PERCEIVED IMAGE AND CUSTOMER RESPONSE: A CASE OF TWO THEATRES

by

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INTRODUCTION

Identity is a vital and primal part of human nature. Our awareness of self begins at an early age and we continue to develop our identity as we learn and mature, selectively adopting the values and beliefs that guide and drive our behavior. Identity differentiates us from others by describing who or what we believe we are. Throughout recorded history, man has chosen to associate with those individuals and societal groups that share his core values and beliefs. Identity is a root construct that addresses the very meaning and character of an entity, its "internalized cognitive structure of what [it] stands for," and its "distinctiveness and oneness" (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton 2000: 13).

Like individuals, businesses also establish and manage an identity. An organization requires an identity in order to construct a sense of how it is situated amongst and interacts with other organizations, groups, and people (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton 2000). Like individual identity, organizational identity addresses 'who or what we believe we are' as an organizational entity. Constructed of core values and beliefs, identity gives meaning to the organization and it distinguishes the organization from other, similar organizations for managers and stakeholders (Albert and Whetten 1985; Busson 1993). As such, organizational identity is the cornerstone of differentiation and positioning (Ackerman, 2000; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001) and it can be a source of sustainable competitive advantage that is unique and inimitable (Ackerman 2000; Pratt and Foreman 2000).

Statements concerning *organizational identity, herein defined as the core values and beliefs that guide and drive behavior* (Ackerman 2000; Albert, Ashforth and Dutton 2000; Albert and Whetten 1985; Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997; Pratt and Foreman 2000), can be shared internally and also can be projected out to external constituents, ultimately influencing external image perceptions. The identity projection process involves communicating the organization's identity to external constituents. Thus, whereas identity can be thought of as who or what we *believe* we are, projected identity can be conceptualized as who or what we *say* we are to external stakeholders. More specifically, *projected identity is defined as the set of core organizational values and beliefs presented by the organization to external stakeholders*. Projected identity is that aspect of organizational positioning that speaks to what the organization says about itself – literally and symbolically -- to establish that it its core values and beliefs are unique in the eyes of customers. These key constructs – organizational identity and projected identity – mirror the traditional distinctions within the individual identity literature between private perceptions of self and the presentation of self to outsiders (Albert and Whetten 1985). Projected identity represents what the organization says about its identity to the outside world, whereas *organizational image represents external stakeholders' impression of the organization*. All three constructs are pertinent to relationship marketing.

The relationship marketing literature has established the benefit an organization realizes when it successfully manages enduring and robust relationships with customers (e.g., Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Past research also has established that organizational values are particularly relevant for understanding a firm's relationships with its key stakeholders since a sharing of values can serve as the basis for relationship formation and subsequent financial support when mutual trust and commitment exist (Morgan and Hunt 1994; Voss, Cable, and Voss 2000).

Despite its contributions, the relationship marketing literature has neglected to address some interesting theoretical issues regarding organizational identity management that are likely encountered by many, if not all, organizations. These issues form the following key questions addressed by this research. Namely:

- When firms intentionally manipulate or package their identity in order to appear to possess certain values that appeal to a particular stakeholder, does it benefit or harm customers' response to the organization?

- Is it important for an organization to project a unified message about organizational identity to those external to the firm?

- Does it matter whether stakeholders are responding to an organization's true values, or if they are responding to their image of an organization's values that may or may not be an authentic representation of the organization's identity?

In other words, does marketing success hinge on the fact that, as an organization, we fully agree on who or what we believe and say we are? Or does positive customer response result from certain perceptions of an organization's image, regardless of whether those images accurately reflect the organization's identity? Put more formally, the key question addressed in this research is as follows: What are the effects of agreement versus disagreement regarding organizational identity and projected identity on: 1) the clarity of customers' perceived organizational image; 2) customers' level of relational motivation; and 3) customer satisfaction?

This research will attempt to incorporate insights gleaned from a review of existing literature and qualitative and empirical studies to answer the questions posed above. In doing so, we use the original term "authenticity rifts" to represent internal disagreements with respect to identity and projected identity. To date, no published research has empirically examined whether a unified, solid and well-communicated identity is a key to superior customer response. This research seeks to fill that gap and contribute to a greater understanding of organizational identity management.

