digital communication, pricing, promotional cues, or service promises are misaligned with the physical encounter, the customer experience may become fragmented and retention may be weakened (Gao et al., 2021).

In experiential service retailing, omnichannel integration also involves the coordination of functional, hedonic, and social forms of value. Digital touchpoints may support search, anticipation, personalization, convenience, and purchase conversion, while physical touchpoints reinforce atmosphere, immersion, sensory stimulation, affective engagement, and social presence (Huré, Picot-Coupey & Ackermann, 2017). The value of the

service experience therefore depends not only on what each touchpoint delivers individually, but on how physical and digital cues work together.

This perspective expands the servicescape discussion. Physical surroundings remain central to experiential services, but their effects are increasingly mediated by digital interfaces, mobile applications, online platforms, loyalty systems, digital signage, and personalized communication tools. Recent research on phygital customer experience shows that physical and digital cues jointly shape attention, engagement, perceived value, and purchase behavior (Batat, 2024; Alexander & Varley, 2025). Digital interfaces do not replace the physical environment; they may extend and intensify its experiential meaning.

Cinema exhibition illustrates this integration clearly. A film may be discovered through a digital interface, reinforced by a trailer, made salient through lobby materials, and converted into purchase through an app, website, or box office interaction. Visual cues, digital banners, mobile communication, trailers, loyalty mechanisms, pricing incentives, and in-theatre atmospherics operate as part of the same consumer-facing system. Their effectiveness depends on alignment across the journey.

For trade marketing, this means that execution can no longer be understood only as physical point-of-sale activation. Film distributors and cinema operators must coordinate promotional resources across digital sales interfaces and physical service environments to support visibility, consistency, anticipation, and conversion. This reinforces the need to understand trade marketing as the orchestration of actors, channels, materials, data, and experiential cues across an omnichannel service environment.

Trade Marketing as Channel Orchestration

Trade marketing has traditionally been associated with manufacturer–retailer relationships in consumer goods markets, focusing on promotional planning, merchandising, sales support, category management, and point-of-sale execution (Randall, 1994; Castillo, 2000; Basheer, 2017). In this role, it operates at the interface between marketing and sales, translating brand strategies into channel-specific actions that influence purchase behavior at the point of contact with consumers (Homburg, Jensen & Krohmer, 2008).

Experiential service retailing expands this role. In service environments, value is shaped not only by availability or visibility, but also by the coordination of service encounters, atmospheric cues, digital interfaces, promotional resources, and consumer expectations across the customer journey. Trade marketing can therefore be understood not only as channel support, but as a managerial capability that connects commercial objectives, channel actors, service environments, and customer experience.

Channel orchestration captures this expanded function. It refers to the deliberate organization of actors, resources, interfaces, data, and experiential cues to produce a coherent market-facing experience across physical and digital touchpoints. This view is consistent with service-dominant logic and value co-creation perspectives, which emphasize resource integration, interaction, and relational interfaces among multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008).

In omnichannel service contexts, this orchestration becomes especially relevant. Promotional messages, visual cues, service interfaces, pricing incentives, and experiential promises need to be mutually reinforcing across the customer journey. Omnichannel research shows that customer experience depends on consistency, transparency, and integration across touchpoints (Verhoef, Kannan & Inman 2015; Quach et al., 2022). Trade marketing is strategically relevant in this setting because it operates at the intersection of channel management, promotional execution, and customer experience.

This perspective extends, rather than replaces, the traditional foundations of trade marketing. Point-of-sale execution, merchandising, and retailer collaboration remain

important, but they become part of a broader orchestration process. The objective is not only to secure visibility or support sales, but to align actors, channels, materials, data, and experiential cues around a coherent value proposition. This gap remains underexplored in service retail contexts, where trade marketing has received less attention than in product-based and consumer goods settings.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at developing an empirically grounded understanding of how trade marketing evolves in experiential service retailing. The objective is not to produce statistical generalization about the cinema industry, but to generate analytical insights into how channel actors coordinate promotional resources, physical and digital touchpoints, and customer experience in a contemporary service retail context. Qualitative research is appropriate for examining complex, processual, and context-dependent phenomena, particularly when the goal is to understand meanings, practices, interactions, and organizational processes in situated settings rather than test predetermined relationships (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015).

