Marketplace Accessibility: A Service-Provider Perspective

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Marketplace Accessibility: A Service-Provider Perspective

Purpose: This study explores the strategies that service providers use to facilitate marketplace accessibility, and identifies the key challenges in that process. We do so to develop a roadmap towards improved accessibility and disability inclusion in the marketplace.

Methodology: We conducted eight semi-structured interviews with service providers (curators, visitor service coordinators, access managers) at museums who run access programmes for customers with visual impairment (VI), along an embodied duo-ethnography of those programmes.

Findings: Service providers foster autonomous, embodied, and social access. Resource constraints, safety concerns, and exposed differences between customers compromise access. To overcome these challenges service providers engage in three inclusionary strategies - *informing*, *extending*, and *sensitizing*.

Original/ Value: This study contributes: i) A service provider perspective on marketplace accessibility that goes beyond removing 'disabling' barriers towards creating opportunities for co-creation. ii) An approach towards marketplace accessibility that fosters inclusiveness while considering the inherent challenges of that process. iii) An illustration of posthumanism's empirical value in addressing issues of accessibility in the marketplace.

Practical Implications: We offer a roadmap for policy makers and service providers on: i) which types of access should and can be created, ii) what challenges may be encountered, iii)

European Journal of Marketing

how to manage these challenges, and, thus, iv) how to advance accessibility beyond regulations.

Research Limitations: Our service provider- and VI-focus present limitations. Future research should: i) consider a poly-vocal approach that includes the experiences of numerous stakeholders to holistically advance marketplace accessibility, ii) apply our marketplace accessibility findings upon different disabilities in other marketplace contexts.

Key words: marketplace accessibility, inclusion, disability, visual impairment, museums, service provision

European Journal of Marketing

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Introduction

More than a billion people, equating to 15% of the world's population, are disabled, rendering the disability community one of the largest minority groups (WHO, 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability as "the interaction between individuals with a health condition […] and personal and environmental factors (e.g., negative attitudes, inaccessible transportation and public buildings)". Given our global ageing population, disability figures are only set to rise, with most of us likely to experience bodily deterioration throughout our life (Goodley, 2017). Despite these developments, and even though holding an estimated disposable income of £7 trillion (Purple Pound, 2022), businesses globally fail to appropriately cater for disabled customers. In 2019, for example, poor accessibility within the UK led to monthly losses of approximately £163 million for restaurants, pubs, and clubs; £267 million for high-street shops; and £501 million for supermarkets (Purple Pound, 2022). Furthermore, UN reports show that within the UK, "more and more disabled people are finding it difficult to live independently and be included, and participate, in their communities on an equal basis" (House of Commons Library Briefings, 2020). In short, marketplace access and disability inclusion remain inadequate and insufficient to say the least. This study seeks to address these issues by exploring the strategies that service providers can use to facilitate marketplace access for disabled customers.

From a marketing and consumer research perspective, issues of equality and fairness for disabled people have informed the concept of 'marketplace accessibility', which refers to the creation, maintenance, and experience of a barrier-free market environment that disabled consumers can access and participate in independently, stress-free, and with dignity (Baker *et al*., 2002; Balabanis *et al*., 2012; Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999, 2001). The growing stream of literature on this subject explores the lived experiences and coping strategies of disabled customers who face challenges in accessing the marketplace due to architectural-structural as

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well as interpersonal service-related barriers (Baker *et al*., 2002, 2007; Dias de Faria and Casotti, 2019; Falchetti *et al*., 2016; Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999, 2001; Yu *et al*., 2015).

Despite offering rich and meaningful insights, marketing research on accessibility is limited to a consumer-centric understanding of marketplace accessibility, and lacks a service-provider perspective. Specifically, we do not understand service providers' strategies to facilitate marketplace accessibility, including the practices that they engage in, and the challenges they face, when removing architectural-structural as well as interpersonal service-related barriers. Thus, we ask: What are the strategies that service providers use to facilitate marketplace accessibility? And, if any, what are the challenges they face in that process? Unpacking service providers' strategies towards marketplace accessibility, and identifying key challenges, is important as it can generate key insights for developing a roadmap towards improved accessibility and disability inclusion in the marketplace.

To answer our research questions, we studied access programmes designed for customers with visual impairment (VI) in London-based museums in the UK. We chose access programmes in museums as our research context as they are often seen as being at the forefront of facilitating marketplace accessibility which is partly due to funder requirements (Sandell, 2003). Arts Council England, for example, makes funding decisions dependent on how creative and cultural organizations "reflect the communities they work in" (https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/blog/opening-inclusion) and whether they take action to remove "social and institutional barriers that prevent people from creating, participating or enjoying arts and culture" (2018, p. 3). This has led to many museums making disability inclusion part of their mission and adopting a proactive approach towards developing access programmes. We chose to focus on VI as globally approximately 2.2 billion people are affected, and due to an aging population, numbers are rising year by year (WHO, 2021).

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Theoretically, we draw from a posthuman understanding of disability to explore how service providers in museums make their offer (in this context art and historic artefact collections) accessible to VI customers. Posthumanism, and its three underlying key principles - interdependence, embodiment, and relationality - received recognition among disability theorists (Goodley *et al*., 2014; Liddiard *et al*., 2019; Murray, 2020). Posthumanism critiques the tragic view of disability (Goodley, 2017) by celebrating diversity, embracing the linkages between humans, technology, objects, and animals, and acknowledging the inherent connectedness among humans (Braidotti, 2013). From this perspective, disabled people, who often have strong interdependences with other people (carers, nurses, support workers), objects (wheelchairs, canes), animals (service dogs), and whose bodies may be perceived as 'different' from the mainstream, are quintessentially human. This inclusive approach and outlook of what it means to be 'human' (Braidotti, 2013) is why we chose this theoretical lens.

Our analysis reveals that to facilitate marketplace accessibility, service providers of VI access programmes foster three interrelated forms of access: autonomous, embodied, and social, each of which resonates with posthuman thought on interdependence, embodiment, and relationality. Autonomous access refers to facilitating an independent marketplace experience at the customers' own discretion; embodied access refers to providing a safe market environment that allows customers to engage in multi-sensory experiences, while social access refers to facilitating relationship-building and creating a sense of belonging in the marketplace. We also find that challenges such as organizational resource constraints, safety concerns, and exposed differences between customers compromise access. To overcome these challenges, service providers engage in three inclusionary strategies—informing, extending, and sensitizing.

This study makes contributions to the literature on marketplace accessibility as well as on posthumanism. First, we offer a service-provider perspective on marketplace accessibility,

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which reveals that efforts to facilitate marketplace accessibility extend beyond reducing architectural-structural as well as interpersonal service-related barriers (Baker *et al*., 2002, 2007; Dias de Faria and Casotti, 2019; Falchetti *et al*. 2016; Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999, 2001; Yu *et al.*, 2015) towards creating opportunities for co-creation and participation. Second, we outline an inclusive approach to marketplace accessibility designed to enable customers to feel "independent and competent [rather than] disempowered and incapable" (Yu *et al.*, 2015, p. 122) while taking into account the challenges that service providers encounter when working towards this approach. Finally, we contribute to the existing literature on posthumanism, which is largely theoretical, by showing empirically how the three principles of posthumanism address issues of accessibility and disability in marketing.

In the following sections, we offer theoretical foundations, discussing marketing research on marketplace accessibility as well as introducing posthumanistic theory. We continue by describing our methodological approach and presenting the findings. We conclude by discussing our findings and outlining our key contributions.

Theoretical Foundations

Marketplace Accessibility

Marketplace accessibility refers to the creation, maintenance, and experience of a barrier-free market environment that disabled customers can access and participate in independently (Baker *et al.*, 2002, 2007; Balabanis *et al.*, 2012; Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001). It has become a "global issue, one that is important to nations, businesses (large and small), and customers throughout the world" (Baker *et al*., 2002, p. 227). Marketplace accessibility is not only key in creating a fair market (Baker *et al.*, 2005; Falchetti *et al*., 2016) but also holds the potential to be a lucrative and a financially attractive business strategy given that globally disabled people are one of the largest minority consumer segments (Purple Pound, 2022).

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Public discourse on marketplace accessibility gained momentum in the late 1990s after the USA issued the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the UK decreed the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Both legislations are aimed at removing access barriers to the marketplace by mandating that service providers make accommodations to provide access (Baker *et al*., 2002; Goodrich and Ramsey, 2012; Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999, 2001; Pavia and Mason, 2012). A positive outcome of these legislations is that they have significantly widened physical access to marketplaces and society. However, their prioritization of physicality has resulted in many companies working to meet legal disability regulations, which often do not fully meet the needs and requirements of disabled people thus failing to improve accessibility in practice (Beudaert, 2020; Higgins, 2020; Reeve, 2020).

From a marketing and consumer research perspective, the past 20 years have given rise to a growing body of work investigating marketplace accessibility (Baker *et al.*, 2002, 2005, 2007; Echeverri and Salomonson, 2019; Falchetti *et al*., 2016; Higgins, 2020; Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999, 2001; Navarro *et al.*, 2014, 2015; Pavia and Mason, 2012, 2014). This work is informed by research on consumer vulnerability (Baker *et al*., 2005; Falchetti *et al*., 2016; Dias de Faria and Casotti, 2019), consumer normalcy (Baker, 2006), marketplace exclusion (Mason and Pavia, 2006) and marketplace stresses (Balabanis *et al*., 2012). It has predominantly focused on exploring 1) the lived experiences and 2) the coping strategies of customers with physical or sensory impairments who navigate a "disabling [market] environment" (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001, p. 432). Assuming a social model of disability, which views disability as socially constructed by the environment rather than as an impairment of the body or mind (Goodley, 2017; Imrie, 1997; Shakespeare, 2004), this research stream identifies two core barriers that impede an accessible marketplace experience.

