DEVELOPMENT OF A SOCIAL MEDIA MODEL TO BUILD AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT: PLEASE TURN ON YOUR PHONES!

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ABSTRACT
The attendance decline experienced by many arts and cultural organizations should be understood to be the result of a fundamental change in how people choose and consume products, including cultural products. This change has resulted from new communications technology, often classified together under the term social media. The widespread use of communication technology presents cultural organizations with two broad challenges: how to use social media to build a relationship with the public so as to communicate their message and how to allow the public to participate in the experience of the cultural product. This survey research focused on how social media can be used before, during and after an event to enhance the attendance experience so as to more fully engage the audience.

Key Words
Social media, attendance, engagement, audience

INTRODUCTION
Over the past two decades significant research has been conducted on the issue of arts attendance at traditional high art activities by demographic factors such as age, gender, education level and ethnicity. As a result of this research cultural organizations have developed marketing campaigns using welcoming messages that communicate benefits thought attractive to specific demographic groups. However, in the US the latest data shows that the attendance problem is not specific to single demographic groups, as the percentage of the population attending traditional cultural events is now declining overall (Brown, 2011).

One of the reasons for this change is the use of social media communications technology and a resulting change in how people research, choose, purchase and then consume cultural products. The new technology allows individuals to easily communicate to the public their own opinion about cultural products. As a result, consumers can market the product more effectively, either positively or negatively, than the cultural organization. Social media technology also allows people to create and share their own art creations, whether a photograph, a video clip or a blog posting. This has changed the public's view of cultural hierarchy because it allows everyone to be an artist.

Therefore it is now time to rethink the emphasis that has been placed on traditional promotional methods alone as the solution to the attendance problem. Instead the same social media that is changing consumption of cultural products should be used to build a new relationship with the public. Cultural organizations must learn how to use the two-way communication that is inherent in social media to engage in a new relationship with the public.

RESEARCH CONTEXT
Use of social media by for-profit companies to communicate with customers has become standard practice. The effect of social media on marketing communications is now a fact of life that has made promotion more difficult for all organizations. In addition social media has resulted in consumers who are no longer passive. However one of the positives of social media is the ability for collective engagement and to build an online community.

Social Media Use by For-Profit Companies
For profit companies, particularly those in the entertainment and hospitality industry have become skilled at ensuring customers have the information they need before they arrive on site. This information is sent to the customer via a date reminder email. Cultural organizations can do the same by providing all the information that is needed to easily access the venue (Geane 2012) This would include information on practical matters such as transportation, ticketing, parking, intermission and ideas for where to have dinner nearby. The organization can also start to engage the audience with the art form before arrival so that the experience when they arrive will be even richer. Biographical information on the artist and historical facts about the art can be sent via social media to then be read by the customer at their leisure. Previously such information was only available in printed programs or by attending lectures, which are not the most convenient formats.

Social Media Effect on Marketing Communication
One result that must be faced by cultural organizations is that social media has changed the promotion dynamic. Where in the past, the organization controlled the promotional message, this is no longer true (Maidia 2011). Social media technology allows consumers to share their values and opinions with others regarding products and organizations. Consumers want to share their excitement or disappointment about all types of products with other current or potential users (Holloman 2012). They not only willingly communicate with other consumers; they also are willing to share with the organization their ideas on how products can be improved.

In fact, social media has resulted in marketing now being conducted by the consumer (Hausmann 2012). Before purchase of a product, consumers go online looking for feedback and opinions from current purchasers. After purchase and consumption, they go back online to give their own feedback and opinions. While the cultural organization can also promote online, their voice is now only one of many.

No Longer Passive Audience
In the past there was a concern that media influences would result in a passive audience because there was no possibility of feedback (Butsch 2008). However the shift in power that resulted from social media means that everyone can now communicate both opinions and content. However, social media has had even a more profound impact on cultural organizations. Because of the ability to create and share online, people are much less interested in a passive arts experience.

The phrase “we the people formerly known as the audience” was first introduced in regard to media audiences (Rosen 2006). However it quickly caught on to describe the people who consume all types of culture. This one statement captures the power shift that has gone on since the explosion of social media use. The people who were formerly the audience now expect an equal voice in the organization. As a result it is marketing’s challenge to become a two way communication process. Today’s consumers still desire culture, but they will no longer accept the authority of the cultural organization.