Research Design and Empirical Setting

Brazilian cinema exhibition was selected because it combines service consumption, retail interfaces, physical–digital integration, and collaborative channel execution. Cinemas operate as consumer-facing service retail environments in which the consumption experience depends on the interaction between a hedonic core offering, physical venues, digital sales interfaces, promotional materials, pricing initiatives, in-theatre atmospherics, and interfirm coordination.

In this setting, film distributors and cinema operators coordinate resources and decisions related to visibility, programming, promotional execution, trailers, point-of-sale materials, digital communication, and consumer engagement. The consumer journey may begin through digital search and online purchase, continue through exposure to trailers, posters, apps, websites, promotional campaigns, and social communication, and culminate in the physical cinema experience. This makes cinema exhibition a suitable context for analyzing how trade marketing moves from point-of-sale execution toward channel orchestration.

Participants and data sources were selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the study's focus on trade marketing practices, channel relationships, promotional execution, and physical–digital coordination in cinema exhibition. The study draws on semi-structured interviews with industry professionals, document analysis of digital sales interfaces, and direct observation of cinema environments. Table 1 summarizes the data sources and their analytical contribution.

TABLE 1 DATA SOURCES AND ANALYTICAL CONTRIBUTION			
Data source	Scope	Analytical purpose	Analytical contribution
Semi-structured interviews	Eight professionals from film distributors, cinema operators, and cinema media companies	Capture strategic and operational interpretations of trade marketing practices	Identify perceived evolution, collaboration mechanisms, execution challenges, and channel coordination practices

Document analysis	Digital sales interfaces, including major ticketing websites, mobile applications, and cinema operator apps	Examine promotional visibility, digital merchandising, pre-sale communication, loyalty programs, and online execution	Identify digital touchpoints and assess how promotional resources are activated in consumer-facing digital interfaces
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Data Collection

Data collection was based on three complementary qualitative sources: semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and direct observation. This combination allowed the study to triangulate managerial interpretations, digital channel execution, and physical point-of-contact practices in cinema environments.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with eight professionals involved in film distribution, cinema operation, and cinema media activities. Participants were selected because of their direct involvement with trade marketing, programming, promotional execution, channel relationships, or consumer-facing activation in cinema exhibition. The interviews explored how trade marketing practices have changed over time, how film distributors and cinema operators coordinate promotional decisions, how physical and digital touchpoints are managed, and how promotional resources are used to influence consumer decision-making. To preserve anonymity, participants and organizations were anonymized, and interview excerpts are identified throughout the article using participant codes P1 to P8.

Document analysis focused on consumer-facing digital sales interfaces, including ticketing websites, mobile applications, and cinema operator platforms. These materials were analyzed to examine how films are promoted in digital environments, including visibility mechanisms, banners, pre-sale communication, loyalty programs, promotional pricing, film pages, recommendation spaces, and other forms of digital merchandising. This source was important for understanding how trade marketing practices extend beyond the physical venue and operate across digital interfaces that shape consumer search, evaluation, and purchase.

Direct observation was conducted in cinema environments in São Paulo and the metropolitan region. The observations focused on the physical execution of promotional and experiential cues, including posters, standees, digital screens, lobby displays, box office communication, concession-area materials, corridor visibility, trailer exposure, and other servicescape elements. The purpose was not to evaluate individual cinema operators, but to understand how physical environments support promotional visibility, experiential engagement, and physical–digital alignment in the consumer journey.

Together, these sources provided complementary evidence on how trade marketing practices are enacted across actors, channels, materials, and service environments. Interviews captured industry interpretations and decision-making rationales; document analysis revealed how promotional execution appears in digital consumer interfaces; and direct observation allowed the identification of physical and experiential cues at the service encounter. Table 2 presents the profile of interview participants.

