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WHAT THE AUDIENCES OF PERFORMING ARTS FIND MOST IMPORTANT

– AN EXAMINATION OF THE ATTITUDINAL
AND RELATIONAL MARKETING STRATEGIES

The audiences of performing arts events are changing, together with wider economic and cultural changes. A questionnaire survey of three folklore performances was conducted in 2008, and yielded a response of 1,470 theater audience members in Taiwan. Traditional folklore performances are usually seen as appealing by old male viewers. However, the findings showed that the audiences of the performances comprised fewer men and a considerable number of women. With the successful transformation of the art organization in relationship marketing, young and collegiate respondents were shown to be frequent and loyal viewers of this folklore performance. The school channel in this study was found to be an effective way to disseminate performance-related information to the young audiences. In addition, age was found to be the predictor for building relations of the emotional bond. This paper contended that building relationships required emotional bonds with the art organization. For long-term true relationships, it was suggested to be driven by the goal of directed emotional quality perceived by the audiences. The discussion on the future studies and limitations were concluded¹.

Keywords: relationship marketing, audience, folklore, attitude, performing arts, Taiwan

Folklore performing arts can clearly play an important role in strengthening the sense of pride, identity, and prosperity of a community. One of the folklore performing arts, Taiwanese opera, originated in Taiwan in the late seventeenth century, flourished in Fujian Province in mainland China, and has been spreading to communities that share the same dialect of Fujian in Southeast Asia (e.g., Singapore and Malaysia). Taiwanese opera is a typical type of folk art that defines local characteristics and styles by incorporating literature, music, dancing, and fine arts. The performance of Taiwanese opera has served as a bridge for Chinese and non-Chinese audiences and recently undergone a transformation by continually absorbing the Western-style elements of theatrical arts and the martial arts movements of Chinese opera.

Performing arts organizations are often underdeveloped in the marketing and management fields. To cope

with a diversified audience in a transitional society, performing arts organizations must adapt to survive. Since different modes of performance are related to various types of audience experience, this study focuses on surveying how audiences access and respond to the folklore performance, and how social relations with performing art organization are affected. One of the objectives was to determine whether social relations through different media channels (e.g., word-of-mouth, newspaper, television, and the internet) are formed and affected. In addition, this article attempted to establish a relationship between the audience and a performing arts organization by offering insight into the attitudes of different audience groups. It intends to enhance our understanding of audiences seeking pleasurable experiences when attending performing arts events and contribute to the genre of audience studies.

Literature Review

Relationship marketing encourages managers to seek innovative ways to create mutually beneficial relationships with audiences. In marketing research, a relationship is defined as any interaction, repeated actions, transactions, deals, and episodes that can be justified by certain barriers of relationship termination, with clearly perceived benefits and financial incentives. Furthermore, a relationship has been determined as an emotional bond with an organization, and is important for a consumer when emotional value is necessary for a real relationship (Chang – Chieng, 2006; Palmer – Bejou, 2005). Because the scope of a discussion on relationships is broad, the research must be restricted by incorporating communication, public relations practices, and brand-marketing theories.

Caldwell (2001) proposed the buying-consuming experiences in attending performing arts which were impacted upon by a variety of factors acting as behavioral triggers and constraints. These important behavioral factors included intrapersonal, interpersonal, product, and situational aspects. To consider behavioral triggers in attending performing arts, the intrapersonal factors included items of aesthetics, social class, age, experience, occupation, gender, and personality whereas interpersonal factors highlighted variables of number of companion, relationship with companion, and art taste similarity with companion. In addition, product and situational factors were about attributes of performing arts, available time and money that impact upon attending occasions. Caldwell proposed the general living system theory in achieving an understanding of lived experiences within realities perceived by performing arts patrons.

Chang and Chieng (2006) attempted to clarify the consumer-brand relationship by defining individual experience, brand association, brand personality, brand attitude, and brand image. They concluded that the causal effect of brand experience affecting the brand relationship was largely achieved through the independent variables such as brand association, brand personality, brand attitude, and brand image. Hall (2009) investigated the authenticity of reality programs and their relationships to audiences' involvement, enjoyment, and perceptions and concluded that each form of audience involvement contributed to their enjoyment. The information regarding behavioral outcomes can potentially form the basis for ongoing activities.

Other researchers examined the relationship between relational bonds, consumer trust, and commitment under the moderating effects of corporate websites frequented by customers (Lin – Weng – Hsieh,

2003). They argued that the characteristics of users employing the services provided on a performing arts website are different from those of non-users, and that relational bonding strategies produce different effects on the two audience groups. The concepts of one-to-one marketing and relationship marketing are no longer merely theoretical. The characteristics of users employing the services provided from the official website of a performing art organization can be different from those of non-users, and that relational bonding strategies can produce different influences to both user and non-users groups of performing arts.