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING, ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITY, AND PROJECTED IDENTITY

The value of relationship marketing to arts organizations is widely accepted (e.g., Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Rentschler et al. 2002; Voss and Voss 1997). Berry (1983) defines relationship marketing as attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships. We argue that successful management of organizational identity, and projected identity is key to successful relationship marketing.

Relationship Marketing and Trust

One of the key elements of relationship formation is the establishment of mutual trust between the relational exchange partners (Berry 1983, Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Grönroos 1990; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Trust results from one exchange partner believing that the other is reliable and that it has a high level of integrity, which is associated with honesty, fairness, credibility, competence, responsibility, helpfulness, and benevolence (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Furthermore, the framework proposed and tested by Morgan and Hunt (1994) indicates that shared values are a key element to the establishment of trust. If we accept Morgan and Hunt's (1994) framework, then we accept that organizational values are a key determinant of mutual trust, which is necessary for the relationship to endure.

Together, these compelling findings regarding antecedents to relationship formation raise interesting questions. Specifically:

- What would be the effects on relationship development if trust were ascribed to a false set of organizational values?

- If a relational exchange partner is reliable and appears to be honest – regardless of whether it really is – will its ability to establish relationships vary depending on whether the honesty is genuine?

Collins and Porras (1996: 71) assert that organizational identity is based on core values and ideology, and that, "Ideology has to be authentic. You cannot fake it." This research seeks to discover whether they are right or wrong, and if they are wrong, does it make a difference.

Relationship Marketing and Message Clarity

Aside from questions of truth or authenticity of organizational identity and projected identity, questions of clarity also arise. In order for internal and external stakeholders to share an organization's values, it follows that the organization's core values must be clearly communicated, either implicitly through actions or explicitly through messages.

The integrated marketing literature (e.g., Gronstedt 2000) strongly argues that successful relational exchanges require integrated communication vertically within the organization's hierarchy, horizontally in the organization, and externally between everyone in the company and stakeholders. Integrated communication, in turn, requires central coordination and complete agreement about core values, priorities and messages. Similarly, Albert and Whetten (1985) suggest that when conflicting definitions about identity are held separate units within the same organization, there will be a resource-consuming struggle for the soul of the organization that will bear negative consequences for the organization.

This existing research on the importance of a consistent identity message to successful relational exchange raises the following questions:

- If an organization projects conflicting representations of its identity to the same stakeholder, will this hamper the stakeholder's ability to discern the organization's core values and beliefs, and what will this mean for the firm?

- If multiple identities are projected, is the firm still able to successfully attract transactional customers, even if it obfuscates its identity and diminishes its relational exchanges?

AUTHENTICITY RIFTS

Our exploration of the relationship marketing literature raised unanswered questions concerning whether a single organizational identity and projected identity would benefit an organization any more than an organization with multiple and conflicting definitions of these constructs. This chapter explores more deeply the ideas of 'authenticity' and 'rift' with respect to organizational identity and projected identity.

The Concept of Authenticity Rifts

The Merriam-Webster dictionary offers a definition of authentic as, "not false or imitation." Cova and Cova (2001: 77) assert that, "the authentic object is rare, unique, singular, non-substitutable, non-alienable." This suggests that authenticity of organizational identity represents a true, unique and singular statement of core organizational values and beliefs held by all organizational insiders and communicated to all stakeholders.

The notion of authenticity appears in the management literature in explorations of legitimacy, which is, "a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions" (Suchman 1995: 574). It is necessary for firms to achieve perceived legitimacy from stakeholders who hold key resources (Suchman 1995). Market leaders are those corporations that are in touch with their identity and who lead based on "the strength of the company's unique, value-creating potential" (Ackerman 2000: 6).

The term 'rift' is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as: 1) a "fissure or crevasse"; and 2) a "breach," which is further defined as, "a broken, ruptured, or torn condition." Rift is an active result of a division. This suggests that rift in organizational identity represents breaks, clefts, or divisions in the core organizational values and beliefs held by organizational insiders and communicated to external constituents.

