

Marketing the Arts: A Comparative Analysis of the
Social Media Practices of Select Performing Arts Centers

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ABSTRACT

MARKETING THE ARTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL MEDIA PRACTICES OF SELECT PERFORMING ARTS CENTERS

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Performing arts centers (PACs) provide a cultural hub that aids in increasing civic engagement and social capital within a community. Attendance in the performing arts has been on the decline, which threatens the cultural richness of communities across the country. The purpose of this study was to examine the social media marketing practices of select California performing arts centers. The PAC, San Luis Obispo, San Diego Symphony and Segerstrom Center for the Arts were selected to be examined in this study. This was done by strategically analyzing the Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts for each of the three PACs utilizing a case study guide developed by the researcher. It was concluded that the social media strategy for performing arts organizations should express a variety of media types and original content that appeals specifically to audience interests and trends. Recommendations include increased post frequency and co-created content with users.

Keywords: marketing, social media marketing, attendance, performing arts, performing arts centers, audience development.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background of Study

Performing arts centers (PACs), however small or grand, serve as a community space for both cultural and creative expression. They offer a platform for local performance groups to showcase their talents to the public or for touring acts to bring global influence to a regional stage. The availability of artistic experiences such as theater, dance and music can have great impacts on a community's social and financial well-being. The presence of local arts venues within a region has been shown to increase civic engagement by providing creative platforms for community involvement in the arts (Rabkin, 2017).

Attendance to performing arts experiences such as symphonies, operas, theater and classical dance has been on the decline since 2002 (Silber & Triplett, 2015). While the cognitive and social benefits of young adults attending such events have been studied significantly, attendance is typically seen in older generations. Each year the members of younger generations, such as Millennials, participating in and attending performing arts events continually declines (Silber & Triplett). Loss of millennial participation in the arts could have significant negative impacts on the creative and cultural health of future communities, as well as a decline in civic engagement and social capital in areas lacking a performance art outlet.

Approaching strategic marketing plans for PACs to increase overall attendance is a complicated issue because the desired aesthetic and artistic experiences in performing

arts center programming across generational and demographic groups is varied. So, determining audience motivations to attend performing arts events is key in understanding the best marketing practices to target them. The purpose of this study was to examine the social media marketing practices of select California performing arts centers.

Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic OneFile, Academic Search Premier and Google Scholar. This review of literature includes the following subsections: marketing, social media marketing, performing arts attendance, performing arts marketing and audience development.

The conceptualization, development and implementation of a marketing strategy is akin to that of orchestrating a symphony (Rajagopal, 2011). It requires delving into an analysis of an organization's values in order to match them with the values of a target market (Terech, 2018). Terech describes this process as "abstract and intellectual" as it attempts to determine how an organization's product or service can bring value and opportunity to a consumer (p. 45). This can be best identified by strategically segmenting the market, analyzing a targeted segment and positioning the product or service to intentionally intercept the selected market (Olaru, 2009). Olaru also suggests that an effective segmentation, targeting and positioning model requires qualitative and quantitative demographic research on the target consumers. While this traditional form of

marketing has been historically effective, in the last ten years the emergence of marketing through social media has effectively changed the landscape of brand promotion and targeted marketing (Venkatraman, 2017).

Social media is a collection of online platforms that allow users to share creative content with others (Cimcek, 2018). This digital form of communication has become a fundamental element of society as it is widely used by individuals of varying demographics globally (Venkatraman, 2017). The most commonly used social media platforms include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest and Yelp as well as a range of others. Functionality of these platforms extends beyond socialization as these universally accessed websites can also be utilized in a business capacity (Momany & Alshboul, 2016). These social media platforms allow consumers to establish an active, two-way connection with a business' brand and dynamically interact with their content. The success of an organization's social media presence lies in the responsiveness they have to consumer demand and current trends (Momany & Alshboul). The instantaneous impact of social media creates an opportunity for organizations to virally increase brand awareness to an extensive global market.