The first barrier involves architectural-structural issues and refers to the design and positioning of materials within commercial settings. These can include inappropriate size,

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height, and width of aisles, ramps, and doors (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999); crowded floor space (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2001); sharp-edged furniture; high-intensity lighting and sound systems (Dias de Faria *et al*., 2012); and inadequate store signage (Yu *et al*., 2015). In the 1990s, Kaufman-Scarborough (1998, 1999) called for retailers to adapt their traditional retail models to incorporate those living with disabilities and issued a framework of reasonable access to help retailers better meet this call. Despite this, almost thirty years on, physical inaccessibility remains a challenge (Beudaert, 2020; Higgins, 2020). The second barrier revolves around interpersonal service-related issues, which predominantly refer to service providers treating disabled customers differently from non-disabled customers (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1998, 1999). Examples include the ignoring of disabled customers by service providers, and experiences of 'overhelping', which are often perceived as patronizing and infantilizing by disabled customers (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1998, 1999, 2001; Yu *et al*., 2015). Such behaviours can indeed further disenfranchise disabled customers to an extent of being internally oppressive and emotionally disabling at the psychological level (Higgins, 2020; Reeve, 2020).

To manage these access barriers as well as to increase feelings of independence, disabled customers employ adaptive or coping strategies (Baker *et al*., 2002; Balabanis *et al*., 2012; Beudaert *et al*., 2017; Echeverri and Salomonson, 2019; Falchetti *et al*., 2016; Mason and Pavia, 2006; Yu *et al.*, 2015). Such strategies involve disabled customers balancing feelings of dependency and independence when accessing the marketplace (Baker *et al.*, 2002). Coping strategies vary widely, "including the degree of independence desired and achieved" (Baker *et al*., 2002, p. 215). Falchetti *et al*. (2016), for example, discuss how factors such as emotional well-being, acceptance of the disability, and perceptions about market access barriers influence disabled customers' coping strategies, which can range from switching to new products and services, asking for and receiving help from others, preferring retailers that meet their needs,

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and raising social awareness. Successful coping and adaptation to marketplace barriers positively affects the well-being and self-image of disabled customers, reducing perceived vulnerabilities (Bruce and Bannister, 2019; Dias de Faria and Casotti, 2019; Falchetti *et al.*, 2016; Yu *et al.*, 2015).

This body of research reveals how the responsibility to adapt or cope with inaccessibility is mostly placed on the customer rather than on the marketplace, or the service providers therein. Indeed, Beudaert et al. (2016, p. 63) highlight how customers living with sensory impairment arrive at self-transformation when they accept their new disabled reality and negotiate "new ways of consuming and enjoying life". Thus, they adapt to fit the marketplace, not the other way around. Beudaert *et al.* (2016) call for service providers to take more responsibility in catering for disabled customers. They suggest that service providers should go beyond mere legal requirements and implement strategies and plans that include sensorial, embodied approaches that better support disabled customers in navigating the marketplace. That is, service providers need to find innovative ways to challenge marketplace exclusion and to facilitate inclusion via their access programmes (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2016; Saren *et al.*, 2019).

In sum, marketing and consumer research prioritizes customers' lived experiences and coping strategies, and thus overlooks how service providers can facilitate marketplace accessibility. Specifically, we do not understand service providers' strategies to facilitate marketplace accessibility, including the practices that they engage in, and the challenges they face, when removing architectural-structural as well as interpersonal service-related barriers. Thus, we ask: What are the strategies that service providers use to facilitate marketplace accessibility? And, if any, what are the challenges they face in that process? We follow the call of Beaudaert (2017) by adopting an embodied posthuman perspective of disability, which has received recognition among disability theorists (Goodley *et al.*, 2014; Liddiard *et al.*, 2019;

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Murray, 2020) due to its inclusive approach and outlook of what it means to be 'human' (Braidotti, 2013).

Posthumanism and Disability

For centuries, society has been socialized to a restricted view of what it means to be human. This view has been "modelled upon ideals of white masculinity, normality, youth and health" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 68). Failure to fit these ideals leads such groups and individuals (i.e., the non-male, non-white, the aged, and the disabled) to be socially cast out as "less than" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 28) and devalued deviants. Posthumanism, however, supports a de-centering from such anthropocentrism, shifting the logic and questioning its audience, "to think critically and creatively about who and what we are actually in the process of becoming" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 12). From a disability perspective, posthumanism critiques the tragic view of disability, that perceives disability as something in need of curing or fixing (Goodley, 2017, p. 2), and calls for further cognizance of human differences and assemblages with fellow humans, animals, and technology (Dolezal, 2017; Goodley *et al*., 2014; Liddiard *et al*., 2019; Murray, 2020). This is demonstrated by the key principles underlying posthumanism – *interdependence, embodiment,* and *relationality*.

The principle of *interdependence* highlights assemblages between humans, and between humans and non-humans (Dolezal, 2017). Interdependence "works across differences" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 49), and postulates that all humans - not just disabled people - rely on assemblages. After all, regardless of our abilities, we are all interdependent and indeed "temporarily able-bodied" (Goodley, 2017), with none of us immune to bodily deterioration (Shakespeare, 2004). Within posthumanism, interdependence is not seen as the opposite to, but rather a gateway towards, independence (Goodley *et al*., 2014). With reliance on non-humans or humans seen not as requiring fixing, but rather a pathway to enabling people to achieve their

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best self. From this perspective, disabled people, who often have strong interdependences with other people (carers, nurses), objects (wheelchairs, canes), animals (service dogs), and whose bodies may be perceived as 'different' from the mainstream, are quintessentially human - an understanding and acknowledgement that the disability community has been fighting for, for decades (Liddiard *et al*., 2019; Reeve, 2020). Interdependence, therefore has been found to be a prerequisite for achieving disruption and innovative power (Liddiard *et al*., 2019; Murray, 2020), shattering normative humanistic ideals on the need to be independent (Goodley *et al.,* 2014; Dolezal, 2017).

Embodiment is the second principle within posthumanism. Embodiment is the central way by which we build and understand our sense of self (Dolezal, 2017). Thus, posthuman embodiment focusses on how we interact and interpret our lived realities through our bodies (Braidotti, 2013). Our bodies, after all, are "our active vehicles for being in the world" (Goodley, 2017, p. 71). Therefore, the social world and our bodies are in symbiosis, whereby in opening ourselves up and engaging with society, we ultimately inform and create society (Goodley, 2017). Posthumanism, and specifically its component of embodiment, speaks against body conformity, permitting "a tangible shift in the representation, materialization and hence, conception of disability and non-normative modes of human embodiment" (Dolezal, 2017, p. 72); a shift that perceives diverse bodily configurations as embodied strengths not weakness (Goodley *et al.,* 2014).

Relationality is the final principle underlying posthumanism. Posthumanism asserts that there is an underlying desire within all human life to connect and build a sense of community (Braidotti, 2013). The principle of relationality moves us away from "humanist individualism" towards collectivism, connectedness, and community-building (Braidotti, 2013, p. 144). Braidotti (2013, p. 50) describes relationality as an "affirmative bond" that strengthens human interaction through a "flow of relations with multiple others". This "flow of relations" occurs

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both within and outside of one's community, with the objective of offering a renewed sense of community and sense of belonging across different bodies, persons, and places (Goodley *et al.,* 2014). Relationality, thus, refers less to a need for assistance, help, or care - as in interdependence - but rather points to the social needs of humans. Relationality is therefore affirming through its openness and respect for, rather than control over, differences. In short, posthumanism celebrates diversity, embraces the linkages between humans, technology, objects, and animals, and acknowledges the inherent connectedness among humans (Braidotti, 2013). We adopted this theoretical lens to shed light on how service providers can facilitate marketplace accessibility once we noticed that our data set resonated closely with the three principles of posthuman thinking. We unpack the methodological consideration in more detail next.

Research Method

Research Context

To gain a deeper understanding into marketplace accessibility from a service-provider perspective, we decided to explore access programmes in museums. Museums offer touch tours (also known as tactile tours) to visually impaired (VI) customers and their companions as part of their access programme. Museums have a mission and responsibility to make their collections accessible to all in society, as shared by curators from the Tate and Attenborough Art Museums in this short video discussing disability and art (Disability Arts International, 2018). This focus on access is partly due to funding requirements (Sandell, 2003) as well as their often community-centred ethos (Fletcher, 2013). Our focus on museums, thus, stems from their implementation of, and expertise in, facilitating marketplace accessibility, from which, we believe, wider lessons can be learned.

Touch tours are designed to make anything visual accessible to those who cannot, or can only partially, perceive or process it. These tours have two core elements: 1) audio

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description and 2) touch. Audio description is an oral account of any visual content (e.g., photo of a sandy beach, turquois sea and blue sky). In addition, these tours provide the opportunity to touch the actual artefact, a replica, or raised print (prints that can be traced with fingers) of it. We focus on VI as a select disability due to its rampant global spread and its impact on consumer lives. Within the UK over 2 million people live with sight loss, calculating to around 340,000 registered as blind or partially sighted (NHS, 2022). VI unfolds in different degrees of severity. Most people who are considered legally blind still receive some visual stimulation, yet some possess no light vision at all (WHO, 2021). Consumer and marketing research has shown that customers with VI have limited access to the marketplace (Baker *et al*., 2001; Balabanis *et al*., 2012) which can yield detrimental impacts on consumer wellbeing (Falchetti *et al*., 2016).