TABLE 2
PROFILE OF INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Participant	Organization type	Position/role	Industry experience	Relevance to the study
P1	Cinema media company	Managing director	26–30 years	Provides a cross-operator perspective on cinema media, promotional visibility, and in-theatre advertising practices
P2	Cinema operator	Marketing manager	21–25 years	Provides evidence on marketing execution, consumer-facing campaigns, and distributor–operator coordination
P3	Cinema operator	Marketing manager	16–20 years	Provides evidence on campaign implementation, promotional materials, and cinema-level activation
P4	Cinema operator	Marketing and operations director	26–30 years	Provides evidence on the connection between marketing, operations, lobby execution, programming, and customer experience
P5	Cinema operator	Managing director	26–30 years	Provides a senior managerial view of cinema operations, commercial decisions, and channel relationships
P6	Cinema operator	Managing director	21–25 years	Provides a senior operator perspective on business strategy, distributor relationships, and execution challenges
P7	Film distributor	Trade marketing manager	16–20 years	Provides evidence on distributor-side trade marketing planning, campaign execution, and coordination with cinema operators
P8	Film distributor	Trade marketing coordinator	10–15 years	Provides evidence on promotional execution, physical–digital coordination, consumer data, and emerging trade marketing practices

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through iterative coding of interview transcripts, documentary materials, and observation notes. The analysis combined qualitative content analysis with coding-cycle procedures to identify how trade marketing practices are interpreted and reorganized across actors, channels, and service environments (Bardin, 1977; Saldaña, 2025). The first round of coding identified recurring references to trade marketing practices, distributor–operator relationships, promotional execution, consumer influence, physical environments, digital sales interfaces, and changes in channel coordination. These codes were then compared across interviews, documents, and observations to identify patterns of convergence and contrast.

In the second stage, related codes were grouped into analytical themes, including joint planning, distributor–operator alignment, promotional visibility, servicescape activation, segmented campaign narratives, digital merchandising, physical–digital consistency, and data-informed execution. These themes were subsequently consolidated into three aggregate dimensions: collaborative coordination, experiential value creation, and omnichannel coordination.

These dimensions provided the analytical basis for explaining how trade marketing moves beyond point-of-sale execution and becomes involved in the orchestration of actors,

resources, touchpoints, and customer experience in experiential service retailing. The coding structure is summarized in Table 3.

TABLE 3 CODING STRUCTURE AND AGGREGATE DIMENSIONS		
Initial codes	Analytical themes	Aggregate dimensions
References to limited dialogue between distributors and cinema operators; descriptions of more frequent interaction; joint construction of campaigns; shared decisions about visibility, programming, and promotional support; recognition of distributors and cinema operators as partners in the same business	From unilateral execution to joint planning; relational alignment between channel actors; shared management of promotional resources	Collaborative coordination
References to posters, standees, digital screens, trailers, lobby displays, concession-area materials, themed activations, and in-theatre promotional cues; use of different creative materials for the same film; adaptation of campaign narratives to different audience expectations; promotional materials used to build anticipation and emotional engagement	Promotional resources as experiential cues; servicescape activation; segmented narrative framing; physical environment as part of the value proposition	Experiential value creation
References to online sales, websites, mobile applications, digital banners, pre-sales, loyalty programs, digital merchandising, physical–digital alignment, consumer data, and more targeted campaign execution; evidence of promotional materials being activated across both physical and digital interfaces	Extension of trade marketing to digital sales interfaces; physical–digital consistency; data-informed consumer influence; integration of touchpoints across the customer journey	Omnichannel coordination

Research Quality

Research quality was addressed through procedures associated with trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility was supported by triangulating interviews, document analysis, and direct observation, allowing participants' interpretations to be compared with evidence from digital sales interfaces and physical cinema environments. Transferability was supported by providing contextual detail about the empirical setting, data sources, and participants' roles, recognizing that the study aims for analytical rather than statistical generalization. Dependability and confirmability were addressed through successive rounds of coding, comparison across data sources, anonymization of interview excerpts using participant codes P1 to P8, and the grounding of interpretations in empirical evidence.