A wide variety of marketing opportunities exist within the realm of social media. Platforms such as Facebook offer an all-encompassing advertising opportunity with which organizations can establish a web presence (Venkatraman, 2017). The creation of a business page allows an organization to develop online advertisements and track the success of campaigns through click, like and impression metrics. These types of social media platforms are effective in generating page traffic and driving sales. Other platforms, such as Instagram, allow businesses to focus on customer relationship

management (Carlson & Lee, 2015). Expression of a clear brand message through social media is an effective way to establish an emotional connection with a consumer, thus strengthening the brand-consumer relationship (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Currently, the demographic range of individuals that use social media is vast and brand messages have a wide reach. It now remains the responsibility of the organization to ensure they are telling the right story to the right audience.

Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) state that, in the scope of social media marketing, the role of the consumer is an active one and that businesses are now “co-creating brand content in collaboration with consumers” in order to stay on trend (p. 189). They propose social media marketing as a form of storytelling where the leading characters are the targeted consumers of the product or service. When company and consumer brand messages align, consumers are then motivated to express brand loyalty on their own social media platforms within their unique virtual community. This remains true when used to examine the marketing opportunities present for performing arts centers (PACs). When a strategic social media marketing plan effectively and consistently communicates a brand message to audience members, they will feel more personally connected to the brand (Singh & Sonnenburg). Because attendance to performing arts events is declining, utilizing strategic marketing to capture and maintain an audience base is essential for PACs to maintain economic viability (Kemp & Poole, 2016).

Performing arts attendance has been on a general decline in American adult populations for decades as has demand for performance art forms such as classical music, dance and theater (Silber & Triplett, 2015; Kemp & Poole, 2016). In 1992, the percentage of adults that attended a single performing arts event within a 12-month period was 41%

compared to 33.4% in 2012 (Silber & Triplett). The disparity in attendance over time can be seen across a variety of demographics nationwide. Overall, the highest levels of attendance in 2012 were seen in white adults aged 55-65 years old with a college education, while the lowest levels of attendance were seen in Hispanic young adults aged 18-24 years old with a high school education or less (Silber & Triplett). This decline in overall performing arts attendance can be financially detrimental to Performing Arts Centers as well as diminishing to the civic engagement and social capital in the communities that surround them (Kemp & Poole; Stern & Seifert, 2009).

With the goal of driving audience attendance, understanding audience motivations to attend performing arts events is key in the development of an effective targeted marketing strategy. Rooij and Bastiaansen (2017) identify eight general motivations for individuals to attend a performing arts event: aesthetics, cognitive stimulation, relaxation, transcendence, entertainment, variety and novelty, bonding and distinction (pg. 119). By building these motivations into the foundation of a marketing strategy, performing arts organizations can effectively appeal to the needs of the consumer prior to physical event attendance. Alternately, familiarity with some of the common barriers to participation in arts events is also useful in outlining marketing goals. According to LaPlaca Cohen (2017), the most common barriers to cultural participation are “It’s not for someone like me” and “Its value is not worth the cost” (p. 41). By structuring a marketing platform to communicate inclusiveness within the organization’s programming and unequivocal value in attendance, an organization can assist future audience members in overcoming barriers.

By valuing the motivations and barriers that drive potential audience members to attend or not attend events, a performing arts organization is assuming a customer-oriented marketing model. Rooij and Bastiaansen (2017) determined that highlighting the customer in a performing arts marketing strategy is most effective in gaining and maintaining an audience.

In addition to appealing to the motivations and barriers held by potential consumers, performing arts centers should additionally apply the social media marketing principles outlined for service-providing companies (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013). Not only are these principles useful in maintaining current audiences but for attracting future audiences, which promotes perpetual demand for the arts. Hausmann and Poellmann identified four distinct principles: promotion and communication, word of mouth, market research and innovation management and reputation management (pp. 149-150). Promotion and communication is the active process by which an organization distributes their brand and promotional material. Word of mouth is the passive manner in which the values of an organization are communicated throughout the public space. Market research ensures that an organization is remaining current and privy to the sociography of their target market. Finally, innovation and reputation management are the actions taken by an organization in response to changes in the market. These principles are ideal outcomes of any marketing endeavor and should therefore be a focus of social media marketing strategies for performing arts services (Hausmann and Poellmann). In order for performing arts organizations to emphatically drive attendance, their marketing strategies must authentically combine audience motivations with these marketing principles, while taking into account always audience barriers to participation.

