

# Engaging art consumers in the social media ecosystem

## Introduction

The arts have always operated in an environment of uncertainty (Burton, 2003), an environment characterised by a complicated mix of private and public support and diversity of audience (Butler, 2000). In most Western countries, increasing audience participation has become one of the primary objectives of arts policy. At the same time, austerity has curtailed government funding for arts and culture, and competition for the consumer's leisure time is increasing. The lines between artist and audience, producer and consumer, and actor and subject are blurring (Literat, 2012). These changes have forced art organisations to become market-oriented and to develop strategies to stabilise and diversify funding sources (Boorsma & Chiaravolloti, 2010).

Traditionally, art organisations have relied on tactical marketing with a greater focus on the promotional role of marketing (Conway & Whitelock, 2007). However, the increasing economic and social importance of the culture sector and the need for transparency and accountability requires marketing to be central to the organisation's mission (Butler, 2000). Furthermore, the needs and preferences of audiences have changed, and consumers increasingly expect personalised and individual control over their experiences (Novak-Leonard & Brown (2011). Contemporary culture participants are no longer satisfied to act solely as observers, but demand participation in entertainment activities and enjoy interacting with organisations in the co-creation of value (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Whereas the main goal of traditional marketing was deliverer a message, contemporary marketing focuses on building relationships and conversations with its audiences (Drury, 2008). In this contemporary marketing landscape, social media is revolutionising the way people communicate, collaborate, socialise, learn, consume and create (Aral, Dellarocas & Godes, 2013; Hansen, Shneiderman & Smith, 2010; Yoo & Gretzel, 2016). By enabling people to share and interact with each other as part of everyday life, social media enables content to become more communal than ever before (Drury, 2008; Couldry, 2012). Organisations have become mere nodes in complex networks where messages are broadcast and modulated by users themselves (Aral, Dellarocas & Godes, 2013).

German suppliers in the performing arts and fine arts are increasingly exploring the possibilities of social media for their marketing objectives, however, until now, arts marketing has seen hardly any research on this topic (Hausmann, 2012). This working paper explores the use of social media by arts organisations in the UK. In this regard, the analysis will use the framework for arts marketing suggested by Wiid and Mora-Avila (in press) in which social media is the point where co-creation between organisations and consumers takes place. First, the paper briefly outlines the method used, followed by an overview of arts marketing and social media. Next, the paper will briefly reference managerial implications and will conclude with the direction for future research. Given the space limitations of this working paper, only a selection of the literature reviewed thus far is referred to and presented in condensed format. The final publication, of approximately 6,000 words, will include the findings and discussion of the social media use in a sample of UK arts organisations.

## Method

In the UK, the arts are typically delivered through non-profit organisations (Scheff & Kotler, 1996), and thus, the sample for this study was taken from the UK Charity Commission's database of arts charities ([www.charitycommission.gov.uk](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk)). Four keywords, orchestra, theatre, opera and visual arts, were used to search the Charities Commission's database for

registered charities in each of the following income ranges: £25,001 - £100,000, £100,001 - £500,000, £500,001 - £1,000,000, £1,000,001 - £10,000,000, and £10,000,001 and above. The search resulted in 874 charities, 394 in the first category, 293 in the second, 48 in the third, 112 in the fourth, and 27 in the fifth. This research will only include the 187 arts organisations in the top three (third, fourth and fifth) income ranges.

Secondary data will be collected from two sources: first, general company information as contained in the Charity Commission's database (income, expenditure, employees, volunteers) and second, data used by each of the social media applications such as followers, following, posts, likes, and so on. The study will focus on social networking sites, such as Facebook and LinkedIn, which allow a user to connect directly with another user or users through groups, networks and location, social streaming sites, such as YouTube and Instagram, which allow for the publishing and sharing of digital photos or video, microblogging sites, such as Twitter and Tumblr, which allow for the posting of short entries, and social blogging sites, such as WordPress and Blogger, which allow which are used for the recording of opinions, stories, articles and links to other websites (Chaffey & Smith, 2013).