Data Collection

We adopted an interpretive and qualitative research approach (i.e. Belk *et al*., 2013) and combined semi-structured interviews with service providers of touch tours in museums with an embodied duo-ethnography of those tours. Data collection took place between November 2017 and July 2018. During this time, we purposively sampled eight museums in London to include a range of medium to large museums as well as a range of visually accessible experiences (see Table 1). We started with museums that had a reputation for being leaders in access programmes. We employed snowball sampling by asking our interviewees about other museums they considered to be leading in access provisions. We worked to ensure that our sample represented diversity with regards to the type of museum. Our sample therefore includes museums that have a strong focus on paintings as well as those that display historical artefacts and those where the site itself is the purpose of the museum. Ethical approval was gained prior to data collection.

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Within our museum sample, we conducted eight interviews with those members of staff in charge of designing and running touch tours (i.e. the curators, visitor service coordinators, or access managers; see Table 1 for interviewees' job titles). The interviews were semi-structured in style with respondents becoming "conversational partners" (Rubin and Rubin, 1997, p. 7). That is, we prepared a topic guide with questions on specific topics, but also allowed respondents the freedom to bring up, and dive into, topics that they considered important to access provisions in museums. Several respondents, for example, brought up the role of technology in delivering touch tours – a topic we had not anticipated prior data collection. Overall, each interview began with questions about the organization's understanding of access and inclusion, followed by questions on the service provider's approach to developing and designing access provisions generally and touch tours specifically. We then continued by inquiring about the challenges service providers face, and improvements they made, with regards to developing and running touch tours. Towards the end of the interview, we asked service providers what they would like to do in terms of access provision if they had unlimited resources. The last question was chosen to tease out their perceptions of shortcomings in their own service provision as well as their vision for the future. Interviews lasted, on average, 45 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, totalling 158 single-spaced pages.

To supplement and triangulate our interview data, we conducted an embodied duo-ethnography of the touch tours set up by our interviewees. Through this duo-ethnography, we became part of the assemblage of the event under investigation providing us with more in-depth and relational data (Barad, 2007). It enabled us to observe the strategies our interviewees referred to in action and thus provide deeper insights on their organisational approaches and strategies (Roslie *et al.*, 2021). Our duo-ethnographic team was comprised of both a fully

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sighted (author 1) and a registered blind (author 2) researcher. The first and second authors participated in all eight touch tours as regular visitors. During the tours, author 1 observed the interactions between author 2 and the tour guide(s) and took pictures thereof. Despite including the pictures in our interpretive analysis, we decided not to incorporate pictures in the manuscript due to the unique artwork shown, which may reveal the museum's identity. Following the tours, both authors took field notes separately before engaging in sense-making debriefs. Our field notes helped us capture our perception of how the access strategies described during interviews were implemented in the actual tours. Moreover, we were able to capture the difference in such perceptions between a fully sighted and a registered blind person. The ethnographic data was important to help deepen our understanding of the nuances of access provision in museums. The field notes ranged from one to three pages per site and researcher. In total, author 1 (sighted) captured 10 single-spaced pages of field notes, and author 2 (registered blind) captured 17 pages. In our field notes, we reflect on our psycho-social-emotional and embodied experiences of physically moving through the museum space, which often permits access through passageways that are generally inaccessible to the public, as well as interacting, often more readily, with the guide and fellow visitors.

Data Analysis

We coded the interview and ethnographic data thematically and iteratively throughout and after the period of immersion (Spiggle, 1994), with movement back and forth between data (emic) and theory (etic) permitting a holistic understanding (Arnold and Fischer, 1994; Thompson, 1997). In this process, we integrated the interview and ethnographic data by using the field notes as a means to triangulate and deepen the insights from the interviews. All three authors engaged in thematic data analysis separately. We then discussed our thoughts and refined our analysis collaboratively. Upon our first wave of data analysis, we noticed our

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emergent themes could align with the conceptual theory of posthumanism revolving around the principles of interdependency, embodiment, and relationality. We continued to iteratively move back and forth between theory and data until we reached a point of theoretical saturation. Each round of analysis included in-depth discussions on possible theoretical interpretations. In that process posthumanism continuously and increasingly aligned with our data, resulting in the analytical narrative presented in this paper. The posthuman lens helped us to thematically unpack the three forms of access, the challenges, and in particular, the inclusionary strategies adopted by service providers in facilitating marketplace accessibility. Figure 1 represents a visual summary of this process, with the posthuman principles of 1. interdependency underpinning autonomous access; 2. embodiment underpinning embodied access; and 3. relationality underpinning social access.

The third author, in not being part of the duo-ethnography, was able to provide a more distanced, objective analytical lens, helping to strengthen "the overall dialogue and the co-constitution of interpretation" (McAlexander *et al.*, 2014, p. 863). As such, we benefitted from both close and distant interpretations of the data. Whilst distant interpretations have long been considered important in field-based research, recent research has called for more research done by those personally close to the research (Jones and Bartunek, 2021). Thus, by combining the interpretations of all three authors who represented very close (author 2 as registered blind), close (author 1 sighted but participated in tours) and distant (author 3) interpretations, we were able to unpick the data from various angles and develop deeper, more nuanced insights. Next, we outline our findings.

Findings

Our analysis reveals that to facilitate marketplace accessibility, service providers of VI access programmes foster three interrelated forms of access for their customers: *autonomous*, *embodied*, and *social*, each of which resonates with the posthuman focus on interdependence,

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embodiment, and relationality - however, they are not mutually exclusive. Informed by interview and ethnographic data, Figure 1 visually summarizes the full process. We introduce Figure 1 upfront to provide the reader with an overview of our findings before outlining them in detail. Autonomous access refers to facilitating an independent marketplace experience at the customers' own discretion. This form of access is typically challenged by organisational resource constraints. Embodied access refers to providing a safe market environment that allows customers to engage in multi-sensory experiences. Yet, it is challenged by safety considerations. Social access refers to facilitating relationship-building and creating a sense of belonging in the marketplace, but is often challenged by exposed differences between customers. To overcome these challenges service providers engage in three inclusionary strategies - *informing*, *extending*, and *sensitizing*. Inclusionary strategies offer the power to push commercial access programmes beyond regulatory rules informed by the DDA and ADA, towards meeting the actual lived needs and realities of VI customers. It is via these strategies that service providers embrace differences and celebrate connectedness among their customers, staff, and other stakeholders, in line with posthumanist principles (Braidotti, 2013). In the following sections, we outline each form of marketplace accessibility, as well as their respective challenges and inclusionary strategies. Even though we find that the three forms of access prevail across the data set in each access programme, we tease out nuances, that is differences and similarities, in how the service providers in our study bring them to life.

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Autonomous Access

Autonomous access refers to facilitating an independent marketplace experience at the customers' own discretion. In facilitating autonomous access, service providers build on

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posthuman thought by acknowledging and celebrating customer's interdependencies as a gateway towards independence and autonomy rather than dependence (Dolezal, 2017; Braidotti, 2013). Our findings reveal that service providers of VI access programmes work to deliver autonomous access by providing opportunities for, and encouraging, independent decision-making and offering choices concerning when, and how, to engage with the market offering. Choices offered vary in our data set. Although, a few service providers offer provisions and equipment for self-led tours (Museum E, F), we find that most commonly VI customers choose between participating in a scheduled group tour or booking a private tour (Museum A, C, E, G, H) as illustrated here:

> "[W]e've been running touch tour programmes now 30+ years, so it's quite well-established. We have a monthly programme which is bookable, and that focusses on all of our special exhibitions and our permanent collection. VI people can then participate in any lecture, workshop, activity and so on… We also arrange when visitors want to come in at their time and choosing, then we'd try to make the necessary arrangements." (Interview with the Equality and Access Advisor, Museum A)

The Equality and Access advisor of Museum A takes measures to design a service that involves the entire art collection and ensures that VI customers can "participate in any lecture, workshop, activity […] at their time and choosing". He shapes the service in a way that enables VI customers to increasingly make independent decisions regarding when to visit the museum and what to see, enhancing feelings of self-worth (Baker *et al.*, 2002). This resonates with Baker (2006, p. 47) who uncovers that marketplace interaction "can enhance" or aid in building consumer identity. She continues, "being-in-the-marketplace is part of the essential ground for being in the contemporary world" in turn enabling customers to feel societally normal. Service

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providers that dedicatedly work towards offering opportunities for their VI customers to independently engage with their services and to make autonomous decisions about when and how to access the service send the message that disabled customers are welcome and belong.

Beyond providing opportunities for autonomous decision-making in the marketplace, service providers realize that it is equally important to encourage their customers to take up these opportunities:

> "When I first make contact with someone, I ask if I can speak to them, rather than just doing it over email. I'll say, 'What's your number?' so that I can ring and talk to them, and they can get to know me before they come. So I can say, 'Listen, you might have a nice time. You may or may not get something from it, but why don't you try it?' Then you'll get people that are like, 'Oh my God, I didn't even want to phone you up', 'I thought that it was not a place for me to come.' I'm like, 'Listen, we want you to come and engage… because that's how we make stuff better for the future.' So for us, it's not just about that tour; it's about getting those people within those groups to be more confident to come and engage with services." (Interview with the Visitor Service Officer, Museum B)

Museum B offers a space where VI customers can build confidence. Confidence-building, which is further encouraged by proactively offering information about to how get to the museum as well as information about the setup of the service and space itself (Museum D, B), can powerfully facilitate an independent marketplace experience for VI customers and for disabled customers in general. Higgins (2020) found that many disabled customers self-exclude from the marketplace when service provision is unwelcoming and unable to cope with their disability. Our findings support Higgins (2020) by showing that when service providers

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prioritize their VI customers' abilities and adopt a mind-set of welcoming and confidence building, they help remove customer fears and anxieties. This in turn communicates to disabled customers that the marketplace is indeed 'a place for [them]'.