This research uses the terms 'authenticity' and 'rift' to in adapting concepts from research on individual identity to the organizational level. Some researchers believe that individuals strive for internal coherence with respect to their values, and that they will strive to act authentically in order to maintain this integrity (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail 1994). By contrast, some theorists (e.g., Goffman 1959) suggest that a person behaves in a certain way in order to convey impressions that serve the person's self-interests – i.e., people engage in impression management. Over time, people adjust their package of desired projected identities to suit their perception of audience needs, beliefs, knowledge, and skills, meaning that the situated identity is influenced by audience reinforcement of acceptable desired identity images (Schlenker 1985).

Similarly, managers control the legitimation process by manipulating symbols (Elsbach and Sutton 1992; Suchman 1995), choosing which aspects of organizational identity to present to stakeholders in order to maximize resource flows from those stakeholders. The term "authenticity rifts" refers to conflicts regarding constructed organizational identity and projected identity. More formally, *authenticity rifts are defined as differences between or divergence across managerial perceptions of organizational identity and projected identity.* This research studies the effects of authenticity rifts based on theory positing that, "…audiences perceive the legitimate organization not only as more worthy, but also as more meaningful, more predictable, and more trustworthy," (Suchman 1995: 575) and that there will be a stronger flow of resources from those stakeholders that view the firm as authentic (Ackerman 2000; Suchman 1995). The following sections detail three types of authenticity rifts.

Identity Rift

The notion of organizations possessing multiple identities has existed since the early explorations of organizational identity in organizational behavior research. In their seminal work, Albert and Whetten (1985) introduced the notion of multiple organizational identities. They proposed that dual identity organizations possess both normative and utilitarian orientations, and that organizations may begin with a single identity but they may acquire multiple identities over the course of time.

This study defines identity rift as the level of disagreement or diversity across managers and employees with respect to the organization's core values and beliefs. Under conditions of identity rift, an organization possesses competing responses to the questions "who are we" and "what are our core values and beliefs." Identity rift can occur either as the result of a hybrid identity with different perceptions of organizational priorities and values separately maintained by different segments of the organization, or as the result of confusion over a hybrid identity with multiple identities diffused throughout the organization (Albert and Whetten 1985; Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997; Pratt and Foreman 2000).

Identity–Projected Identity Rift

Organizational identity construction includes managerial projected identity-creation activities (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Scott and Lane 2000). The projected identity may stray from the organization's true identity due to unintentional breakdowns in internal communication or intentional manipulations designed to increase perceived values congruence with key stakeholders (Alvesson 1990; Elsbach and Sutton 1992). *Identity-projected identity rift represents a projected identity that intentionally diverges from the organization's identity*. Intentional manipulations may involve adjusting the packaging of desired identity characteristics to more closely match a stakeholder's needs, beliefs, knowledge, and skills (Alvesson 1990; Scott and Lane 2000). The end result is that projected identity diverges from identity, resulting in an identity-projected identity rift.

Taken to its extreme, identity-projected identity can take the form of a cognitive, strategic decision to falsify the organization's identity or to "show the company other than it is" in an effort to make an impression (Berg and Gagliardi 1985). When various stakeholders press conflicting demands on an organization, the organization may, "…mask or distract attention from controversial core activities that may be unacceptable to some key constituencies" (Elsbach and Sutton 1992: 700).

Projected Identity Rift

Marketing serves an essential boundary function by creating, communicating, and managing an organization's projected identity, and by "convey[ing] important organizational values to … various audiences" (Christensen 1995: 653). In many organizations the marketing concept permeates the organizational culture, influencing all organizational members that engage in boundary-spanning activities (Balmer and Wilson 1998; Christensen 1995).

Projected identity rift is defined as the level of disagreement or diversity across managers and employees with respect to the set of core organization's core values and beliefs presented to external stakeholders. Though organizational identity projection may be the mandate of the marketing department, organizational leaders also engage in identity projection by the very public nature of their positions. At times, the identity projected by top managers may not coincide with the identity projected by the marketing department.

CUSTOMER RESPONSE

This study targets a single, key external constituent: customers. Specifically, overall level of rift can be expected to affect the following three dimensions of customer response: 1) image clarity, 2) relational motivation, and 3) satisfaction.

Image Clarity

Perceived image is the cumulative, relatively stable impression of the organization and its products that is held by external stakeholders such as customers (Berg 1985). If an organization's image is clear, then there should be little variance in the organizational image perceived by customers. If there is low image clarity, one can expect there to be greater variance amongst customers as to what the organization's image is, due to confusion as to what the organization stands for.