Collective Engagement
The cultural organization can still play a critical role by providing a place for people to associate with others to create their own cultural life in a way which creates or reinforces community. Collective engagement is one of the characteristics of an experience that increases its value (Radbourne 2010). Previously this sense of engagement could only occur at the venue during intermission. Cultural organizations can now provide this engagement during the event by allowing audience members to interact with each other and those not present via social media. Customers now can share and comment online while at the same time they are experiencing the art. This is in direct contrast to the passive viewing experience. The use of social media is quite common in popular culture events where audience members are encouraged to take photos during the event and immediately share them with others in real time. After all what else is Instagram for?

Building Online Communities
Art has not always been seen as something that was separate from everyday experience and that, therefore, needed to be in a special venue. Nor has it been thought that only a few people are gifted enough to be creative. In fact, it has been argued that the act of experiencing art is creative in itself (Dewey 1934). This older view of art, that creativity is a part of everyone’s life, is now possible again because of the use of social media.

Social media can be used to build a creative online community around the art form. Creating this community, rather than just developing a new marketing campaign, is the challenge now facing cultural organizations. This creative community will not only expand the audience, it will allow those involved with the art form to do the promotion. A community based on shared experience moves art away from the 'art as medicine' approach, where the organization prescribes the art that is good for the public, to one where the public seeks out the art (Jensen 2002).

ENGAGEMENT TO INCREASE ATTENDANCE

Some researchers have proposed that too much attention has been spent analyzing data on attendance at benchmark events by such factors as age and ethnicity. While studies have shown that young people and ethnic groups attend less events at venues, they do view art and culture using media. (NEA 2010) Young people and ethnic groups are involved in the arts; they are just not attending the traditional high arts forms at traditional venues.

This leaves cultural organizations that present the traditional art forms with the challenge of how to build attendance at their venues. Some argue that cultural institutions just need to make further attempts to expand their audience by reaching out to specific demographic groups. However if the traditional arts are seeing a decline among even their core audience, the problem is much larger than the development of a new marketing message can solve. This is where social media presents cultural organizations with an opportunity.

For example, rather than restricting phone use at events, cultural organizations could encourage the audience to give their opinions of the performance using tweets that are then shown to the audience at the same time as the event it taking place. Voting can also be used to solicit opinions on the next piece that should be played, on the desire for an encore and even the ending of a play (Johnson 2012).

After the cultural event, those attending can be encouraged to post their opinions and ask further questions. The opinions of other customers are the most potent marketing tool available to the organization. Many consumers make regular use of review sites before purchase of a product. It is difficult to image how hotel rooms were chosen before sites such as TripAdvisor. And can it be imagined who a product is purchased without checking the Amazon reviews? Purchase of a cultural product is no different.

The cultural organization can even use social media to build relationships with those who never attend. By doing so they can build trust in the organization and interest in the cultural product that will influence future purchase decisions (Vivek 2012). Video clips of the orchestra or ballet in rehearsal can be captivating in themselves, not just as a means of promotion.

A final model takes social media engagement further by allowing the consumer to become a co-creator. Co-creation is common in many online experiences from song writing to game playing. Online video sites include numerous home produced music videos that are parodies of popular songs. Online gaming allows players to create and manipulate characters just as a playwright does. Design sites allow the budding architect to create their own building. These sites allow creative participation that is 'artistic' if art is thought of as creative expression (Jenkins 2008).

RESEARCH QUESTION

The purpose of this research project was to test the idea that social media can be used to engage the audience before, during and after the event. This changes the audience member from a passive participant to one who is actively engaged. It was hoped that this research would lead to the development of a model for pre-event, during and post-event use of social media for cultural organizations.

Hypothesis: Young audience members wish to engage with a cultural organization using social media to access and share information before, during and after an event.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To answer this question a two-step research process was followed. First two focus groups were held of senior-level college students who were studying business. Each group was asked to brainstorm what types of events young people prefer to attend. They were also asked about their use of social media. In addition they were asked what type of information they would like to receive before and after attending an event. The focus group participants were asked to discuss what types of social media they would like to use during an event. The

purpose of the focus group research was to obtain enough information to create a survey form. The survey results were to be used to develop a model of social media use for audience engagement.