Challenges to Autonomous Access

Although the above practices facilitate autonomous access, at times service providers need to impose decisions upon VI customers. This is due to the amount of budget, time and staff resources required to enable autonomous access. Across our data set, service providers restrict autonomous access by limiting the number of touch tours available per month, and limiting the number of artworks included per tour:

> "[L]et's face it, we've looked at four artworks today and there are probably 25 artworks that I would love to have shown you, but it took us an hour and a quarter to visit 4 artworks." (Interview with the Curator of Public Programme, Museum C)

> "The restriction of whether somebody [a trained tour guide] is going to be available to do it or not. As I say, I have to rely on another department's staffing levels, as to whether a person can be available to do that, at a particular time." (Interview with the Visitor Service Coordinator, Museum D)

The vignettes highlight how touch tours can be time-and labour-intensive. This is due to the time needed to provide audio descriptions and touch experiences, as well as the time needed to move safely between different artworks, in particular, if it is a group experience. The time-intensity of VI access tours is a key reason why service providers continuously impose decisions on their customers, restricting their choice, and thus limiting their independence.

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Autonomous access is also limited by offering touch tours only in selected areas of the museum due to limited budget and trained staff (Museum D, F). Current research has exposed the expectation to adapt and cope with inaccessibility as being the responsibility of the disabled customer (Pavia and Mason, 2012, 2014). Here, we see that although access is offered, it comes at the cost of restricted self-determination. Thus, disabled customers are emplaced in a precarious position where they are either responsibilized to cope with inaccessibility or de-autonomized when faced with accessibility. Nonetheless, the service providers in this study are aware of and empathetic to this shortcoming, which is an important step in challenging marketplace exclusion (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2016):

> "My wish is that a VI person can come in off the streets and ask for a guided tour there and then… That's my aim, to have that almost seamless service and for VI people to be able to use the museum as anybody else would." (Interview with the Equality and Access Advisor, Museum A)

Nonetheless, until such service is available, service providers typically address challenges of restricted autonomy and independence by engaging in an inclusionary strategy that we label *informing*.

Inclusionary Strategy: Informing

To overcome or address issues of restricted autonomy and independence due to resource constraints, service providers engage in an inclusionary strategy that we refer to as '*informing'*. Informing, refers to the ways by which service providers engage in an extensive feedback process to meaningfully inform the decision(s) they impose upon customers. In our data set feedback sources range from access advisory boards (Museum C, D, G), to cross-

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trainings and peer-to-peer observations with other museums (Museum B, C), to VI focus groups and surveys (Museum B, E, F, G), to the VI customer in-situ (Museum A, B, C, D, F, G, H). In line with Kaufman-Scarborough's (1999) belief that marketplace accessibility arises at the intersection of disabled customers, service providers, and practice and policy makers, informing relies on numerous feedback agents and sources and unfolds as an iterative and in-situ process. Museum C's Curator of Public Programme reflects:

> "So, when I first started in this role about 10 years ago, the offer was quite simply a touch tour and all we could touch were bronze and marble sculptures and, over the last 10 years, we've worked with our audience to ask what people want and expect. What's going really well? What's boring? What's exciting? And, we have an access advisory group of people with different kinds of sensory disabilities who give us guidance on what would work well. We also work in collaboration with other major museums and galleries, we're not working in isolation…we're learning from each other's practices." (Interview with the Curator of Public Programme, Museum C)

Feedback sources, both internal and external of the organization, provide 'guidance on what would work well', thus informing the decisions within the access programme. The sharing of good and bad practice across key feedback sources is a core exemplar of how human-human assemblages can create an interdependent rather than dependent marketplace environment (Braidotti, 2013; Goodley *et al*., 2014; Murray, 2020). Such interdependency highlights that "dependency and independence are not opposite extremes of a unidimensional construct" (Baker *et al.,* 2001, p. 221) but rather can work in symbiosis to ensure a lessening of the power dynamic outlined above. By including VI customers in access panels, service providers view

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them as co-creators and -producers of the market offering, re-instantiating control and moving towards independence in the marketplace (Baker, 2006).

Most service providers in our study are trained to adapt the service while guiding the tour to suit their customers' abilities and preferences in-situ, thus giving back voice and control. The Curator of Public Programme of Museum C continues to explain:

> "[W]e need to be aware of the wide range of VI that exists, not just in present ability, but also in sight memory, and so where somebody is in their life and whether that person was born without sight or whether that person has acquired sight loss during the course of their life. [O]nce we've formed a relationship with each other, it might be a little easier for me to say something like, 'I'm thinking of describing some neon artworks to you, is it okay if I ask you, do you have an element of sight ability that would enable you to at least partially see some bright neon tubes?' But that's a very personal question. […] We hope that, by taking this very gentle approach, people feel that they can trust us, that we respect their ability and that they want to come back for a second and subsequent tour." (Interview with the Curator of Public Programme, Museum C)

The Curator of Public Programme of Museum C, who often serves as a tour guide himself, uses the VI customer as an in-situ feedback source to inform the content and flow of the touch tour. As such he makes them active agents in the marketplace (Baker, 2006). A field note written by author 2 reflecting on the touch tour at Museum A states "[o]ur guide as before in other tours adapted to where I was touching the object and then started describing it based on what I was doing". It captures the co-creative nature of touch tours and how control is shifted to the VI customer. Appreciating that each individual and each (dis)ability is not the same, informing meets a range of diverse needs (Braidotti, 2013, Murray, 2020) through collaborative,

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participatory dialogue with disabled customers, as well as other expert sources (e.g., access panels). Together, the interdependent and affirmative nature of informing underpins posthumanism, providing a gateway towards an inclusive approach of marketplace accessibility.

Embodied Access

Embodied access refers to providing a sense of safety in the physical market environment and designing meaningful, multisensory experiences that prioritize VI customers' sensorial abilities. In facilitating embodied access, service providers build on the posthuman principle of embodiment by celebrating body diversity and evoking inherent embodied strengths (Dolezal, 2017; Goodley *et al*., 2014). Meaningfully supporting the VI customers' navigation of the physical space by carefully considering a safe route, and providing a sense of space (i.e., narrating the environment) forms a key element of all touch tours across our data set. Our field note below captures this aspect of embodied access:

> "The tour took us through many different rooms and levels of the building. Despite all this walking around, it was never difficult to follow our guide or felt like an obstacle course. She was good in explaining and directing. She was also not too pushy in a sense that she didn't try to guide me physically but […] just needed someone to tell me left and right." (Author 2, field notes from tour at Museum A)

Providing a sense of space, which allows VI customers to move and experience the marketplace independently, without feeling patronized, contributes to embodied access whilst also facilitating autonomous access. This is because the ability to experience space with one's body without interference enables disabled customers to feel included and welcomed in the

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marketplace (Baker, 2006). The tour guide in skilfully leading author 2 through the museum space without being patronizing ('not too pushy') while also appreciating her embodied abilities and competences ('just needed someone to tell me left and right'), celebrates VI, not as a weakness, but rather as a diverse form of embodied strength (Goodley *et al*., 2014). Thus, the tour guide re-conceptualizes disability as valuable, rather than non-normative, to society (Dolzeal, 2017).

The service providers in this study shared paying particular attention to the design of their museum experiences, working hard to ensure the experience prioritizes their customers' abled senses. While taste and smell (still) play a relatively minor role, service providers emphasize hearing and touch senses in their access programmes:

> "When you're talking, and delivering the tour, people who are sighted are actually taking in those things, whereas, you know, partially sighted or blind people aren't. […] [It is about] the vocabulary we were using. The emphasis on words, and the description of, you know, 'Tumbling cherubs falling from the sky' rather than, 'There are cherubs', 'luscious ripe fruit' - those adjectives that add emphasis to the descriptions." (Interview with the Visitor Service Officer, Museum G)

Creating word pictures is a technique that is crucial to facilitating embodied access (Museum A, B, C, D, F, G, H) as it allows tour guides to provide "the information that you often get through sight through verbal communication" (Interview with the Producer of Adult Learning, Museum E). This linguistic technique appreciates the intelligent minds and abled hearing senses of VI customers (Braidotti 2013), therefore allowing for body diversity and non-conformity (Dolezal, 2017). In other words, through their unique bodies and minds (Goodley *et al.,* 2014), VI customers gain intellectual access to marketplace artefacts. Similarly, service

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providers address VI customers' sense of touch by utilizing objects of different forms, shapes, and materials when delivering tours, thus facilitating embodied access by promoting their individual perception (Dolzeal, 2017). This is achieved through the ability to touch the actual artefact (Museum A, C, D, E, F, H), or by handing out informative resources in large print, braille or tactile formats (all museums). Author 1 captures this in their field notes when observing that "Museum A clearly has an advanced focus on access. I could see several touch objects that were described in braille. There were also many large print books in different galleries we walked through". It is these environmental cues, Kaufman-Scarborough (1998) argues, that signal to customers with disabilities that they are not an afterthought, but valued and welcome. In sum, service providers in harnessing a posthuman skillset that understands, values, and celebrates the diverse abilities of bodies, as well as VI, create a sense of safety in the physical market environment, shift the marketplace experience to prioritize the customers' abled senses in meaningful ways, and thus permit the delivery of powerful embodied experiences in the marketplace.