Audiences comprise different demographic and psychographic groups that form around a specific show or a certain type of activity, and can be understood by observing their emotional involvement, the motivation behind their intention to attend, and the activities that result from the performance. Johnson – Garbarino (2001) compared three types of audiences' – those of the simple audience, the mass audience, and the diffused audience in contemporary society. The distinction among simple, mass, and diffused audiences provides a different perspective for observing the internal and external stresses within these paradigms. Johnson and Garbarino also examined the differences in attitudes and future intentions and found that single-ticket buyers and occasional subscribers differ slightly for the off-Broadway arts organization. However, regular subscribers differ from the other two groups on most of the measures, which are in the high levels of satisfaction, trust, commitment, and positive future intentions to the organization and production.

Petr (2007) indicated that occasional theatergoers do not become subscribers chiefly because of the number of shows and the level of consumption. Watching television is typically a low-attention event, whereas the theater is a high-attention medium. When members of an audience attend a performance, they concentrate their energy, emotions, and thoughts on the performance, and attempt to obtain from that performance some meaning. A detailed analysis of the relationship concept is seldom found in the literature, and a solid understanding of what can be defined as a relationship and what the main elements are for determining a relationship are absent. Such a gap affirms the problem of the topic being analyzed; thus, this study investigates this problem, in relation to the multiple dimensions of the relationship concept by applying them to the subject of traditional performing arts.

Several researchers contested that true relationships are substantially more important than repeated visits or the purchases of goods and services of a com-

pany. Long-term real relationships require emotional bonds with an organization, and the identification of such bonds is the focus of the consumer's perception (Damkuvien – Virvilait, 2007; Hume – Mort – Winzar, 2007). The most frequently applied marketing strategies concentrate on behavioral manifestations (i.e., repeated purchases or visits), but do not pay sufficient attention to the emotional elements of a relationship. Relationship marketing theory should include commitment, interdependence, interactions, collaboration, and emotional bonds as important criteria for ensuring a long-lasting relationship.

Research Questions and Procedures

An audience's attitude, behavior, and association toward the arts organization, and performance were surveyed by the following four research questions:

- RQ1. Who are the current audiences of folklore performing arts? What are their demographic and behavioral manifestations?
- RQ2. How do audiences access performance information?
- RQ3. What are the audiences' seeking pleasurable experiences when attending performing arts events? Will these experiences influence their association?
- RQ4. What are the audience's emotional elements of the relationship? How do the emotional bonds of the audience with an organization motivate them for future attendance?

The measurement structure was based on a questionnaire design adapted from earlier studies by Caldwell (2001) and Johnson – Garbarino (2001) regarding four factors: (a) individual accessibility and experience for attending the performance, (b) the attitude, involvement, enjoyment, and perception of the performance and performing arts group, (c) the relationship with the performers and the arts group, and (d) the association with the performance and the arts group for identifying the predictors of future intentions. The survey comprised 39 questions and basic seven demographic questions (i.e., age, sex, education level, occupation, living area, income and language use).

Immediately before a performance, questionnaires were distributed to all audience members with tickets at three regional theaters, each located in a different urban city. During the intermission and after the show, all respondents were reminded to submit the questionnaire for a small reward that had been purchased in a stationery store. Through partnership with the arts group, 2,400 questionnaire surveys were distributed to

the theater audiences in November and December of 2008. Volunteers were trained to receive the questionnaires with a quick check and to provide assistance to elderly attendees or illiterate respondents in filling out the questionnaire. Invalid samples were eliminated, yielding 1,470 successfully completed questionnaires.

One of the largest and long-lasting performing arts groups, Ming-Hua-Yuan (MHY), was recruited in this study. Members of the MHY founder's family include producers, directors, scriptwriters, actors and actresses, and the family spans three generations. This family-run company, on average, produces 50 stories and provides approximately 20 days of performances in theater and over 120 outdoor stage performances per year.

Research Results

The demographic profiles of the respondents' characteristics are as follows: gender (332 males: 22.6%, 1,138 females: 77.4%), age (21 years or younger: 26.9%; 22-40 years: 37%; 41-59 years: 27.4%; 60-78 years: 7.7%; 79 years or more: 1%), education level (master's degree: 8.3%; bachelor's degree: 49.5%; high school: 32.8%; elementary school: 8.7%; illiterate: 0.7%). Approximately half of the respondents (49.5%) have a college bachelor's degree. The age ranges from 8 to 83 years, and the average age of the audience is 32.4 years. The respondents' profiles revealed that the age groups (41 to 59 years and 21 years or younger) comprised the majority of respondents and 75% of them were from the same canton.