The goal for any marketing strategy should be establishing a positive, two-way communication with consumers (Hegner, Beldad & Langenhorst, 2016). This allows an organization to be responsive and to understand the expectations maintained by consumers of the performing arts. Due to the intangibility of performing arts services, organizations must employ strategic social media marketing techniques that assign value to the experiences. When there is perceived value in an experience, audience members are more likely to attend that activity with frequency (Kemp & Poole, 2016). The concept of assigning value to a performing arts experience additionally addresses one of the barriers to arts participation outlined by LaPlaca Cohen (2017). Additionally, cultivating value for audience members also enforces and promotes the concept of audience development. Audience development is the efforts put forth by an organization to build audiences in distinctive ways that addresses the needs of a variety of demographics (Lindelof, 2014). Developing social media for the performing arts provides an opportunity to facilitate market research and manage the reputation of the organization so as to fully address the audience development needs of the organization (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the social media marketing practices of select California performing arts centers.

Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the social media marketing practices of California performing arts centers?
2. What type of content is typically posted by California performing arts centers?
3. What is the digital relationship between California performing arts centers and their customer base?
4. How does social media marketing practice correlate with online followership?
5. How effective is social media content variety?
6. How effective is performing arts center communication with customers on social media?

Chapter 2

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to examine the social media marketing practices of select California performing arts centers. This chapter includes the following sections: description of organizations, description of instrument, and description of procedures.

Description of Organization/s

A comparative analysis of the Performing Arts Center, San Luis Obispo, San Diego Symphony, and Segerstrom Center for the Arts was conducted for this study. The Performing Arts Center, San Luis Obispo (The PAC) is a 1,286-seat hall located on the Central Coast of California, specifically on the California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo campus (Performing Arts Center of San Luis Obispo, 2018). The performance hall showcases a mix of live art including theater, dance and music seasonally from September to May (Cal Poly Arts, 2019). The PAC serves the county of San Luis Obispo, which has a population of about 283,405 people (United States Census Bureau, 2018).

The Copley Symphony Hall in San Diego, California is a world-class facility resident to the San Diego Symphony (San Diego Symphony, 2019). The hall has a capacity of 2,248 people and showcases over 140 classical music performances year-round. The San Diego Symphony resides in San Diego County, which has a population of approximately 3.3 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2018).

The Segerstrom Center for the Arts, the performing arts center of Costa Mesa, California, is a 3,000-seat performing arts center that features world-class artistic talent in the form of theater, ballet and music presentations year-round (Segerstrom Center for the Arts, 2015). The population of this city, located in Orange County, is 113,825 people (United States Census Bureau, 2018).

Description of Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a case study guide developed by the researcher (see Appendix A). It was designed to compare the social media practices of the three performing arts organizations: The PAC, San Luis Obispo, The San Diego Symphony and The Segerstrom Center for the Arts. The instrument consists of elements that were designed to analyze each organization's activity on three of the most used social media sites: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter (Murnane, 2018). The instrument was utilized to assess social media engagement for each of the performing arts organizations by examining the following: Number of followers, frequency of posts, type of posts, content of posts, originality and customer interaction.

A pilot study was conducted using the Luther Burbank Center for the Arts' social media accounts to determine the effectiveness of the instrument. Following the pilot, the instrument questions were adjusted to better reflect research questions. The language was also changed to allow for better qualitative analysis.