The following section presents the findings according to the three aggregate dimensions identified in the analysis.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings identify three interrelated expansions in the managerial scope of trade marketing: collaborative coordination, experiential value creation, and omnichannel coordination. These dimensions do not represent a fixed sequence of stages. Rather, they show how trade marketing moves beyond point-of-sale execution and becomes involved in the orchestration of actors, promotional resources, physical and digital touchpoints, and customer experience. The analysis integrates interview evidence, document analysis, and direct observation. Interview excerpts capture how industry participants interpret the evolution of trade marketing, while documentary and observational evidence shows how

promotional resources are activated across digital sales interfaces and physical cinema environments.

From Unilateral Execution to Collaborative Channel Coordination

The first aggregate dimension concerns the movement from unilateral execution toward collaborative channel coordination. Participants describe trade marketing in cinema exhibition as increasingly dependent on interaction between film distributors and cinema operators. Rather than being limited to the delivery of promotional materials or the implementation of centrally defined campaigns, trade marketing is portrayed as a relational practice through which channel actors negotiate visibility, timing, promotional priorities, and consumer-facing execution.

This finding extends traditional trade marketing models, which emphasize manufacturer–retailer relationships, merchandising support, and point-of-sale execution (Randall, 1994; Castillo, 2000; Basheer, 2017). The evidence suggests that these activities remain important, but their effectiveness increasingly depends on the quality of coordination between channel actors. P4 contrasted current practices with an earlier context in which there was “no conversation with the distributor,” whereas current trade marketing involves a form of “joint construction to promote the film” at the point of contact with consumers. This statement should not be read as evidence of a uniform historical transformation across the entire industry, but as an indication of how experienced actors perceive a shift from unilateral delivery of campaign elements toward shared planning and contextual adaptation.

The collaborative logic also appeared in participants’ descriptions of the distributor–operator relationship. P7 emphasized that “the exhibitor and the distributor are partners in the same business,” indicating that promotional execution depends on mutual dependence rather than isolated action. Although the term “exhibitor” is common in the film industry, the underlying managerial issue reflects the broader manufacturer–retailer logic traditionally associated with trade marketing. In this empirical context, film distributors occupy a role analogous to manufacturers, as they provide the core offering, campaign assets, release priorities, and commercial objectives associated with each film. Cinema operators, in turn, perform the role of service retailers, controlling the physical service environment, consumer-facing touchpoints, programming decisions, and local execution conditions. Trade marketing becomes the mechanism through which these actors align interests and translate them into coordinated consumer-facing execution.

The importance of relational proximity was also highlighted by P2, who argued that “having someone at the studio who moves within the exhibitor helps a lot.” This evidence suggests that trade marketing depends not only on formal campaign plans, but also on boundary-spanning roles capable of connecting organizations, interpreting local execution conditions, and adapting promotional decisions to specific channel realities. In this sense, trade marketing becomes a relational interface between firms rather than merely an internal support function.

This collaborative dimension is particularly relevant in experiential service retailing because the consumer-facing environment is not controlled by a single actor. Film distributors influence campaign narratives, trailers, release strategies, promotional materials, and communication priorities, while cinema operators manage programming, lobby spaces, digital screens, ticketing interfaces, concession areas, staff interaction, and the physical conditions of the service encounter. Promotional effectiveness therefore depends on the ability of channel actors to coordinate resources across organizational boundaries.

In this sense, collaborative coordination is not simply a more cooperative form of execution. It changes the locus of trade marketing work: from the delivery of campaign materials to the ongoing alignment of priorities, resources, and local execution conditions between film distributors and cinema operators.

From Promotional Visibility to Experiential Value Creation

The second aggregate dimension concerns the movement from promotional visibility toward experiential value creation. The findings suggest that trade marketing practices in experiential service retailing are not limited to making the offering visible at the point of contact. Promotional materials, trailers, digital screens, lobby displays, standees, and themed activations may also operate as experiential cues that shape anticipation, attention, interpretation, and emotional engagement before the core service is consumed.

Traditional trade marketing practices remain relevant, but their role expands when promotional resources are used not only to inform consumers about a film, but also to frame the type of experience they may expect from it. This shift is especially visible in the adaptation of promotional materials to different audience profiles and cinema contexts. P4 emphasized that a single film may be communicated through different creative angles, noting that film materials can be interpreted “with love, with romance, with action, with fights, and several other formats,” allowing distributors to develop “three different materials for the same film.” This indicates that trade marketing execution is not merely a matter of placing standardized materials in visible locations; it also involves translating the same core offering into multiple consumer-facing meanings.