Challenges to Embodied Access

Despite service providers' efforts to create a wide range of deeply engaging multisensory experiences within a safe space, they are mindful of their VI customers' bodily capacities. Protecting VI customers' physical welfare may compromise embodied touch access, a prevailing concern across our data set, as the following quote by the Access Manager of Museum F illustrates:

> "You've got to think about considerations, when there's touch involved, about health and safety. Could a wheelchair user who is partially sighted still touch it? Is it too high?

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> Could there be sharp edges? Things like that, so there's those kinds of considerations." (Interview with the Access Manager, Museum F)

Concerns about the customers' physical wellbeing has the potential to compromise embodied access, especially if accessible services become overly simplistic and, as such, come across as infantilizing and patronizing (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999). Such services can socially exclude VI customers and threaten their sense of "belongingness, self-esteem, control and meaningful existence" in marketplace settings (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2016, p. 160). Yet, embodied access is not only challenged by safety concerns for VI customers, but also by safety concerns for the artefacts, a second concern shared across all eight service providers. That is, service providers may limit embodied access due to the physical risks of damaging artefacts:

> "…it's trying to find ways in which we can actually make the collection accessible, and balance the thing from a curatorial impulse wanting to preserve and protect objects, and from our side wanting to really just use them, take them apart, and test them. So, I think negotiating that is an institution-wide challenge." (Interview with the Producer of Adult Learning, Museum E)

The above vignette outlines the fine balance between accessibility and protection of both the customer and the artefact. This illustrates the centrality of embodied human-object relationships in delivering touch tours (Braidotti, 2013). Resonating with challenges occurring in autonomous access, this fine balance exemplifies a mid-point between Kaufman-Scarborough's (2016, p. 163) dimensions of universal inclusion, which refer to how "everyone, regardless of ability or disability is included" in the marketplace; and selective inclusion, whereby inclusion is "established by decision-makers in the social environment" (Kaufman-

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Scarborough 2016, p. 163). In many instances, mediating this balance does not only involve the curator and the customer, but often the entire organization and its stakeholders. For instance, in cases where artefacts are 'only borrowed' by a museum, the lender has a say in whether their artefacts should be protected from touch, as the Curator of Public Programme of Museum C explains. However, our data uncovers service providers can feel at odds with restricting embodied access, and, thus, to offset it, they engage in an inclusionary strategy that we call *extending*.

Inclusionary Strategy: Extending

To overcome issues of restricted embodied access due to safety concerns, service providers engage in a strategy that we call extending. Extending, which occurs to both customer's bodies, and/ or to the marketplace object (i.e., the artwork), creates an interplay between human-object-animal relationships (Braidotti, 2013). This complex interplay rejects body conformity (Dolezal, 2017) and allows for rich multisensory experiences while ensuring the customer and object's physical safety. In the context of VI access programmes, the inclusion of service dogs and sighted companions are common, as evidenced by field notes from all touch tours we participated in, and illustrated by the below:

> "We walked through two rooms to the second exhibit he wanted to show us. This one was roped off, and we had to wear cotton gloves when we touched it. To make sure that I would not trip and to encourage [my service dog] to walk forward, [the guide] asked [author 1] to join him in stepping on the rope so that it was flat on the ground. We then knelt down [to touch the artefact]." (Author 2 field notes from tour at Museum C)

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The tour guide understands the interdependences between the VI customer, their service dog, and their companion in navigating the marketplace confidently and safely (Braidotti, 2013; Dolezal, 2017; Murray, 2020). Besides, service dogs and companions, objects, such as gloves and amplifiers, are also regularly used as extensions of the VI customer's body, allowing for embodied multisensory experiences in the marketplace while overcoming safety considerations (Museum A, C, G). Service providers of VI access programmes understand their customers' bodies as extendable and integrate a posthuman interplay between human-object-animal relationships into the delivery of touch tours. This interplay is key to designing an embodied but also an independent experience in the marketplace (Braidotti, 2013; Goodley *et al.*, 2014; Murray, 2020). However, this interplay also permits negotiation between multisensory accessibility and the service providers' responsibility to protect their customer and artefacts.

Our data uncovered service providers of VI access programmes to not only extend their customers' body, but also extend the marketplace object, in this case artefacts or artworks. Technologies, such as 3D printing (Museum C, E, H), replicas made from gum, wood, or plastic (Museum A, B, C, D, F), or tactile printing (Museum D, F, G), offer handling objects of artworks that are otherwise untouchable due to safety considerations, and allow VI customers to grasp the scale of very large artefacts (Museum B, C, D). Such human-technology assemblages (Braidotti, 2013; Goodley *et al.*, 2014; Murray, 2020) demonstrate the innovative and embodied ways by which service providers overcome safety issues and facilitate participation, engagement, and a welcoming marketplace environment (Pavia and Mason, 2014). Thus, we advance Kaufman-Scarborough (1999) by highlighting that accessibility does not only involve human-human interaction, but also human-object-animal-technology interaction. Here, the service provider's innovative use of objects and technology to extend the museum and its artefacts further promotes an inclusive attitude and ethos, reminiscent again of posthumanism as discussed to date in disability studies (Goodley, 2014; Liddiard *et al.*, 2019).

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Social Access

Social access refers to facilitating relationship-building and creating a sense of belonging in the marketplace that extends beyond service providers' efforts to eliminate interpersonal, service-related barriers, such as training service personnel not to patronize or over-help VI customers (Kaufman-Scarborough, 1999, 2001, 2016; Yu *et al*., 2015). Social access draws from the posthuman principle of relationality by embracing human connectedness and the human desire for community and belonging (Braidotti, 2013). In touch tours, the group usually consists of VI customers, their sighted guides, friends or family members, one or more tour guides, and, at times, one or more assisting members of staff. Across our data set, we found that tour guides place emphasis on fostering socially vibrant but also warm and trusting relationships with their customers, as the following field note illustrates:

> "The more experience I get doing these touch tours, the more I realize how important the relationship building aspect is when doing these tours. This time the guide asked Author 2 if she could touch her hands and lead her to the important parts of the objects. Author 2 agreed. There is a lot of proximity, even intimacy, involved in these tours. Laughter and having fun are part of this as well. The relationship that is built up between the VI person and the guide is partly what brings the objects to life." (Author 1, field note from tour at Museum A)

Humour and a conversational dialogue are core facilitators in building rapport between tour guides and VI customers and create the proximity and embodied contact often needed in VI access tours. Proximity also highlights the participatory and co-creative nature of touch tours. Baker *et al*. (2002, p. 237) argue that "just as the service provider is expected to accommodate

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the VI customer, the customer is equally obligated to assist the service provider by stating what it is that s/he requires", highlighting that accessibility is co-created within market relationships instead of carried out by responsibilized market actors.

In addition to rapport-building between tour guides and VI customers, VI access programmes provide extensive opportunities for VI customers and others to socialize (Museum A, B, C, E, G). Socializing opportunities can take the shape of more formal workshops (Museum A, C, E, G) or informal after-tour events, e.g., coffee, snacks (Museum B) that foster not only relationship building but also a sense of belonging. Resonating with the posthuman assertion that the underlying desire in all human life is to connect and build a sense of community (Braidotti, 2013), our study found that service providers also use their tours and services to create a local community that exists beyond the immediate time and place of the museum or the event.

> "[W]hat's really nice about the tours here is that we have a core group of people who come to all the sessions, so it's also about building that network of people who can come and already feel that they have some form of ownership in visiting the museum and coming here. So, I think it's also about social inclusiveness." (Interview with the Producer of Adult Learning, Museum E)

Although social access is key to achieving marketplace accessibility regardless of the particular form of disability, social access becomes ever more critical within the context of VI, due to the larger societal and psychological issues VI can raise (Falchetti *et al.*, 2016). Museum E's discussion of 'social inclusiveness' resonates across all our service providers, showing a shared cognizance that some VI customers may live a relatively isolated life. Most service providers show efforts to use their access programmes as an opportunity to personally get to know their

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customers and to build long-term, trustful relationships (Museum A, B, C, E, F, H, G) which is illustratively captured by a field note written by author 1 after a group tour in Museum C:

> "Clearly the VI people knew each other and had a lot to talk about. The pictures [artworks] come second. The tour guide does an amazing job in facilitating the social aspect of the tour. As a host he is treating people as if they were old good friends that he is happy to catch up with." (Author 1, field note from tour at Museum C)

As the Curator of Public Programme at Museum C further outlines, "we mustn't forget that the museum of the future is not just about experiencing art objects, it's about experiencing other people in a sense of place." Overall, we find that service providers of VI access programmes pro-actively work towards social access by designing their offering in an affirmative way, ensuring that relationships of flow rather than of dependency are created between disabled customers and service providers (Braidotti, 2013), which in turn can address issues of societal isolation.

Challenges to Social Access

At times service providers place emphasis on differences rather than commonalities between VI and sighted customers as a means of respectively managing and aligning both groups' expectations and needs. These exposed differences can challenge social access and are not inclusive but instead stigmatizing. Exposed differences, which we found in all eight museums, are often symbolic and manifest, for example, when VI customers touch otherwise untouchable artwork, jump queues, or cross barriers that sighted customers ought not. This, as reflected upon by some service providers, can make touch tours seem more 'exclusive' to sighted customers (Museum B, C, F), which may leave them "irritated but also interested"

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(field notes, author 1, Museum C). This special treatment makes disability widely visible in the marketplace, which is positive in that it widens recognition of accessibility amongst the public (Reeve, 2020). However, at the same time, VI customers are aware that such recognition is predicated on their impairment, which can be negative for their sense of self (Baker, 2006).