## **Literature review**

### ***Arts marketing***

The charitable aspect of arts organisations suggests that community and politics, and their role and influence on people and places, are under the spotlight (Hughes & Luksetich, 2004). Arts organisations are neutral spaces where people can be inspired, and Doeser & Vona (2016) suggest the arts can be used to stir up, marshal, enable and inhibit the way individuals engage with the world around them.

From a relational perspective on art, arts organisations are engaged in both market exchange and artistic exchange relationships with their customers. The arts consumer, therefore, plays a crucial role in the art process by giving meaning to the artistic metaphor. This co-creative response is vital to the achievement of an organisation's artistic mission (Boorsma, 2006). Culture participants no longer want to only experience the product, they also want to contribute to the organisation through development of the art product, for example through affiliation, posting of reviews and comments, and uploading personal art work (Jenkins *et al.*, 2009).

Furthermore, as cultural experiences can only be judged during or after using a service or participating in an activity, there is a high share of trust characteristics. The greater the uncertainty of potential customers prior to the use of a service, the higher their perceived risk of making the wrong choice, and the higher their requirement for information (Hausmann, 2012). Given the experiential nature of art, the information created by other arts consumers in communities where members have similar interests and shared values will carry more credibility (Dahl, 2015; Yoo & Gretzel, 2016; Grigore & Rosenkranz, 2011).

### ***Social media***

Social media refers to online applications that individuals and organisations use to create, edit, disseminate and share content. These resources include blogs, vlogs, social networks sites, message boards, podcasts, public bookmarking and wikis. Popular examples of social media applications include Flickr (online photosharing), Youtube (online video sharing), Wikipedia (reference), Facebook and MySpace (networking) and Twitter (Constantinides, 2014; Drury, 2008). These applications have changed the way organisations relate to the marketplace and society, in particular with respect to consumer preferences and targeted

marketing techniques (Aral, Dellarocas & Godes, 2013; Hill, Provost & Volinsky, 2006; Trusov, Bodapati & Bucklin, 2010; Aral & Walker, 2011, 2012).

Social media characteristics include social interaction, social collaboration, content sharing, user-generated content and social connectedness (Doyle, Sammon & Neville, 2015). Through social media, users are encouraged to interact with each other in their communities, are empowered to collaborate at various levels of participation, and are moved to create and share content (Doyle, Sammon & Neville, 2015; Grigore & Rosenkranz, 2011). The more users contribute, the more their social connectedness is strengthened and multiplies (Doyle, Sammon & Neville, 2015). This sense of community building and identification, however conditional and however brief, is a core prerogative of participatory art (Strickland, 2011).

Organisations generally use social media to promote themselves and communicate with consumers and society. When organisations optimise the level of their social media functionality, Aral and Walker (2011) and Dou, Niculescu & Wu (2013) suggest the network effects can have dramatic implications for consumer demand, competition, and organisation strategy. Social media can also bring together organisation-produced content and user-generated content (Drury, 2008).

An active approach will require the arts organisation to use blogs, forums, content communities and content aggregators for online PR and direct marketing, to engage with advocates of the offering, and to influence the judgment and creativity of consumers (Constantinides, 2014). Such an approach will be particularly apt in arts organisations where both high-quality and behavioural uncertainty on the part of the participant prevail (Hausmann, 2012).

### **Managerial implications and further research**

As arts organisations become market-oriented and develop strategies to diversify their funding sources, they must come to terms with the role of technology in marketing communications, and include Social Media engagement as strategic imperative (Constantinides, 2014). The pressure is on to engage with their customers in the social media ecosystem and seek to create an adapted environment where all stakeholders engage with each other.

The full paper will consider Kaplan and Haenlein's (2010) social media classification based on the two key elements of social presence and media richness, and the social processes of self-presentation and self-disclosure as well as Kietzmann *et al.*'s (2011) seven functional blocks of social media. It will also explore the issues around whether arts organisations should engage in social media, and which media would provide the most potential for growth in a contemporary cooperative environment.

### **Conclusion**

Our working paper's main contributions are (1) to analyse the use of social media in arts organisations in the UK, (2) to highlight the need for arts organisations to embrace social media in their marketing efforts, and (3) to provide practical recommendations for arts marketers. The future development of this paper has been clearly outlined.

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