Abric (1994) conceptualizes perceived image as being hierarchically constructed around a core of information, beliefs and attitudes. Individuals and groups construct perceived images based on a variety of information including presented cues, past experience, knowledge, and social conditions; however, in the end, dominant traits will form the essence of the image and play a central, privileged role. All remaining, less significant information will play only a peripheral role in the maintenance of the impression (Abric 1994). This research also will seek to determine the extent to which customers prioritize authenticity rift in the formation of their image schema of the organization.

Relational Motivation

Customers can form deep attachments to organizations (Oliver 1999). There is a growing body of literature examining the benefits of organizational identification – self-perceptions of 'oneness' with the organization (e.g., Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn 1995; Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2000; Golden-Biddle and Rao 1997). In each case, researchers have found that the consumer or member responds positively when he or she perceives that the values projected by the focal organization are salient to him or her. One positive outcome of organizational identification is an increase in the level of long-term commitment to the organization (Oliver 1999).

Relational motivation refers to the extent to which customers want to enter into or remain in a committed relationship with the organization (Battacharya, Rao and Glynn 1995; Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987). By examining the association between level of authenticity rift and relational motivation, this research attempts to establish whether authenticity rift is important to the establishment of a formal and enduring relationship between customers and the organization.

Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is heavily explored in the marketing literature since a high level of customer satisfaction has been linked to positive economic consequences for the organization (e.g., Kotler 1991; Oliver and Swan 1989). Satisfaction can be characterized as "the consumer's fulfillment response" (Oliver 1996: 12), or, more specifically, as a subjective assessment that one's needs and expectations have been positively met (Brady, Cronin and Brand 2002; Kotler 1991; Oliver 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988). There is a substantive body of research supporting the notion that service quality assessments are antecedents to customer satisfaction (e.g., Brady, Cronin and Brand 2002; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988). This research seeks to explore whether authenticity rift impacts customer satisfaction, or whether satisfaction is solely a function of quality assessment.

While much research explores customer satisfaction's potential as an influence on customer retention and purchase intentions (e.g., Brady, Cronin and Brand 2002; Oliver and Swan 1989), other research has shown that relational motivation and customer satisfaction are not necessarily linked (e.g., Voss and Voss 1997). Following the lead of these latter explorations, this research explores relational motivation and customer satisfaction as independent outcome measures of customer response.

LINKING AUTHENTICITY RIFT TO CUSTOMER RESPONSE

Abric (1994: 12) states that, "A representation is always a representation of something for someone." Ultimately, authenticity rifts should be perceived by customers. Eiglier and Langeard (1988: 165) point out that customers' image of the service must be very clear, and that it is up to the organization's management to orchestrate the coordination of appropriate and salient organizational messages and behaviors that will be perceived by customers. Through actions and communicated messages, organizations provide customers with essential information for the formation of perceived organizational image. If an organization's image is unclear in the eyes of customers, then it follows that customers will be unable to perceive that which is unique and distinctive about the organization. Therefore, a negative relationship between overall level of authenticity rift and image clarity is predicted.

> **H1**: Overall authenticity rift will exhibit a negative relationship with overall levels of customer image clarity.

Past conceptual and empirical research indicates that shared values play a significant role in developing and maintaining relationships with external stakeholders (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh 1987; Garbarino and Johnson 1999; Morgan and Hunt 1994). As discussed earlier, customers compare their perceived organizational image with their own personal values to establish their level of organizational identification and subsequent relational commitment (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). A high level of authenticity rift may make it difficult for customers to discern which organizational traits are those that are truly at the core of the organization's identity, thereby dampening their motivation to enter into a relationship with that organization. Moreover, Scott and Lane (2000: 49) state that stakeholders assess an organization's legitimacy in choosing the organizations with which to identify. Those organizations that are authentic, then, should provide higher levels of attractiveness to stakeholders.

> **H2**: Overall authenticity rift will exhibit a negative relationship with overall levels of relational motivation.

Authenticity rift represents a dissonance of organizational identity and projected identity, which is manifest in organizational messages and behaviors. One likely manifestation of authenticity rift is a lack of consistency with respect to service offering decisions since authenticity rift represents confusion about and competition amongst organizational priorities. Moreover, multiple and conflicting projections of the organization's identity can create multiple expectations for customers. Both relational customers and repeat transactional customers have a track record of experience with the organization and, through these experiences, they construct expectations about organizational behaviors. If expectations are not positively met, a lower level of satisfaction will result (Brady, Cronin and Brand 2002; Kotler 1991; Oliver 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988). In other words, authenticity rift should affect customers' fulfillment response.