Description of Procedures

The purpose of this study was to examine the social media marketing practices of select California performing arts centers. The instrument utilized in this study was a case study guide developed by the researcher. The data were collected for each of the three performing arts organizations by accessing their public social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. The homepages on each of the social media sites were used primarily to collect both the quantitative and qualitative data in this study. When applicable, the media and photo tabs on Facebook and Twitter were utilized to gather detailed information about content quality and style. Additionally, the comments sections of selected posts were accessed to analyze customer-organization interactions.

Chapter 3

PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the social media practices of select California performing arts centers. A comparative analysis was utilized to examine the Performing Arts Center, San Luis Obispo, San Diego Symphony and Segerstrom Center for the Arts. This chapter includes the following subsections: content type, frequency and followers, content descriptions and customer-organization interactions.

Content Type, Frequency and Followers

The Performing Arts Center, San Luis Obispo has the smallest following across the three platforms with 4,461 Facebook followers, 1,041 Instagram followers and 3,082 Twitter followers. The PAC also posts the least frequently on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, with weekly averages of 4.25, 2.5 and 0.5 posts respectively. On Facebook, the media type is primarily in the form of events and photos, however video and text posts are utilized as well. On Instagram, the PAC posts mostly photos and a limited number of videos. Instagram also has an Instagram Story feature, where organizations can post live videos and photos throughout the day. The PAC uses this feature minimally, with one collection of archived stories about an upcoming comedy event featured on their page. The PAC is not frequently active on Twitter, but the posts to this account are majorly borrowed video clips.

The San Diego Symphony has a greater following than the PAC on the three social media sites with 49,369 Facebook followers, 7,893 Instagram followers and 11,800

Twitter followers. The Symphony's weekly post averages are 5.92 on Facebook, 5.08 on Instagram and 7.75 on Twitter. Their Facebook posts express a variety of media types including events, photos, videos, text, weblinks and interactive polls. On Instagram, the Symphony posts an equal mix of videos and photos as well as five Instagram Story archives and current Instagram Story activity. The Symphony's Twitter presence is the most active across their social media accounts and features a mix of video clips, photo galleries, retweets and text posts.

The Segerstrom Center for the Arts has the largest social media following with 99,204 Facebook followers, 17,300 Instagram followers and 12,500 Twitter followers. They also post the most frequently compared to the other two performing arts organizations with weekly post averages of 20.75 on Facebook, 20.83 on Instagram and 21.33 on Twitter. On Facebook, Segerstrom posts a mix of events, photos, videos, weblinks and text posts. Instagram also consists of a variety of photo and video content in addition to six Instagram Story archives and almost daily story activity. The Segerstrom Twitter profile consists of primarily photo and text posts with very little video content.

Content Descriptions

The PAC's social media content is largely the same across the three social media platforms. Primarily all posted content consists of the same posters and videos that specifically promote upcoming events at the Performing Arts Center. The majority of these posts are non-original content borrowed from the performing artists' and groups' promotional materials. The PAC also posts a small amount of non-promotional video content on Facebook and Twitter, that features videos linked from YouTube, a video

sharing site. An example of this type of non-promotional content includes an educational video displaying how ballet pointe shoes are made in the US. Most of the organization's social media content, both event and non-event oriented, is posted on the PAC's Facebook account. This account utilizes the main features of Facebook by including an events calendar, photo galleries and video links. The organization posts to Instagram about half as much as Facebook and a quarter as much to Twitter. The content posted to these sites is borrowed from their Facebook account.

The content posted to the San Diego Symphony's three social media platforms consists of primarily internally-generated original content. The posts include a mix of materials promoting upcoming events, posts showcasing specific artists and general posts about the San Diego performing arts community. The organization posts almost equally to Facebook and Instagram and the content posted on these platforms is mainly promotional. The promotional content on Facebook includes original videos created to attract younger audiences to the symphony and posters promoting upcoming performances. On Instagram, the posts consist of event promotions, but also user generated content where the organization invites their followers to send in videos of themselves singing and playing music; some of these videos are then reposted on the Symphony's page. San Diego Symphony posts most frequently to Twitter, where they also have the largest following. The content of the posts to this account maintains the greatest variety including promotional material, user generated content, event photo galleries, musician features, performing arts fun facts and Spotify links to classical music.