The students were enrolled in Lycoming College in the city of Williamsport in the state of Pennsylvania in the US. Lycoming College enrolls traditional age (18-22) students who study a liberal arts curriculum. As part of this curriculum all students must enroll in two art, music or theatre courses as part of their studies. Because the students chose to attend a college with a liberal arts curriculum, they may be biased toward preferring arts events. Of course, these are the type of students who are most sought after by cultural organizations as long term future audience members.

From the focus group research results a ten question survey was developed. This survey asked questions on:
Type of event preferred and frequency of attendance
Current use of social media
Type of research conducted when making the attendance decision
Information desired before and after attending an event
Online interaction desired during an event
Age and gender

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Below are the results of the survey and observations on their meaning and potential use. Almost all of the 75 students were aged 20-22. Fifty eight percent were female, which is in line with the gender percentage of the student body.

Type of Social Media Used
While it was anticipated that the respondents would be heavy users of social media, what was not known was the type of social media preferred. It was found that Facebook or a similar type of site is used daily by 58% of the students with another 6% using it frequently, which is defined as more than once a week but less than daily. Twitter is used daily by 34% with another 11% using it frequently. The third most popular social media tool is Instagram with 21% using daily and 7% frequently. Pinterest is used daily by 15% of the respondents. Video sharing sites are used daily by only 11% of respondents but seem to be growing in interest as 13% state they are using it frequently.

Students Use of Social Media

Event	Daily	Frequently
Facebook/other	58	6
Twitter	34	11
Instagram	21	7
Pinterest	15	7
Video sharing site	11	13

Many of the respondents use more than one social media tool on a regular basis. In addition it was learned that daily users may be online more than once a day. This interest, some may say need, to be in touch cannot be ignored by cultural organizations. The day of the passive audience is, or at least, will soon be gone. If young people need to share every day with friends such mundane facts as the quality of the lunch they are eating, it is not surprising they will feel a need to share information on the quality of the art they are experiencing. In fact, organizations should encourage them to do so.

Type of Event Preferred
Movies are enjoyed as an evening out by 67% of the respondents. While the preference for movies does not relate directly to arts and cultural events, it was listed in the survey as a control for comparison purposes as it can be assumed that going to the movies is a normal part of a college student's lifestyle. It can be seen that live music events generate a high level of interest, as it comes in a surprising close second to movies as a preference. Rap and rock music were the second most preferred music event at 56%. Probably because of the rural location of the college, 49% enjoy attending country music events. Music is also in fourth place but this time it was solo signer/instrumentalist at 48%. Fifth place went to theatre with 42%. Ballet and opera while at the bottom of the

popularity list, still are attended by college students.

Students Event Preference

Event	%
Movie	67
Music (rock, rap)	56
Music (country)	49
Individual singer	48
Theatre	42
Music (classical)	28
Music (jazz)	25
Choral singing	21
Ballet	19
Opera	11

This data suggests that there is still an audience for live arts events. While musical events, such as rock, rap and country, were of the most interest after movies, there is also an interest in theatre. The traditional art forms of classical music, ballet and opera are still of interest even though at a lower percentage. While these art forms are most in need of young attenders they are probably the least likely to allow social media interaction during events.

Frequency of Attendance
The respondents went out frequently with 36% attending an event once or more a week. Adding the number of those who attend at least every other week, brings the attendance percentage to 41%. An additional 31% go out monthly.

Attendance Frequency

Frequency	%
Twice a week or more	5
Once a week	31
Every other week	11
Monthly	30
Every other month	8
Once or twice a year	15

The frequency of attendance demonstrates that young college age students are a huge potential market. Williamsport is a small town of only 27,000 people located in a rural area. It is a least 75 miles over mountains to a larger city that offers more entertainment options. As Lycoming College requires students to live in dorms on campus it is doubtful that the students are traveling that far. Therefore even in a small town with limited entertainment options they are still finding enough activities to maintain an active social life.

Social Media Entertainment Research
The respondents often perform online research before deciding on an event. Almost two-thirds (64%) will check websites. Review sites that give other attenders opinions are the second most popular form of conducting research at 41%. YouTube videos are used by 36% of respondents as a means of experiencing an event before deciding to attend. Facebook comes in fourth with 35% followed closely by price comparison sites. A surprising 25% rely on phone apps to assess information.