H3: Overall authenticity rift will exhibit a negative relationship with overall levels of satisfaction.

METHODOLOGY

Following a review of the literature, we conducted a series of focus group discussions to develop a richer understanding of organizational identity and image from the perspective of managers and customers; two manager focus groups and two customer focus groups were conducted from June 2001 to April 2002. In total, we gathered four artistic directors, eleven managing directors, three marketing directors, two trustees, and sixteen customers to confirm and extend propositions from the literature.

Building on these qualitative findings, we implemented a two-part empirical study to examine authenticity rifts in conjunction with Theatre Communications Group (TCG), the national service organization of the U.S. nonprofit professional theatre industry, which implements an annual fiscal and attendance survey of member theatres. In September 2001, TCG mailed the fiscal survey and the supplemental survey to managing directors at all 407 TCG member theatres. At the same time TCG sent the fiscal survey and our supplemental survey to managing directors, the same supplemental survey was mailed separately to marketing directors at the same theatres. In the end, we received usable responses from both the managing and marketing director plus full fiscal data for 135 theatres, for a composite 33% rate of response.

Our supplemental survey consisted of a 15-item scale designed to measure five organizational identity dimensions -- artistic, prosocial, market, achievement and financial (Voss, Cable and Voss 2000) – using 7-point Likert scales. To ensure that the dimensions employed by Voss, Cable and Voss (2000) remain a valid and comprehensive representation of the values possessed by theatres, the values were tested qualitatively during managerial focus group discussions. It was found that the list remains relevant and comprehensive.

Preliminary Phase I results were used to identify theatres that exhibit low and high authenticity rifts. Identity and projected identity rifts across managing and marketing director responses were examined using sum of difference scores and correlation analyses (Cable and Parsons 2001) to identify one high rift theatre and one low rift theatre for participation in an audience survey (see Table 1). The analysis first took the mean of the responses to the three questions for each organizational identity type (e.g., artistic identity, etc.) to arrive at a single score representing the respondents' level of identity and projected identity on each dimension (Brady, Cronin and Brand 2002). Then, we calculated the difference score for each set of component measures (i.e., each organizational identity type as it relates to each rift), and took the sum of these difference scores squared to form a composite difference score for each of the rift types. Lastly, the four composite squared difference scores were summed for each theatre to arrive at an overall rift measure.

Once this analysis was complete, theatres were ranked: 1) according to their overall difference score, and 2) according to the correlation between managing and marketing directors' responses to projected identity questions (i.e., according to their level of projected identity rift). For both rankings, theatres were broken down into a range of possible absolute ranks (high rift, medium rift, and low rift). Then, the sample of high rift candidates was narrowed to those theatres that consistently appeared in the high rift range, and the sample of low rift candidates to those that consistently appeared in the low rift range. This left samples of 17 high rift theatres 19 low rift theatres.

There was an attempt made to control for a variety of external and organizational variables that might affect the theatres with high and low levels of rift. In the end, this study identified two theatres with similar traits, including level of negative and positive correlation between projected identity responses. The two selected theatres operate in U. S. East Coast metropolitan markets (see Table 2). Both organizations are run by: 1) a founding artistic director, 2) a managing director who has been in the position for five to ten years, and 3) a marketing director who has been in the position two years or less. Both theatres produce intellectually challenging, edgy, and provocative work. In fact, both theatres had produced two of the same plays within the past two seasons.