Technological change contributes to this experiential expansion. P1 observed that, with digitalization, it became possible to program trailers for specific audiences, considering location, audience profile, and the characteristics of the films being shown. This suggests that promotional execution has become more flexible, segmented, and context-sensitive. Digitalization does not merely improve operational efficiency; it allows trade marketing practices to become more closely aligned with consumer profiles, service moments, and local audience expectations.

Direct observation in cinema environments reinforced this finding. Digital screens, monitors, posters, banners, and other visual materials were positioned in areas of circulation and decision-making, such as lobbies, box offices, access corridors, and screening-room entrances. Rather than functioning as isolated promotional objects, these materials helped shape the atmosphere of the cinema and the meanings associated with upcoming releases.

This finding is consistent with experiential consumption and customer experience perspectives, which argue that consumers respond not only to functional attributes but also to symbolic, sensory, emotional, and contextual stimuli (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Becker & Jaakkola, 2020). It also extends the servicescape and visual merchandising literature by showing that promotional materials in service retail environments may perform a dual role: they support visibility and persuasion, but also help stage the conditions through which consumers interpret the service offering before consumption (Bitner, 1992; Basu et al., 2022).

Thus, promotional resources operate as more than visibility devices. By framing the same core offering through different emotional, symbolic, and sensory cues, trade marketing helps shape the meanings through which consumers approach the service experience.

From Channel Presence to Omnichannel Coordination

The third aggregate dimension concerns the movement from channel presence toward omnichannel coordination. The findings suggest that trade marketing practices in experiential service retailing increasingly operate across both physical and digital interfaces. However, the relevant transformation is not simply the addition of digital channels to traditional point-of-sale execution. Rather, it lies in the coordination of promotional resources, consumer information, campaign timing, and experiential cues across interconnected touchpoints in the customer journey.

Participants emphasized that digital interfaces have become increasingly central to consumer decision-making in cinema exhibition. P4 stated that “Trade Marketing operates in both areas,” referring to physical and digital environments, and added that “today online sales

are very prominent.” This evidence indicates that trade marketing can no longer be restricted to the physical point of contact. Digital sales interfaces, mobile applications, cinema operator platforms, banners, pre-sale communication, loyalty programs, and online promotional spaces now participate in the construction of consumer attention and purchase intention.

Document analysis reinforced this interpretation. Digital sales interfaces were not limited to transactional functions such as ticket availability, seat selection, or payment. They also operated as promotional environments in which films were made visible through banners, highlighted titles, pre-sale sections, loyalty incentives, promotional pricing, film pages, and campaign-specific communication. These elements suggest that digital interfaces perform a merchandising role analogous to, but not identical with, physical point-of-sale materials, influencing how consumers search, compare, prioritize, and select entertainment options before arriving at the service venue.

The findings also indicate that physical and digital execution are increasingly interdependent. P8 noted that promotional materials may be strategically placed “both at the physical point of sale and in digital spaces as well.” Posters, trailers, standees, lobby displays, digital screens, online banners, app highlights, and pre-sale communication may therefore operate as different expressions of the same campaign logic. Their effectiveness depends not only on individual visibility, but on their alignment across the consumer journey.

This interpretation is consistent with omnichannel retailing research, which argues that value does not emerge merely from the coexistence of multiple channels, but from their integration, consistency, and transparency (Verhoef, Kannan & Inman, 2015; Hossain et al., 2019; Quach et al., 2022). In experiential service retailing, this integration is especially important because digital interfaces may shape expectations before the service encounter, while the physical environment influences attention, emotion, social interaction, and perceived value during the encounter. When digital communication and physical execution are misaligned, the consumer experience may become fragmented.