Sites Used for Research

Site	%
Websites	64
Review sites	41
YouTube videos	36
Facebook	35
Price comparison sites	34
Phone apps	25

It is clear that students find it natural to do their own research on entertainment options rather than only rely on promotional messages. Cultural organizations must ensure that the information these students seek is easily available. This means posting YouTube videos online even if the cultural organization can only afford to shoot them with a cellphone. Reviews can be encouraged to be posted on the cultural organization's Facebook page while the cultural organization's website can be linked with external review websites.

Type of Device
The computer is still the most popular method of assessing online information. However it is closely followed by a smartphone at 60%. Tablet computers are still only 12% but this may change as they gain in popularity.

Devices Used

Method	%
Computer	70
Smartphone	60
Tablet	12

The information that organizations make available must be assessable via smart phone. This may mean that the website must also have a mobile version designed for smart phone users. How information looks on a tablet computer must also be considered.

Information Desired before Event
The major focus of the survey was to determine what type of information event attenders would like to receive before attendance. It is not surprising that the most desired information are event times, prices, directions/maps and parking information. Another issue for attenders is the availability of food, as the event is often part of an evening out. Information on the artist is only desired by 44%, perhaps because this information has been gathered during research conducted when the attendance decision is being made.

Pre-event Information

Site	%
Prices	68
Times	67
Directions/map	61
Parking information	53
Food availability at event	52
Local restaurants	46
Artist information	44
Dress standard	42
Local attractions	42
Nearby hotels	34

If email addresses are collected at the time of ticket purchase, reminder emails could be sent before the event with all the desired information. This is standard practice for the hotel industry and it is also used by commercial

entertainment options. It now needs to become standard practice for cultural organizations. It is important to understand that if this information is not easily at hand, the desire to attend may not turn into the action of attending.

Social Media Interaction at the Event
The respondents' interest in using social media continues at the event. Sixty-four percent would enjoy taking and uploading photos. A majority (56%) want to update their Facebook page, perhaps using the photos they have taken. Almost fifty percent would enjoy sending and receiving tweets during the event while a smaller percent would use Instagram. While the social media tools change as technology develops, these research results demonstrate a strong desire to communicate and share with others while an event is happening.

Social Media Interaction at Event

Action	%
Take and upload photos	64
Update Facebook	56
Send/receive tweet	49
Use Instagram	40

It may be time for cultural organizations to stop telling the audience to turn off their phones. While silencing ringers may still be an appropriate message, there is no reason why silent phone use should be distracting to performers or audience members. The previous idea that an audience member should be so absorbed in a performance that they forget the outside world does not seem to be true for young college students who feel that being connected at all times is the norm. The more excited they are about an activity or performance the more they will feel the desire to share the information immediately.

Information Desired After the Event
It is clear from the results below that the best target market to attend future events are those who attend present events. At 65% and 56% most respondents want discounts and information on future events sent to then after attendance. The strong interest in visual information is again evident by the 53% of respondents who want photos taken at the event sent to them. Video/audio of the event is of interest to over half the respondents. Also of almost equal interest is a list of songs or art experienced. There is also interest in a personal message from the artist. Again, because the audience does not wish to be passive, 45% would like to share with the organization the photos they took at the event.

Post-event Information

Site	%
Discounts to future events	65
Information on future events	56
Photos taken at event	53
Video/audio of event	51
List of songs/art	50
Personal message from artist	48
Request photos taken at event	45

It is an old business saying that it is cheaper to keep a current customer than to find a new customer. The easiest way to increase future attendance is to follow up with past attenders. While it is considered good etiquette to follow up a personal visit with a thank you, cultural organizations remain silent once the audience member walks out the door. Instead past audience members could be sent a link for a podcast or a link to a YouTube video of the event they attended along with discounts to future events. If the organization has the email address of ticket purchases such follow up is easy and only costs a small amount of time.

CONCLUSION

A simple three step social media use model can be implemented by cultural organizations to engage the audience before, during and after an event. Before an event an email should be sent that makes the attendance experience as easy as possible. Social media sharing should not only be allowed but also encouraged during an event. What stronger promotional message can there be than a tweet or text from a friend saying 'too bad you aren't here, this event is great!' Finally after the event, photos and other information can be sent along with discounts to future events.

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