TABLE 1: SELECTION OF ONE HIGH AND ONE LOW RIFT THEATRE FOR FURTHER STUDY

	High Rift Theatre	Low Rift Theatre
Correlation between Managing Director & Marketing Director Responses to Projected Identity Items	-0.54	0.60
Theatre Rank (out of 135 theatres, high-to-low) based on Cross-Manager Correlation	4th	89th
Sum of Squared Differences between and amongst Managing Director & Marketing Director Responses (all rifts)	39	4
Theatre Rank (out of 135 theatres, high-to-low) based on Sum of Squared Differences	11th	125th

TABLE 2: COMPARISON OF HIGH AND LOW RIFT THEATRE ENVIRONMENTAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

	High Rift Theatre	Low Rift Theatre

Metro area population	5,100,931	4,923,153
Money Magazine arts index rating	56	30
Local competition density (# comparable theatres)	19	14
Seating Capacity	300	200
Annual Budget	$2,800,000	$2,995,000
Organization Age	28	26
Number of Board Members	29	30

Image clarity is measured using the same 15-item identity scale distributed to managing and marketing directors, with minor modifications that reflect the shift from identity statements to perceived image statements. Relational motivation is measured with a 7-point Likert scale that asked both subscribers and single ticket buyers whether they will consider renewing/ subscribing to next year's season. Four direct measures of customer satisfaction were employed using a 7-point Likert scale. Responses are summed to form an overall satisfaction construct (Garbarino and Johnson 1999).

At both theatres, surveys were administered during the last production of the 2001-2002 season. They were inserted as a program-stuffer and distributed to all patrons over the course of five performances. At each performance, the house manager made a curtain speech encouraging patrons to fill out the survey. Table 3 details the response rates at both theatres. The response rate at the low rift theatre was significantly higher ($p<.01$) than that of the high rift theatre.

TABLE 3: AUDIENCE SURVEY RESPONSE RATES AT ONE HIGH AND ONE LOW RIFT THEATRE

High Rift Theatre: Survey Date	# Surveys	Attendance**	Response Rate*
16-May	57	261	22%
18-May-mat	35	267	13%
18 May-eve	30	277	11%
22-May	42	232	18%
24-May	24	282	9%
Total	188	1319	14%
Low Rift Theatre:			

Survey Date	# Surveys	Attendance**	Response Rate*
12-Jun	55	160	34%
13-Jun	37	165	22%
14-Jun	26	163	16%
15-Jun mat	54	150	36%
15-Jun eve	49	177	28%
Total	221	815	27%

*Response rates are significantly different at p<.01.
**The High Rift Theatre's seating capacity is 300 (attendance represents 88% capacity filled);
The Low Rift Theatre's seating capacity is 200 (attendance represents 82% capacity filled).

Compared to audiences at the low rift theatre, audiences at the high rift theatre are slightly younger and slightly less affluent, they tend to be married, and have more children at home. The mix of men to women is slightly more balanced for the low rift theatre. Overall, the audience demographics at the two theatres are similar.

Examinations of the effects of authenticity rift on customer response include customers' service quality assessments as a covariate in tests of customer satisfaction and relational motivation. This research examines two dimensions of service quality in a theatergoing context: quality of the service offering and quality of the support of the service offering, or 'servuction' (Eiglier and Langeard 1988).

The exploratory factor analyses results provide support for the five proposed perceived image items, the satisfaction items, and the quality items, and indicate that the constructs are, indeed distinct. Items that exhibited poor psychometric properties as suggested by non-unique loadings were deleted from this analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

Image clarity can be expected to manifest itself in three measurements: 1) as a function of the variance in perceived image responses across the two theatre audiences; 2) as significant differences in the response rates between audiences of the two theatres; and 3) as significant differences in the levels of 'no opinion/don't know' responses between audiences of the two theatres. Towards the first measure of image clarity, a t-test were run across the two populations of customer responses regarding their perceptions of how well each value describes their theatre. In conjunction with the t-test, an F-Test determines whether one population experienced significantly more variance in responses than the other population. A significantly lower level of variance in one population will serve as a measure of image clarity. The second and third measurements referenced above are accomplished by simple t-tests.

The impact of authenticity rift on relational motivation was analyzed using a generalized linear model (GLM), a test of analysis of variance that uses both Type I and Type III sums of squares. Relational motivation is measured as customer's desire to either continue in or enter into a relational commitment with the theatre in the coming season. This research examines whether there are significant differences in the levels of relational motivation for both subscribers and single ticket buyers across the two populations. Similarly, a GLM was employed to determine whether there are significant differences across theatres' customer satisfaction.

RESULTS

Overall level of authenticity rift has little impact on image clarity, providing no support for H1. The low rift theatre experienced a significantly higher response rate than the high rift theatre (see Table 3); however, as indicated in Table 4, an F-test showed no significant differences in the levels of variance between the high rift and low rift theatres for the perceived image dimensions, and a t-test showed no significant difference between theatres in the rate of 'no opinion' responses from patrons unsure of the theatre's image with respect to various image dimensions.