The omnichannel dimension also appears in participants’ references to consumer data and more targeted execution. P2 observed that companies are increasingly considering trade marketing actions capable of collecting consumer data, adding that “that’s the trend.” P8 also referred to post-screening surveys and the strategic positioning of promotional materials across physical and digital spaces. Although the evidence does not suggest a fully mature data-driven model, it indicates a movement toward more personalized, measurable, and feedback-oriented forms of channel execution.

The omnichannel dimension therefore shifts the trade marketing challenge from channel coverage to channel coherence. Digital interfaces, in-theatre materials, promotional communication, and consumer data become interdependent elements that must be aligned across the customer journey.

Evolutionary Framework: Trade Marketing as Channel Orchestration

The three aggregate dimensions identified in the analysis — collaborative coordination, experiential value creation, and omnichannel coordination — provide the basis for an evolutionary understanding of trade marketing in experiential service retailing. These dimensions should not be interpreted as a fixed sequence of universal stages, but as interrelated expansions in the managerial scope of trade marketing. Together, they show how trade marketing moves from point-of-sale execution toward channel orchestration.

This framework suggests that traditional point-of-sale execution remains important, but becomes part of a broader capability for aligning actors, organizing experiential cues, and connecting physical and digital interfaces across the consumer journey. This interpretation is consistent with value co-creation perspectives, which emphasize resource integration among multiple actors (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Payne, Storbacka & Frow, 2008), and with

omnichannel retailing research, which highlights consistency and integration across touchpoints (Verhoef, Kannan & Inman, 2015; Quach et al., 2022).

Figure 1 summarizes the evolutionary framework developed from the empirical analysis. It positions point-of-sale execution as the traditional foundation of trade marketing and channel orchestration as its expanded role in experiential service retailing.