The Segerstrom Center for the Arts has the highest posting frequency compared to the other organizations across all three platforms. The material includes a mix of

borrowed and internally-generated content that is designed to promote events and programs as well as the performing arts in general. In addition to a full calendar of performing arts events, Segerstrom also promotes their School of Dance and Music for Children with Disabilities on all of their social media platforms. Typically, the organization posts similar content multiple times per day on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. On Facebook, the content is event-centric while the Instagram and Twitter feeds are a mix of posts promoting both events and the children's program.

Customer-Organization Interactions

The Performing Arts Center's interaction with users is minimal on their social media platforms. On Instagram and Twitter, interaction is limited to user comments on posts where organization response is not typically common. On Facebook, there is an option for user recommendations and reviews of which there are 54. This option allows users to rate the organization out of five; the PAC currently has a rating of 4.7.

The San Diego Symphony receives a number of user comments on the three social media platforms but does not typically respond to them individually. On Facebook, the Symphony does not offer the recommendation and review option, so the page does not have the 1-5 rating. However, the organization does create a number of opportunities for users to digitally interact with the Symphony in the form of interactive polls and user generated content. Participation in these allows users the opportunity to be featured on the organization's social media accounts.

The Segerstrom Center for the Arts presents a variety of opportunities for customer interaction on their social media platforms. On Facebook, Segerstrom allows

for recommendations and reviews and has over 1,000 responses. The organization currently maintains a 4.7 out of 5 rating on their Facebook account. On Instagram and Twitter, the organization also creates a number of interactive games in which they encourage their followers to participate. For example, prior to the release of their Broadway series, the organization posted a “Name that Broadway show” haiku every day giving clues about which shows would be presented this season. Followers were encouraged to interact and post their guess for which theater production the haiku was hinting.

Chapter 4

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Attendance to performing arts events has been on the decline in the United States for decades, and a cost-effective way to drive attendance is to utilize social media services to market performing arts centers (Silber & Triplett, 2015; Kemp & Poole, 2016). This concluding chapter includes the following: a discussion of the major findings, limitations of the research, conclusions based on research questions, and recommendations for the future.

Discussion

For California performing arts centers, high posting frequency and varied media type correlates with the highest number of followers across the three social media platforms studied. Implementation of these social media practices indicates increased page traffic, which ultimately leads to increased brand awareness and sales (Venkatraman, 2017). As indicated by the social media practices of the Segerstrom Center for the Arts and the San Diego Symphony, generating media content that is varied in type and style allows for peaking consumer interest and results in an increased number of impressions and clicks. By placing value in posting a variety of media types at a rate of more than five times per week, performing arts centers are able to stay current on consumer social media feeds and will therefore be at the forefront of consumer minds. Additionally, the habit of increased post frequency and variety assists performing arts

centers with remaining responsive to consumer demands and trends (Momany & Alshboul, 2016). This will in turn lead to increased generation of more relevant content to the consumer and strengthen the organization-consumer relationship (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012).

Social media content for performing arts centers should maintain a modern feel and incorporate a variety of posts that extend beyond showcasing upcoming events. This content should remain relevant to the performing arts and consumer interests, while additionally demonstrating a unified brand aesthetic and intention. Rooji and Bastiaansen (2017) highlight audience motivations for performing arts attendance. These motivations, which include entertainment, bonding and relaxation, should be highlighted in the social media content posted by performing arts centers in order to establish a deep emotional connection with potential audience members (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012). Mindful incorporation of these values and motivations into social media content sets a significant precedent for consumer expectations prior to physically attending a performing arts event. Performing arts center social media should additionally incorporate these values into their overall brand image, thus allowing for brand alignment with that of consumers. Users are more likely to express strong brand loyalty when the values of the performing arts center align with their own values (Singh & Sonnenburg). Mutual brand standards create an effective platform for two-way communication between the performing arts center and their social media followers, which prompt opportunity for additional relationship development.