Service providers of two VI access programmes (Museum B, F) perpetuate such distinction through 'signifying' participants of touch tours with colourful badges or sashes as a means of managing the expectations of those customers who are not participating in the touch tours.

> "Quite often, as soon as people see people touching the objects, they think, 'So, I can touch the objects, even though it says, 'Don't touch,'' so then they start touching the objects. There's a bit of a management job of that, so it's a cross between some visitors are telling people off for touching the objects; some visitors are taking it as a sign that they can touch the objects. The original idea was [then to use] a little beige sticker with 'Touch Tour' written on it that was about an inch round. We realized pretty quickly that that didn't cut it and then we needed something a bit flashier, clearer. [So we introduced the turquoise badges]. We kind of had quite a debate about the fact that people don't necessarily want to identify themselves in such a way, but the difficulty is that we've got minimal staff in that gallery." (Interview with the Access Manager, Museum F)

The 'debate' outlined by the Access Manager of Museum F, highlights that service providers themselves are aware and empathetic of how the demarcation between VI and sighted customers via badges and sashes emphasizes and reinforces difference in stigmatic ways, and thus limits social cohesion for their VI customers. Customers with VI seek to achieve uniqueness and distinction through consumption, yet not through being reduced to or by their

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impairment (Baker, 2006). However, such demarcation has become necessary to manage both staff resource limitations, and the potentially "stigmatizing behaviour of fellow consumers" (Dias de Faria and Casotti, 2019, p. 2246) (i.e. 'some visitors are telling people off for touching the objects'). Nonetheless, the service providers of this study, in being aware of this demarcation, worked to resolve such unwelcomeness through an inclusionary strategy we refer to as *sensitizing*.

Inclusionary Strategy: Sensitizing

To address issues of restricted social access, service providers engage in the inclusionary strategy of *sensitizing*, whereby, they provide opportunities for sighted customers and staff to understand, and relate to, VI customers' needs in the marketplace. In doing so, service providers enact a posthuman ethos that is open and respectful of difference, rather than controlling of it (Goodley *et al.,* 2014). To help sensitize sighted customers to VI experiences, one service provider has begun to make touch tours available to all.

> "So, on the one hand, it's about trying to be inclusive […] On the other, that can throw up new challenges, so you also want to make sure […] that we're prioritizing the VI participants on the tours as well and making sure that their needs are met. Sometimes when you have too many fully sighted participants that can shift the dynamic a bit […] I think it goes back to what I was saying before about not segregating a group, in one of the senses. I'm a sighted person and I learn so much through being part of these. Just in terms of thinking about different senses and different sensory experiences to [art]. That's an insight that I wouldn't usually get. I think, in a way, having vision is almost like having a barrier to thinking in those other ways." (Interview with the Producer of Adult Learning, Museum E)

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By carefully opening up VI tours to the general public (i.e. not allowing too many sighted customers), Museum E knowingly sacrifices attention to, and prioritization of, VI customers' needs. In line with Baker *et al*. (2002), the Producer of Adult Learning argues that respectful service provision should not define customers in terms of single characteristics such as individual senses, or disability, more broadly. For him, inclusion involves not only offering equitable services to VI customers but bringing together VI and sighted customers and allowing them to learn from each other. A field note from author 1 reflects on Museum's E innovative approach and concludes that "there was a good vibe and lively exchange between all visitors". Reeve (2020) outlines that the societal hiding of disability perpetuates ostracism. She continues that such ostracism can only be shattered when disability is unhidden and integrated in a way that allows it to become societally mundane. The alignment of VI and sighted customers in touch tours permits a renewed sense of community and sense of belonging across different bodies, persons, and places (Goodley *et al*., 2014), and thus re-conceptualizes diversity as a strength not a weakness, and as valuable, not non-normative, to society (Dolezal, 2017). Following a similar ethos, other service providers (Museum A, C, D, F, H) allow all customers, not just tour customers, to touch selected artworks, and make those artworks part of the tour. Sensitizing enables a normalcy approach to impairment, whereby instead of being 'othered' (Reeve, 2020) the VI customer becomes 'thered' with all who partake in the tour.

To further sensitize able-bodied society to the needs of VI customers', service providers invest in disability awareness training for members of staff beyond the immediate access team and tour guides (Museum A, B, C, D, F, G). For example, the Visitor Service Officer of Museum B outlines:

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> "…we trained the staff, but it didn't mean just training the people that are on the tour themselves; it meant training security. It meant training the people in the canteen. We've put them [staff] in blindfolds, and we've walked them through [the museum], so they would understand how it is...". (Interview with the Visitor Service Officer, Museum B)

This training moves service provision towards an ethos of posthuman collectivism (Braidotti 2013) developing an "affirmative bond" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 144) between VI customers, sighted customers, staff, and objects; thus, building a sense of collective relationality (Murray 2020). Accordingly, service providers of touch tours aim to stimulate an ethos of relationality that is open and respectful, not controlling of, difference (Dolezal, 2017).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the strategies that service providers use to facilitate marketplace accessibility, and to understand the challenges they face when doing so. Drawing from a combination of semi-structured interviews with service providers of, and ethnographic data from, touch tours offered in museums and designed for VI customers, our analysis reveals that to facilitate marketplace accessibility, service providers foster three interrelated forms of marketplace access: autonomous, embodied, and social. Through our findings, we contribute to marketing and consumer research on marketplace accessibility as well as to posthuman theory.

Theoretical Contributions

First, this study contributes to marketing and consumer research by unpacking a service-provider perspective on marketplace accessibility. To date, research on marketplace accessibility has largely focused on exploring the lived experiences and coping strategies of

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customers with physical or sensory impairments who navigate a "disabling [market] environment" (Kaufman-Scarborough 2001, p. 432), rendering the service-provider's voice silent and often cast as unaccommodating (Higgins, 2020; Navarro *et al*., 2014). In uncovering the process by which service providers enact responsibility, we advance the call of Goodrich and Ramsey (2012) and Higgins (2020) to illustrate how service providers can be more cognizant and proactive in stimulating marketplace accessibility.

In line with suggestions from previous research on marketplace accessibility (Baker 2006; Baker *et al.* 2002, 2007; Dias de Faria *et al*. 2012; Falchetti *et al*. 2016; Kaufman-Scarborough 1998, 1999, 2001; Yu *et al*. 2015), service providers in our study remove architectural-structural as well as interpersonal service-related barriers; yet they do much more than that. Indeed, they pro-actively create opportunities for co-creation and participation in the marketplace, which, in turn, is key for disabled customers' sense of self-worth and consumer identity construction (Baker 2006; Balabanis *et al*. 2012; Pavia and Mason 2014). By highlighting the participatory and collaborative nature of autonomous, embodied, and social access, we are shifting the debate in consumer and marketing research on marketplace accessibility from coping to co-creation. So far, the research stream on marketplace access has identified how disabled customers are often responsibilized to cope with, and adapt to, challenging marketplace settings (Baker *et al*., 2002; Balabanis *et al.,* 2012; Beudaert *et al.*, 2017; Echeverri and Salomonson, 2019; Falchetti *et al*., 2016; Mason and Pavia, 2006; Yu *et al*., 2015). Successful coping with marketplace barriers which range from switching to new products and services, to asking for and receiving help from others, to preferring retailers that meet their needs can positively affect customers' well-being and self-image (Falchetti *et al*., 2016). That is, successful coping renders a sense of control and self-power in the marketplace and thus reduces experiences of vulnerability (Baker *et al*., 2005; Bruce and Bannister, 2019; Dias de Faria and Casotti, 2019; Falchetti *et al.,* 2016; Yu *et al*., 2015). By spotlighting service

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providers' efforts to create opportunities for VI customers' co-creation and participation, we outline an approach to marketplace accessibility that puts less pressure on VI customers' coping skills, yet may still create opportunities for enhancing consumer wellbeing and self-esteem. In other words, service providers who take the responsibility to facilitate marketplace accessibility do not do so unilaterality but collaboratively and empathetically. They understand that "just as [they are] expected to accommodate the VI customer, the customer is equally obligated to assist the service provider by stating what it is that s/he requires" (Baker *et al*., 2002, p. 237). Such empathy and realization witness service providers working to adapt to disability, rather than disability adapting to the marketplace.

Second, we uncover an approach to marketplace accessibility that is designed to encourage disabled customers to feel "independent and competent [rather than] disempowered and incapable" (Yu *et al*. 2015, p. 122) and that fosters "participation, a welcoming, or an opportunity to engage" in the marketplace (Kaufman-Scarborough 2016, p. 160) while taking into account the challenges that service providers encounter in that process. Our analysis suggests that the three interrelated forms of access - autonomous, embodied, and social access - resonate with the posthuman focus on interdependence, embodiment, and relationality. Within each form of access, we unpack what we call inclusionary strategies (i.e. informing, extending, and sensitizing) and show that it is via these strategies that service providers can proactively address their inherent challenges (i.e., organizational resource constraints, safety concerns, exposed differences). By engaging in these strategies, service providers move their market offering further towards embracing embodied diversity, and celebrate connectedness among their customers, staff, technology, and service animals in line with posthuman thinking (Braidotti, 2013). Thus, we believe our inclusionary strategies yield the power to push the boundaries of marketplace accessibility and transform commercial access programmes towards being more inclusive.

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Our identification of these inclusionary strategies contributes nuance to Kaufman-Scarborough's (2016) understanding of and distinction between two types of inclusionary approaches practiced by marketing practitioners—selective/partial inclusion and universal/full inclusion, and thus informs the regulation versus reality debate prevailing in research on marketplace accessibility (Beudaert, 2020; Higgins, 2020). Whereas universal inclusion refers to how "everyone, regardless of ability or disability is included" in the service encounter, and selective inclusion is "established by decision-makers in the social environment" (Kaufman-Scarborough, 2016, p. 163), we argue that inclusionary strategies constitute the mechanism that balances the two approaches. In other words, inclusionary strategies can be read as the midpoint between universal and selected inclusion. By engaging in these strategies, service providers acknowledge the interconnected and interdependent relationship between various actors and assemblages in promoting marketplace access (i.e. disabled customers, service providers, material objects, organizational resources constraints, health and safety, stakeholder expectations, legal regulations), as well as the fine balance between regulation and reality when working towards marketplace accessibility. By showing how service providers need to temper both the realities and needs of disability alongside the realities and needs of companies/organisations, and by outlining the role of inclusionary strategies in counter-balancing a range of challenges including organizational resource constraints, safety concerns, and exposed differences that threaten to compromise access, this study reveals that the regulation versus reality argument is more complex than previously discussed. Indeed, companies are often criticized for working to meet legal disability regulations, which often do not fully meet the needs and requirements of disabled people (Beudaert, 2020; Higgins, 2020; Reeve, 2020). However, marketing research fails to outline and distinguish how movement beyond regulation can and should be done. In outlining and distinguishing between three forms of marketplace accessibility, including their inclusionary strategies that help service providers

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to overcome and counter-balance inherent challenges, this study begins to address this criticism, yet also acknowledges that facilitating marketplace accessibility is not an easy, but a highly complex and challenging process.

Third, in introducing a posthuman perspective to marketplace accessibility, we not only address marketing scholars' calls for a greater emphasis on posthumanism and embodiment (Beudaert, 2020) but also highlight posthumanism's empirical value in addressing issues of accessibility and disability inclusion in the marketplace. Thus, we contribute to existing literature on posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013) by showing how the three posthuman principles of interdependency, embodiment, and relationality can inform and transform market-based accessibility agendas. This is due, we argue, to: i) it's recognition of the interdependencies we all face (Goodley, 2017; Shakespeare, 2004) ii) it's embracement of embodied diversity and rejection of body conformity (Dolezal, 2017), and iii) it's focus on genuine human connection (Braidotti, 2013; Goodley *et al*., 2014; Dolezal, 2017). Such an approach begins to not only create physical access, but to signal a welcoming and inclusive market environment that renders no-one to feel excluded, unwelcome, and 'abnormal' (Baker, 2006). While our study focusses on marketplace accessibility for disabled, particularly for VI customers, we believe that the three interrelated forms of access (autonomous, embodied, and social) and their inclusionary strategies, may yield similarly interesting insights for other groups who experience embodied discrimination (Braidotti, 2013), including discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age.

Policy and Managerial Implications

Our research yields public policy and managerial implications. Whereas the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the US and the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in the UK have significantly widened physical access to marketplaces and society, it is the prioritization

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of architectural-structural barriers that has resulted in many companies working to meet legal disability laws and regulations, which often do not fully meet the needs of disabled people (Beudaert, 2020; Higgins, 2020; Reeve, 2020). By adopting a posthuman perspective on disability which is known for its affirmative and inclusive approach of being human (Braidotti, 2103; Goodley *et al*., 2014), our model provides a starting point for unravelling some larger systemic access barriers, such as the victimization of the disabled body or stigmatizing behaviours of fellow customers, when facilitating marketplace access. Thus, our study offers a preliminary roadmap for both public policy makers as well as service providers of how movement beyond regulation can be realistically and pragmatically achieved. That is, we offer a practical guide for policy makers and service providers on i) which types of access should and can be created, ii) what challenges may be encountered, ii) how to proactively manage these challenges, and, thus, iii) how to advance accessibility beyond mere regulations.

Our analysis unpacks how the three forms of marketplaces access manifest in the context of access programmes designed for VI customers in museums. We argue though that there are lessons learned beyond this. Various innovative practices and techniques such as audio descriptions involving word pictures, 3D prints for tactile experiences and scaling down effects, opportunities for co-creation and participation, and tours and events open to all (i.e. blind, partially sighted or sighted) bring autonomous, embodied and social access to life (see Figure 1 for an overview). We argue that these practices and techniques may indeed be innovative to, and appreciated by, all customers. Increased inclusion of audio descriptions would allow customers who struggle with literacy issues or dislike reading to feel more included and welcomed in museum. Whilst the inclusion of touch to general tours would help bring the art to life for all customers (not just those with VI), it would also render the need for touch tours obsolete as the tour would instinctively cater to VI needs. Thus, although we discuss the value of these practices and techniques from a VI perspective, such accessible innovation

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can be inclusive and engaging for all customers. Such insight, thus, has positive implications for both marketing practitioners and customers.

Furthermore, we focus on the context of access in and to museums due to their leadership in this domain. However, autonomous, embodied and social access can be seen in other corners of the marketplace. UK retailer Marks and Spencer, for example, provides publicly available information on in-store access provisions which facilitates autonomous access, offers information in large print which feeds into embodied access, and promotes disability awareness staff training which can be conducive for social access (https://www.accessable.co.uk/marks-and-spencer). This is commendable but can and should be further developed. We hope service providers, marketers, and retailers will find our three-fold understanding of access and how it manifests in museums (see Figure 1) useful to develop their access programmes for their (disabled) customers. Speaking more broadly, we hope this framework offers service providers, marketers, and retailers with hands-on guidance on how to "expand their customer base to be inclusive" (de Ruyter et al., 2022, p. 19) of disabled customers; a customer segment that is often overlooked, yet makes up of over 1 billion people globally (WHO, 2021).

Lastly, we would like to widen the outlook of this study i) by calling on marketing researchers to take on the task to study the grand challenges of our time, including reducing inequalities and discrimination against disabled people, and ii) by calling on policy makers and the business sector to partner with the academic marketing community to work towards solutions. Indeed, the business sector is vital for successfully working towards the UN's 2030 Agenda, yet they often lack appropriate tools to do so (Mende and Scott 2021). By identifying and systemically unpacking the strategies and practices that museums use to make their market offer more equitable and inclusive, this study shows that marketing scholars are well equipped

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3 to develop appropriate toolkits that can help businesses to become "catalyst[s] for positive
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5 change" (Mende and Scott 2021, p. 116; Berry et al. 2021).
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10 *Future Research and Limitations*
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12 This paper focuses on understanding marketplace accessibility from a service provider
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15 perspective and, thus, complements marketing research on access and disability to date, which
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17 is limited to a consumer-centric perspective. We believe future research would benefit from a
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19 poly-vocal approach that systematically and simultaneously includes the experiences and
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22 perspectives of numerous stakeholders, for example, customers, service providers, product
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24 designers, policy makers, or charities to help inform and advance marketplace access practices
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26 and policies. Resonating with principles of co-production (de Ruyter *et al.*, 2022) such an
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29 approach will be empathetic to the needs of all stakeholders and help uncover how services can
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31 be responsibly co-created in a manner that enables the marketplace to adapt to disability, rather
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33 than disabled customers having to adapt to the marketplace. This type of (marketing)
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36 scholarship can help advance UN SDG's such as reducing inequalities (SDG 10), enhancing
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38 good health and wellbeing (SDG 3), and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).
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40 Furthermore, this study focuses on VI (instead of other sensory or bodily impairments)
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42 and on museums. Future research can use our model to explore how marketplace accessibility
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45 can be facilitated with other disabilities and marketplace contexts. Future research may wish
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47 to unpack how different disabilities and disabled customers feel included or perceive improved
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49 access based on i) their level of acceptance of their disability, ii) their level of dependence, iii)
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52 their desire for independence. Moreover, we recommend future research to consider
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54 intersectional consumer identities linked to disability. This approach can carve out further
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56 marketplace accessibility challenges linked to disability and its intersection with, for instance,
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59 class, gender, age, sexual orientation or socioeconomic background. For example, to explore
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(ways to enhance) socio-economic situations for disabled populations, marketing researchers can collaborate with organisational scholars to understand how embodied differences can be appreciated and catered for not only in consumption but also workspaces. Lastly, this study focuses on the in-situ over the online experience. Given the growing popularity of online experiences, there is a need for further exploration in this area. Future research should explore how our three forms of access translate into online spaces; thus, advancing our work by highlighting strategies towards online marketplace accessibility.