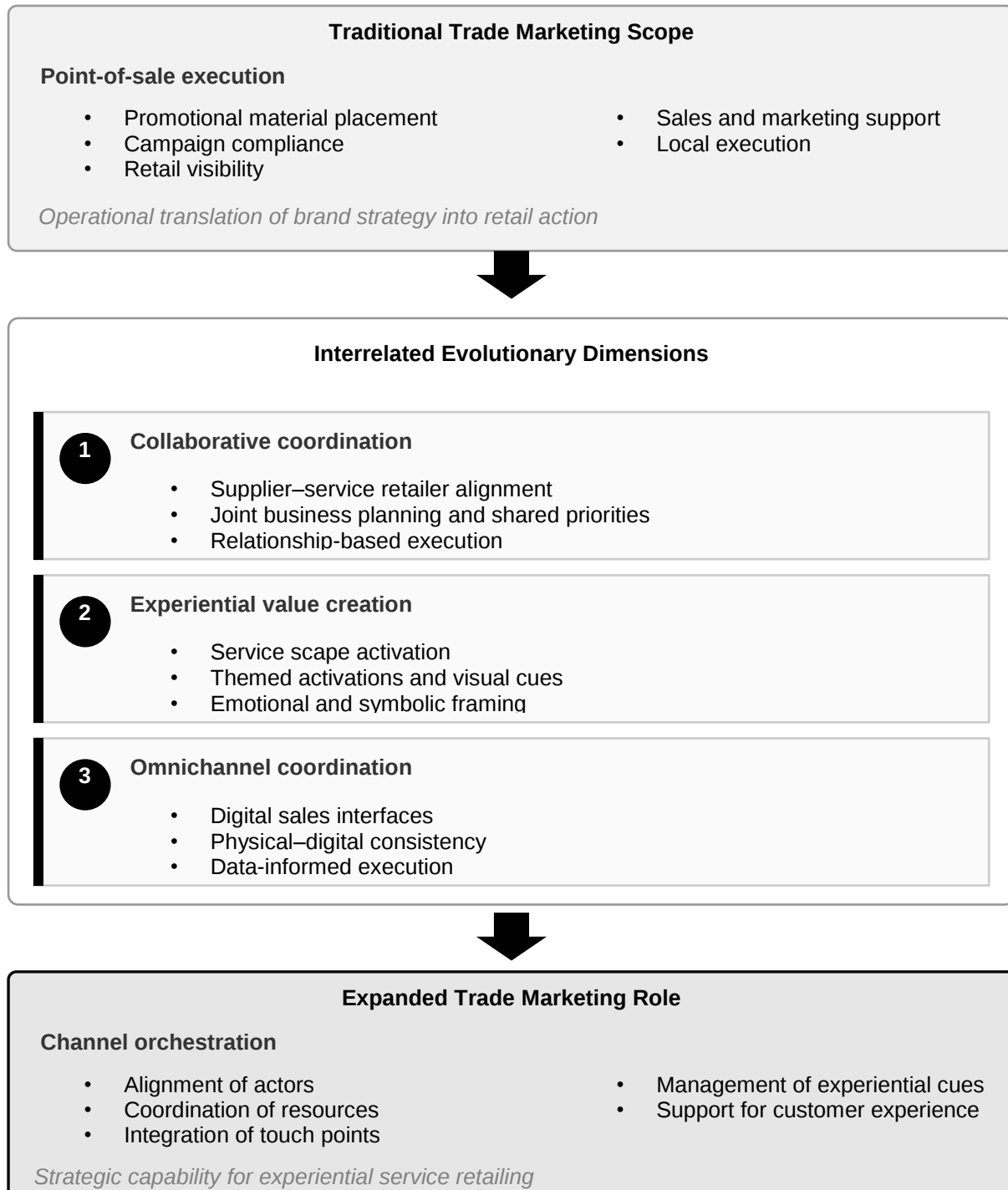


FIGURE 1 EVOLUTIONARY FRAMEWORK OF TRADE MARKETING AS CHANNEL ORCHESTRATION

The framework reframes trade marketing as more than a manufacturer–retailer support function. In experiential service retailing, trade marketing becomes a channel-level orchestration capability through which firms align commercial objectives, channel relationships, promotional resources, physical and digital interfaces, and customer experience across the consumer journey.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how trade marketing evolves from point-of-sale execution toward channel orchestration in experiential service retailing. Drawing on Brazilian cinema exhibition as a theoretically relevant empirical context, the research analyzed how film distributors, cinema operators, digital sales interfaces, promotional resources, and physical service environments are coordinated to influence consumer decision-making across the customer journey.

The findings identify three interrelated evolutionary dimensions in the managerial scope of trade marketing: collaborative coordination, experiential value creation, and omnichannel coordination. These dimensions show that trade marketing is not limited to operational support, merchandising, or promotional visibility. Rather, it may contribute to the alignment of channel actors, the organization of experiential cues, and the coordination of physical and digital touchpoints in service retail environments.

The article contributes to marketing and channel management research by reframing trade marketing as a channel-level orchestration capability. This perspective extends traditional trade marketing models, which have been largely grounded in consumer goods and conventional manufacturer–retailer relationships, by showing how trade marketing operates in experiential, omnichannel, and interorganizational service contexts. In such contexts, promotional effectiveness depends not only on execution at the point of contact, but also on interfirm collaboration, customer experience, physical–digital integration, and the coherent management of consumer-facing cues.

Managerially, the findings suggest that firms in experiential service markets should treat trade marketing as an integrative capability rather than as isolated promotional execution. This requires stronger coordination between suppliers and service retailers, clearer alignment between physical and digital communication, and more systematic use of consumer data to adapt promotional cues to different contexts and audiences. In cinema exhibition and analogous service sectors, trade marketing can support not only conversion, but also the design of more coherent consumer journeys.

The study has limitations. The empirical analysis is based on Brazilian cinema exhibition and does not aim to provide statistical generalization to all service sectors. Future research could examine whether similar dynamics occur in other experiential service markets, such as live entertainment, sports venues, museums, theme parks, hospitality, and cultural events. Comparative studies across countries and sectors could further refine the proposed framework, while consumer-side research could examine how audiences perceive the alignment between digital communication, physical servicescape cues, promotional materials, and the service experience.

Data availability statement

Anonymized materials supporting the findings of this study, including the codebook, coding outputs, analytical memos, and ATLAS.ti project reports, are available from the corresponding author upon request. Access is subject to anonymization procedures designed to protect participant confidentiality and organizational anonymity. Raw interview recordings

and non-anonymized transcripts are not publicly available due to confidentiality commitments made to participants.

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