

# Marketing the Performing Arts to Today's Young Adults

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## Abstract

It goes without saying that the performing arts have struggled to maintain a presence in the minds of the average consumer (McClellan, Rebello-Rao & Wyszomirski 1999). Many performing arts organizations are in battles for diminishing public funding and other resource limitations (Scheff & Kotler 1996; Yavas 1996). Erstwhile, leisure pursuits sought by the next generation of potential arts goers seldom include the performing arts. In order to grow and prosper in the future the performing arts must attract and maintain new, young patrons while not alienating current patrons. Younger segments have different motivations for pursuing leisure activities and experiences than their older counterparts (Schlegelmilch & Ollenburg 2013, Holbrook 2000).

However, *Hamilton*, a Hip-Hop sung-through musical, has captivated theater audiences and performs consistently to sellout crowds. Michaela DePrince is an athletic black ballerina recruited by Beyonce to perform in the 'Lemonade' music video. DePrince might represent a new breed of artist capable of inspiring young ballet audiences. The 2017-18 season of the New York Metropolitan Opera will be transmitted live in HD movie theaters. Perhaps, a new era is emerging for the performing arts. If so, marketing management for these services must also evolve to meet the needs of both the arts themselves as well as the young audiences. Fine arts managers must be conscious of audiences' psychological needs when designing arts products/services (Huang & Hsu 2009).

Two studies were conducted to deduce the current level of interest among college students in four performing arts; plays, symphonies, operas and ballet. The first study investigated the likelihood of attending one of these events while visiting a city. The likelihood of visiting numerous other potential tourist activities was also measured for comparison (Pesonen 2015). Study One's goal was to gauge the level of interest in the performing arts.

The second study was an experiment with the four arts representing the independent variable. Respondents were randomly assigned a survey which included major measures for just one of the four arts. This research design was employed to eliminate any impact from fatigue and interaction among the variables.

Issues relevant to the motivation of respondents to attend a performing arts event were investigated in Study Two. Motivation to participate in tourism activities have been studied. Differences involving self-actualization and spiritual growth have been found between senior tourist and younger segments (Moal-Ulvoas & Taylor 2014). The opportunity to explore self-actualization is more restricted for younger segments (Garikapati, Pendyala, Morris, Mokhtarian & McDonald 2016). Enjoying fine art performances can be viewed as a self-actualization pursuit.

Push and pull motivation is often used to explore motivation within the travel and tourism industry (i.e. Correia, Oom do Valle & Moco 2005, Smith, Costello & Muenchen 2010). Push and pull motivation has also been used to explore entrepreneurial motivations (i.e. Kirkwood 2009). The concept of being pushed and/or pulled to an experience was viewed to be beneficial in this exploration of the young adult audience for the performing arts.

College students were sampled as they represent the ideal emerging market for the performing arts. Presumably today's college students represent tomorrow's well-educated young professionals. Students in business classes offered at a mid-sized Midwestern public university served as respondents for both studies.

In the first study, 162 respondents indicated their level of likelihood on a five-point scale of participating in 33 different activities when traveling for leisure to a city. Going to a beach and touring the city tied for most likely with a score of 4.6. In comparison, the performing arts scored at the bottom with 'Attend a play' at 2.1, 'Attend a symphony' at 1.7, 'Attend an opera' at 1.6 and 'Attend a ballet' at 1.5. These four activities also loaded into a factor with 'Visit a botanical garden' (2.8). The respondents were more inclined to 'Visit a theme park' (4.0) or 'Sample local cuisine' (4.4) than attend a performance of a cultural nature.

Given, the results from Study One, Study Two focused on current perceptions of the performing arts and other factors that might contribute to the low likelihood of attending one of these events. In order for the many small not-for-profit organizations dedicated to these arts to best allocate their meager marketing budget other questions regarding positive (pull) and negative (push) motivational factors were considered.

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**Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners:** In an increasingly competitive marketing for leisure dollars marketing the fine arts, specifically the performing arts, to young adults can be troublesome. Many organizations, many of them not-for-profits, must find a way to market their service offerings to the emerging audiences.

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