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European Journal of Marketing

FIGURE 1: Service Providers' Strategies towards Marketplace Accessibility: Learnings from Museum Touch Tours designed for VI Customers

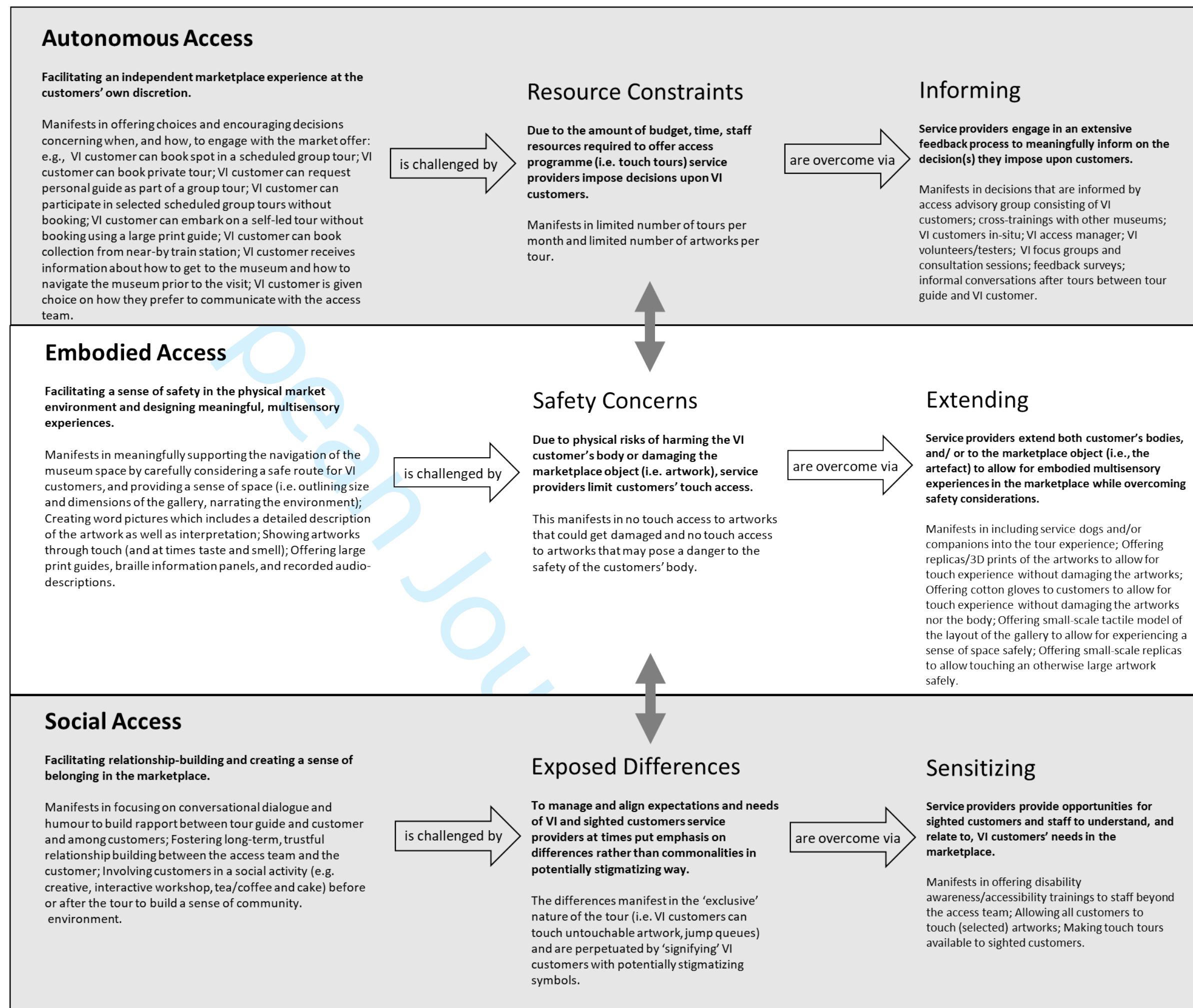

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Table 1: Sample Overview

Museum	Museum type	Organisational values	Annual visitors (2019 based on ALVA data)	Number of artefacts	Funding	Tour description	Interviewee job title/role description
A	Art, history, and performance museum	Open, tolerant, and diverse celebrations of difference.	3.9 million	2.8 million	Government funding for free general admissions plus self-generated funding (6.2% admission for special exhibitions; 32% fundraising; remaining not specified)	Individual tour; time of choice but needed to be mornings; one guide.	Equality and Access Advisor
B	Building of historic significance	Information not available	1 million	26,000+	Government funded	Group tour; set time; VI plus companion; two guides.	Visitor Service Officer
C	Art and historic artefacts museum	Champion the importance and inclusivity of making art, encourage people to explore how art is created, develop people's creative potential.	Site 1: 6+ million Site 2: 1.8 million	20+ million across both sites	Government funded for free general admission (38%) plus self-generated income (62% made up of admission to select exhibitions, gift shop, grants, fundraising)	Site 1: Individual tour; restricted time choice (mornings 10am); VI plus companion; one guide. Site 2: Group tour plus tea and coffee; set time; VI plus companions; two guides plus two supporters (carrying chairs and sight guiding).	Curator of Public Programme
D	Building of historic significance; artefacts museum	everyone to feel welcome and accepted, allow people to explore and ge minds racing	2.9 million	Multiple historic buildings and 10,000+ objects	4% donations; 32% income from trading activities; 64% income from charitable activities	Individual tour; choice of time, restricted time choice (off-peak and weekdays only); VI plus companion; two subsequent guides (one per building)	Visitor Service Coordinator

European Journal of Marketing

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E	Technology museum	Collaborative, welcoming, enterprising and forward looking.	Approx. 1 million (2018 annual review & 2019 annual charity report)	3,000+	73% donations 15% income from trading activities 12% income from charitable activities	Group tour plus workshop; set time; VI and non-VI visitors; two guides.	Producer of Adult Learning
F	Historic and cultural artefacts	To be representative of world cultures.	6+ million	8+ million	7,5% admission income 0.5 % trading income 92% donations	Individual tour; restricted time choice (off-peak weekdays only); VI plus companion; tour possible without guide; or with one guide.	Access Manager
G	Building and site of historic significance	Bold, embracing, imaginative and resourceful.	1.2 million overall, 70,000 to historic building	Over 400, and multiple historic buildings	33% Restricted grants & donations 26% Property & lease income 13% Grant-in-aid 10% service charges 8% admission & trading operations 10% other	Individual tour plus workshop and tea and biscuits; set time; VI plus companion; four guides.	Visitor Service Officer
H	Museum showcasing science and research	Diverse, experimental, bold, and surprising.	700,000 (2017)	250,000+	76% income from investments 24% Charitable income	Individual tour; restricted time choice (mornings); VI plus companion; one guide	Education Curator

European Journal of Marketing

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Responses to AE comments

Dear Editors,

Again, we would like to thank you for taking the time to offer your constructive and useful feedback. We are thrilled about the conditional acceptance of our manuscript. We made the minor changes to the paper that you requested (see table below for a detailed overview).

We thank you again for your time, feedback and support, and we hope that you will find our paper is now ready for acceptance. Many Thanks.

		Comment	**Response**
1	Abstract	Please just spell out 'Service Providers' in full at each instance rather than using SPs	We have done that now.
2	Abstract	In the method, please include the number of interviews that you conducted, and indicate something about their position with the museums.	We have now included both the number of interviews conducted and the interviewees' positions in the abstract.
3	Introduction	Can you revise the last sentence of the first paragraph so that it specifies the focus of your manuscript.	Thank you for this comment. We have added following sentence to the end of the first paragraph of the introduction: "This study seeks to address these issues by exploring the strategies that service providers can use to facilitate marketplace access for disabled customers."
4	Introduction	Remove the description of your method from the introduction (this should all be contained with the method section itself) and instead expand on your post-human paragraph - you need to embed your theoretical approach better within the introduction rationale.	We removed details about the method from the introduction. We kept information about the research contexts (i.e. museums and VI) though. In the review process, reviewers asked us to add this to the introduction to improve the logical flow of our argument. We also expanded on the posthuman paragraph to better explain our rational for choosing this theoretical lens.
5	Research Context and Method	Please use sub-headings in this section to break up the text into its requisite parts.	We changed the main heading of this section from "Research Context and Method" to "Research Method". We added three sub-headings to this section: 1. Research Context, 2. Data Collection, and 3. Data Analysis.
6	Research Context and Method	Again include the actual number of interviews conducted.	We included the number of interviews to the method section. We did one interview per museum, that is 8 interviews. This is also shown in Table 1.
7	Research Context and Method	Please provide more of a rationale for the approach to your interviews. You suggest that you covered a range of themes, was this all in one interview? You mention using semi-structured	We have added more detail to our interview approach. We now explain in more detail what we mean by 'semi-structured' interview, and why we chose this approach. We also added detail about which topics we

European Journal of Marketing

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		interviews where you would expect to have a structured set of themes going into the interview. Was this the case? On what did you base these themes etc.?	discussed during the interview. Lastly, we hope it is now clear that we did 8 interviews. We interviewed each service provider once. In this interview we covered all relevant questions.
8	Research Context and Method	You mention that you 'coded the data' but you do not specify whether you are referring to the interviews of the ethnography. Please be clearer in your method about how and what you did.	This is a very good point. We are now clearer about the fact that we coded both the interview and ethnographic data thematically and iteratively.
9	Research Context and Method	Also be clear on how you integrated the findings from your different data sources - otherwise it is difficult to follow your findings. Referencing figure 1 in your analysis section will help you a lot in linking up the analysis and the findings.	We are now more explicit about how we integrated the two data sources. In the data analysis section, we now state that "we integrated the interview and ethnographic data by using the field notes as means to triangulate and deepen the insights from the interviews." We also now reference Figure 1 in our data analysis section. We specify how the three post-human principles informed our data analysis, and where they manifest in our findings. That is, we state "Figure 1 represents a visual summary of this process with the posthuman principles of 1. interdependency underpinning autonomous access; 2. embodiment underpinning embodied access; and 3. relationality underpinning social access."
10	Findings	Please see my comment above - it is important that the reader knows on what elements of your data you are drawing to offer your insights.	To address this point, - we mentioned again both data sources at the beginning of the findings ("Informed by interview and ethnographic data, Figure 1 visually summarizes the full process"). - we also added source information to each data point in the findings section. That is, we specified whether the data point derives from interview or ethnographic data. In cases where the data point derives from an interview, we added the job title of the interviewed person in addition to the Museum descriptor (e.g. Interview with the Producer of Adult Learning, Museum E). In cases where the data point derives from the ethnography, we state which author write the field note, and which Museum it is referring to.
11	References	Please check your references, I noted that you had de Ruyter et al 2021, but 2022 in the references - do go through your references and check that they are all correct.	We corrected the de Ruyter et al. reference, and double checked the other references as well.

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