Behind the Scenes:
Service Experience in Traditional Performing Arts Groups in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Delivering a satisfactory experience to the customers is an inseparable part of a service organization. This article investigates how two different groups of wayang orang (human wayang), a form of traditional art in Indonesia deliver service experiences to the audiences. Qualitative methods consisted of in-depth interviews and open-ended survey were utilized as the data collection method. The findings suggest that service experiences were delivered through the combination of various art elements in the performance, and some of the elements are considered to be more important than the others. Several barriers have also been identified as the barriers that inhibit consumption of this traditional art. Bharata and SwargaLoka performing art groups were utilized as the context of this research. This article contributes to limited studies on traditional arts within the arts marketing domain, especially with regards to art experience delivery and art consumption.

KEYWORDS

Art Consumption, Art Marketing, Heritage, Indonesia, Service Experience, Wayang Orang

INTRODUCTION

The rapid change in the marketplace of the heritage business means that heritage organizations need to change their way of interacting with customers (Minkiewicz, Evans & Bridson, 2014). As a heritage performing arts group delivering traditional art performances, wayang orang (literally ‘human puppet’) performance groups are facing fierce competition from modern types of entertainment such as cinema, and music concerts (Colbert, 2003 in d’Aousts, Colbert, & Fornier, 2007). This calls for a new approach for these performing arts groups to be better marketed and to refine their offerings to their audiences.

The wayang orang or human puppet(s) is a form of Javanese theatrical performance whose stories are derived from the Mahabharata and Ramayana. As the type of art has been developed for several centuries in Indonesia, the performance itself has received considerable changes in terms of the storyline, costumes, and language, adjusting to local cultures and local tastes. Wayang performance, especially wayang kulit (shadow puppet) is often held during special events such as village purification (called bersih desa, literally means cleansing the village), personal purification, and other life event celebrations such as weddings and circumcision (Sedana and Foley, 2016).

Despite recent surges of interest in arts marketing, very little progress has been made with regards to the accepted construct of marketing for arts organizations (Fillis, 2002). In general, art organizations seem to strive for mostly artistic excellence, innovation and peer recognition (Lee,
2005) and are not particularly commercial success-driven, and this has created tensions which makes the arts such a challenging environment for the practice of marketing (Butler, 2000). In relation to consumption of arts and cultural goods, D’Angelo, Furia, Crociata, & Castagna, (2010) have noted that an accumulation of knowledge and experience in their audience members will have an impact on their future consumption of arts. This further necessitates the need to investigate how performing arts organizations can enable their audiences to have enjoyable art consumption experiences.

Marketing practice acknowledges that producers of products or services should be able to gain information of consumers’ needs and then create products intended to fulfill those needs; whereas, today’s marketing experts acknowledge the need to broaden this original perspective (Kerrigan, 2014). The understanding of marketing tends to be a narrow one with little involvement in wider marketing strategy issues (Conway & Whitelock, 2007). In addition to that, the understanding is also mixed with a narrow definition of business competition and a lack of knowledge about customers (Dibb & Simkin, 1993; Copley & Robson, 1997).

As a product, art has to create experience; which is made of different aspects, sensations and conceptual associations (Corte, Savastano & Storlazzi, 2009). This notion is supported by Boorsma (2006) who argued that arts marketing should aim to support the artistic experience as a core customer value. The unique nature of service would mean that there is an active participation of customers as the audience, a characteristic that sets service operations apart from manufacturing systems (Tseng, Qinhai, & Su, 1999). The nature of service also often necessitates co-creation and active participation from the audiences.

For Pine and Gilmore (1999, in Conway & Leighton, 2012) companies now not only need to move away from the basic provision of goods and services, but towards the provision of experiences (memorable events that engage customers in an inherently personal way) and transformations (a series of experiences that change the customer in some fundamental way). A study conducted by O’Reilly (2011) argues that art consumption experiences are one of the areas that offer opportunities for future inquiry, since it has not frequently appeared. The following areas also appear to be fruitful opportunities for future inquiry, particularly because they do not appear frequently in the literature identified: live arts consumption experiences; arts consumption communities; and arts branding.

Previous studies have pointed out how customer satisfaction is not necessarily a priority for many arts organizations (Gainer & Padanyi, 2002). Meanwhile, arts organizations were recognized as being essential for providing the context in which the artists and recipients could share the art experience (White, Hede, & Rentschler, 2009).

It is regrettable that research on art marketing and consumption is still limited given that it is an ‘exciting and lively’ field (Larsen & O’Reilly, 2010) with high possibilities to enrich the insights on marketing domain in general and arts marketing in particular. New approaches and methods are required to investigate the complexity of art domain that is very dynamic in which some methods that are applicable for other marketing topics may not be fully applicable in this domain (Kerrigan, O’Reilly, Vom Lehn, 2009).

The arts offer rich symbolic resources, intense consumption experiences and opportunities for passionate and enduring customer relationships. The emerging body of arts marketing in particular has increased the need to identify relevant frameworks that are specifically within the arts marketing domain (Fillis, 2011). In addition to that, the communication conducted by service providers, the consumption experience delivered, as well as the interaction would eventually lead to an experience that is engraved in the customer’s mind (Homburg, Koschatz, & Hoyer, 2005 in Conway & Leighton, 2012).

Based on the above discussion, there are two objectives of this research as follows: