

Self-Image Congruency for Theatre, Movie and Home Audiences

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ABSTRACT

It has been well documented that the performing arts have experienced declining attendance and financial support. The Millennial consumer has many options for entertainment experiences in a variety of venues. In order to appreciate the motivations of the emerging audience three studies were conducted involving college students. The first study revealed a definite lack of appreciation for the fine arts, specifically ballet, opera, symphony and live theatre. The second study investigated alternative strategies to improve attendance to these experiences. The final study started an inquiry into self-image congruency for live theatre goers and alternative venues for an experience, movie theaters and home viewing.

The performing arts exist in a market full of competition for audiences (McClellan, Rebello-Rao & Wyszomirski 1999). Performing arts organizations attempt to compete for the consumers' attention while they battle for public funding and contend with a multitude of other resource limitations (Scheff & Kotler 1996; Yavas 1996). In order to grow and prosper the performing arts must attract and maintain new, young patrons while not alienating current patrons. It is clear that Millennials and GenZs have different motivations for pursuing leisure activities and experiences than their older counterparts (Schlegelmilch & Ollenburg 2013, Holbrook 2000). Thus a series of three studies all involving college students were conducted.

Study One involved 33 different leisure activities. Respondents indicated that attending the fine arts (ballet, opera, symphony and live theatre) was at the bottom of their choices of opportunities, whereas going to a beach or a theme park were at the top.

Given the results of Study One, Study Two focused on likelihood of attending the four fine arts performances given a variety of scenarios. It was discovered that attendance likelihood could be improved if the performances involved a performer they enjoyed, music they enjoyed, if their friend asked them to go with them, if the performance was free and if the performance was at a convenient location.

Study Three focused on just live theatre performance as it appeared to have the most potential to reach a larger portion of the Millennial market. Therefore, to partially understand the motivation of the Millennial and GenZ market for live theatre a study was conducted to explore the impact of self-image on the likelihood of attending a live theatre production.

The impact of self-image congruency has been explored recently in multiple contexts in the consumer behavior literature (e.g. Mittal, 2015; Gil, Kwon, Good and Johnson, 2012; Gration, Raciti and Arcodia, 2011; Kressmann, Sirgy, Herrmann, Huber, Huber and Lee, 2006). Based on the groundbreaking work by Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) the role of products to be viewed as symbols to communicate to others and enhance one self-concept has relevance for marketing products, brands and services. Sirgy (1982) concluded that the motivation to express a self-image is often the motivating force behind an individual's purchase and use of a product or service. Individuals will attempt to find a congruency with the image they wish to express and the image of the product, or service, they consume.

In Study Three live theatre versus the alternative venues and formats of viewing including a movie theater and home were studied. In theory, the viewing diversion could be spent going to a play, going to a movie theater or staying at home and watching a performance.

Students in consumer behavior classes offered at a mid-sized Midwestern public university served as respondents. Given the nature of the two-part data collection process a convenience sample of 65 respondents was collected (33 males, 32 females). Respondents were first asked to respond to a 15 item, seven-point semantic differential self-concept measure. Several weeks later, to diminish the nature of the study, the same respondents were asked to indicate their likelihood on a five-point likelihood scale of attending a live theater production (mean = 3.5), a movie at a theater (mean = 4.6) and view a movie at home (mean = 4.7).

Several differences were noted between self-image scores and scores for live theatre, theater movies and home viewing. Most notably, theatre goers were perceived as more delicate, old fashioned, emotional, formal, liberal, complex and colorful than average self-image scores. Home viewers were perceived as more submissive, thrifty informal and colorless than all the other image scores. The results of this study, although just preliminary and exploratory in nature, will be beneficial for not only additional research but also for theatre management. It might be advisable to avoid the impression of 'fine arts' and delve into more contemporary and rugged subject matter.

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Relevance to Marketing educators, Researchers and Practitioners:

Managers of fine arts organizations will benefit from the results concerning engaging the Millennial and GenZ market. Consumer behavior researchers will benefit from the foundations provided from the results of these three studies.

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