TABLE 4: IMAGE CLARITY

Tested Dimensions	F value: variance in image perceptions between the high and low rift theatres
Artistic Image	1.06
Prosocial Image	1.11
Market Image	1.17
Achievement Image	1.18
Financial Image	1.32
Overall Image (mean of the 5 dimensions)	1.02

No support was found for either H2 or H3. Authenticity rift had no significant impact on either overall level of relational motivation (t=-.29, p=.77) or satisfaction (t=-1.46, p=.15). The two theatres did not experience significantly different levels of these two customer response outcomes. The key factors that affect relational motivation are perceived quality of the service offering (t=4.79, p<.01) and whether or not the customer is a subscriber or single ticket buyer; not surprisingly, single ticket buyers have a significantly lower level of relational motivation than subscribers (t=-9.78, p<.01). The key determinant of overall customer satisfaction is perceived quality of the service offering (t=10.56, p<.01). Perceived quality of the servuction system did not significantly impact either relational motivation or satisfaction.

We conducted a post hoc examination to explore whether significant differences surfaced when subscriber and single ticket buyer levels were examined separately at the two theatres with respect to the two outcome measures, creating the bar graphs of means presented in Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 depicts the relationships between levels of subscriber and single ticket buyer relational motivation at the high and low rift theatres. As discussed above, subscriber relational motivation is significantly higher than that of single ticket buyers for both theatres. Neither subscriber nor single ticket buyer relational motivation levels between the two theatres differed significantly. However, the high rift theatre experienced a greater range of relational motivation: single ticket buyers' relational motivation is lower and subscribers' relational motivation is higher than that of the counterparts at the low rift theatre. Interestingly, single ticket buyers at the low rift theatre possess a similar, high, level of satisfaction as subscribers at the high rift theatre (Figure 3). Subscribers at the low rift theatre possess a significantly lower level of satisfaction than subscribers of the high rift theatre ($t=-2.26, p<.05$); otherwise, no significant relationships between the four variables emerged.

FIGURE 2

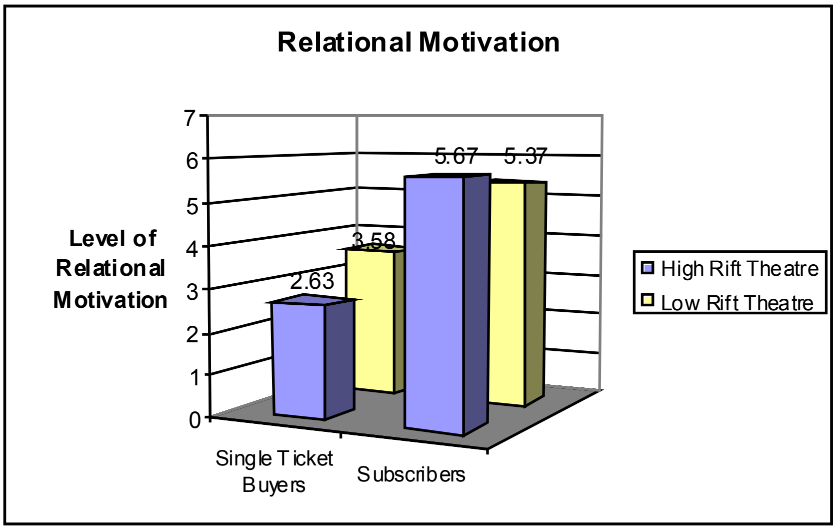
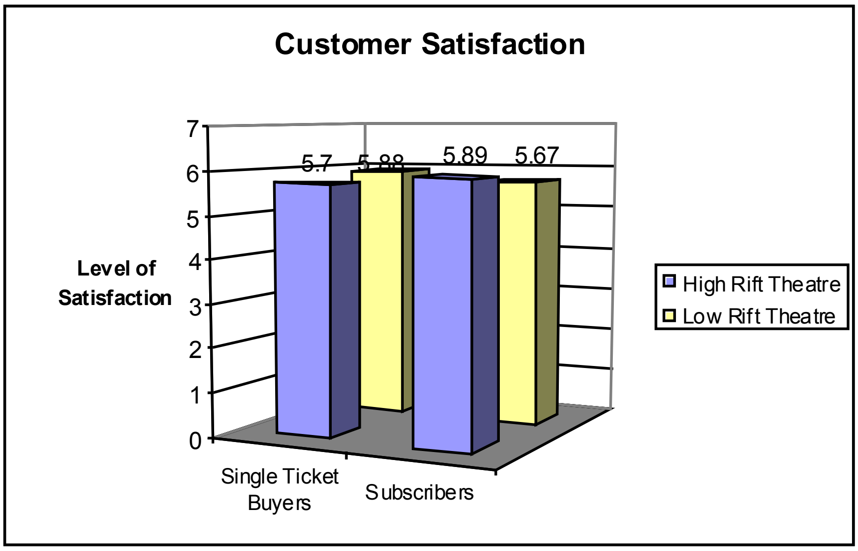