The relationship between an organization and its consumers is derived from ample opportunity for consumers to participate with the organization's social media

content. Research conducted for this study indicates that collaborative consumer participation is vital in the maintenance of a current and relevant social media presence. Energetic and authentic engagement with followers encourages user contribution to online activations and content, which in turn provides an organization with dynamic, co-created material to post. This mutualistic approach to content generation is ultimately beneficial for both the performing arts organization and the consumer, thus creating strong brand loyalty. Performing arts centers should approach social media marketing as a tool to effectively connect with their consumer base with the goal of understanding their needs, rather than simply being informative. Hausmann and Poellman (2013) identified innovation management and reputation management as being one of the key principles in performing arts marketing. Applications of these concepts should be immediately derived from consumer feedback and trends.

Several limitations may have impacted the results of this study. The sample size of performing arts organizations that was examined for this study was small and is not necessarily congruent with trends for all California performing arts centers. Additionally, the researcher is employed by one of the performing arts centers researched in this study, which may have impacted data collection and analysis. Finally, social media itself limits data to only those that have access to and use the internet, which is not inclusive to all performing arts patrons. Although the results of this study do include some limitations, the processes for acquiring the information in this study was intentionally systematic and diligent therefore the findings can still be considered valid.

Social media is an effective tool in not only promoting the performing arts but connecting with patrons of performing arts centers in a unique and dynamic way. When

effectively and consistently managed, social media creates an opportunity for performing arts centers to listen to the needs of their consumer-base and respond directly to consumer demand. It also provides an interactive platform for performing arts centers to establish their brand and align it with the values and motivations of current and future audience members.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. While California performing arts organizations do typically post a significant amount of event promotions, those with the most user engagement also post content that appeals to consumer trends, brand alignment and values and motivations.
2. Posting a variety of media content (photos, videos, text etc.) more than five times per week is the best social media marketing practice for California performing arts organizations.
3. The digital relationship between California performing arts organizations is strongest when performing arts organizations incorporate the interests and needs of the consumer into their content and offer opportunities for active collaboration.
4. California performing arts organizations that post the most frequently with the most variety have the highest number of followers on their social media platforms.

5. Social media content variety is an important element of performing arts marketing because it makes for a more dynamic social media page that attracts a larger number of followers.
6. California performing arts organizations that actively communicate and interact with their followers on social media have a higher ratings and followership.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Social media should be utilized by all performing arts organizations in order to stay current with industry trends and responsive to consumer demand.
2. To increase followership, performing arts organizations should aim to post between 5-10 posts per week that consist of a variety of media content.
3. Social media posts for performing arts organizations should consist of content that effectively communicates their brand message and actively responds to consumer trends.
4. Performing arts organizations should aim to design content that encourages user participation.
5. Future research should examine a larger number of performing arts organizations globally to determine the value of active social media presence and its impact on attendance.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

	Facebook	Instagram	Twitter
1. How many followers on the given social media site does the organization currently possess?			
The PAC, San Luis Obispo			
The San Diego Symphony			
The Segerstrom Center for the Arts			
2. How frequently has the organization posted content from their social media account in the last year?			
The PAC, San Luis Obispo			
The San Diego Symphony			
The Segerstrom Center for the Arts			
3. What mix of media are used in the posts on the organizations social media accounts? (text, photos, videos etc.)			
The PAC, San Luis Obispo			
The San Diego Symphony			
The Segerstrom Center for the Arts			
4. Describe the content posted on the organization's social media accounts?			

The PAC, San Luis Obispo			
The San Diego Symphony			
The Segerstrom Center for the Arts			
5. Does the organization generate original content?			
The PAC, San Luis Obispo			
The San Diego Symphony			
The Segerstrom Center for the Arts			
6. How does the organization interact with and respond to their followers directly on the social media account?			
The PAC, San Luis Obispo			
The San Diego Symphony			
The Segerstrom Center for the Arts			