FIGURE 3



DISCUSSION

It appears that audience members form strong images of a theatre's identity regardless of whether multiple identities are projected by the theatre or whether the identity projected to the public diverges from the theatre's true core values and beliefs. The lack of significant findings with respect a link between overall level of authenticity rift to image clarity may have several explanations. First, image is affected by factors beyond the control of the organization, such as shifting public opinion and preferences. Second, the lack of significance in the link points to customers' inability to detect authenticity rift. This led us to question whether customers prioritize identity attributes at all in the formation of their image schema of the organization, or whether quality perceptions of the service offering dominate image (Abric 1994). To address this question, a post hoc analysis of the direct links between perceptions of the five image dimensions and relational motivation and satisfaction was conducted, again controlling for overall assessment of service offering and servuction quality.

The results suggest that people form images based on their subjective perceptions of an organization's identity, not on reality. While little support was found for a link between authenticity rift and image clarity, compelling support was found for direct links between perceptions of the five image dimensions and relational motivation and satisfaction. Specifically, subscribers who perceive that the theatre possesses either a market ($t=4.41$, $p<.01$) or an achievement ($t=2.70$, $p<.01$) identity have a higher level of relational motivation, and those who perceive either a prosocial ($t=-2.05$, $p<.05$) or financial ($t=-1.72$, $p<.10$) identity are less likely to continue their relationship with the theatre. Interestingly, an organization's identity is far less important to single ticket buyers' willingness to enter into a relationship with the theatre; perceptions that the theatre has an achievement identity ($t=-2.38$, $p<.05$) make relationship formation less likely, but all other images have no effect on relational motivation. When the specific dimensions of organizational image are taken into consideration as direct predictors of relational motivation and satisfaction, patrons' perceptions of quality no longer play a part in determining relational motivation. In summary, regardless of a theatres' level of authenticity rift, subscribers who perceive that the theatre has either a market or achievement identity are more likely to renew, those who perceive a prosocial or financial identity are less likely to renew, and quality does not play a significant role in the renewal decision.

Despite the fact that the model explained 57% of the variance, neither quality nor the five image dimensions surfaced as significant drivers of single ticket buyers' decision to subscribe. The literature on legitimacy helps to provide an understanding of the lack of findings with respect to single ticket buyers. Legitimacy theory contends that, "…legitimacy represents a relationship with an audience" (Suchman 1995: 594). In the absence of a relationship with the organization, transactional customers simply may not have enough experience with the organization to detect its organizational identity.

Customers who perceive that a theatre has either an artistic identity ($t=3.66, p<.01$) or market identity ($t=5.88, p<.01$) experience higher levels of overall satisfaction. This was true for both subscribers and single ticket buyers, and it was true for both the high rift and low rift theatres. As was the case with relational motivation, when the specific dimensions of organizational image are taken into consideration as direct predictors of satisfaction, patrons' perceptions of quality no longer play a part in determining satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

It appears that regardless of which values a theatre possesses or whether it is consistent in its public messages, it is patrons' *image* of the theatre's values that drives satisfaction and commitment. Image of an organization's identity is a salient and dominant trait that affects customers' level of relational motivation and satisfaction, even moreso than perceptions of service quality. However, whether that image is or is not in tune with the organization's true identity or projected identity is of little or no importance. What matters is that the customer *perceives* the presence of certain identity traits, regardless of the organization's level of authenticity rift or projected identity.

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