Regarding language proficiency, 48% of the respondents can manage fluent Mandarin, comparing to another two of major Chinese language subdivisions (Taiwanese, 42% and Hakka, 1.3%), and foreign language (English, 7.4%; Japanese, 1.1%). For the respondents' occupation, students (34.2%) comprised the majority, followed by government employees and teachers (19.3%), housewives (11.2%), and business people (4%).

For the income level of the respondents, most respondents (39.3%) earn approximately NT\$10,000 (US\$335) or less. The survey shows the trend of a greater decline percentage of the number of attendees indicating a higher monthly income. Only 4% of respondents earned NT\$70,000 (US\$2,345) or more every month. In addition, the result reports that most audience members (16.4%) paid NT\$800 (US\$27) for tickets, followed by 13.4% who spent NT\$300 (US\$10), 13.2% who spent NT\$1,000, and 3% who purchased the most expensive tickets NT\$1,200 (US\$40). The indoor theater showing the MHY performance adopted a low-price strategy to promote folklore performances to

young audiences. It is well known that 90% of MHY performances are shown on outdoor stages, and are all free of charge. The theater ticket income might not be the main motivation for this arts group.

The capability of audience members to access sources of performance information for retrieving MHY performance information, word-of-mouth (WOM) is the most popular method (33.4%), followed by internet blogs (18.5%), out-of-home advertisements (i.e., posters and banners; 16.8%), and newspapers (9.6%).

spondents it was their first time attending the MHY performance. The range of prior experience for attending is from 0 to 80 times for the year 2007. The trend indicates a steep decline at four times per year for attending the Taiwanese opera performance. To a certain extent, the results can be used to segment the audience members into the following five groups: non-users, occasional attendees (1-3 times) per year, regular attendees (4-6 times), frequent attendees (7-9 times), and loyal attendees (10 times or more).

Table 1

Cross-tabulation of the age of attendees and their attitudes toward the performance and performers

Attitude variables	Age								
	Attitude	15&less	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66&above	Total
I enjoy watching Taiwanese Opera	Disagree	5.7%	0.9%	1.3%	0.5%	1.3%	0%	0%	1.4%
$\chi^2=45.674, df=12, p<.001 (sig.=.000)$	Neutral	20.5%	22.7%	13.6%	11.8%	8.9%	8.6%	19.4%	15.9%
	Agree	73.8%	76.4%	85.1%	87.7%	89.8%	91.4%	80.6%	82.7%
I am familiar with MHY artists	Disagree	13.6%	5.7%	4.8%	1.9%	5.0%	0%	0%	5.1%
$\chi^2=45.685, df=12, p<.001 (sig.=.000)$	Neutral	28.8%	31.9%	25.8%	24.6%	20.8%	12.3%	20.0%	26.1%
	Agree	57.6%	62.3%	69.4%	73.5%	74.2%	87.7%	80.0%	68.8%

Table 2

Cross-tabulation of the age of attendees and their agreement of involvement with the performing arts group

Perception Variable	Age								
	Attitude	15&less	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66&above	Total
I am a loyal MHY audience	Disagree	8.8%	3.4%	2.6%	0%	2.5%	0%	0%	2.8%
$\chi^2=85.37, df=12, p<.001 (sig.=.000)$	Neutral	21.9%	34.4%	21.6%	14.3%	11.9%	5.2%	12.9%	21.5%
	Agree	69.3%	62.3%	75.8%	85.7%	85.5%	94.8%	87.1%	75.7%

However, performing arts websites were also found to provide an important forum for audiences. In addition, through lectures, workshops, and seminars, schools have been an important channel for educating and circulating performing arts information to staffs, faculties, students, and their parents.

Regarding the audience's attending experience, the result shows the trend of accompanying an attendee to the performance. More than half of the respondents (55.6%) attended the performances with their family members, and this was followed by friends or schoolmates (29.9%), colleagues (6.2%), and lastly, by themselves (4.7%). This shows that the current audiences of theater goers are not individual attendee, and Taiwanese folklore is welcomed by the families of attendees, and attending alone might not be popular.

For attending MHY performance in the past one year of 2007, most respondents indicated that they had attended only once (27.9%), whereas for 18.4% of re-

To understand the audience's attitudes toward the performance and the performing arts group, Table 1 shows positive attitudes associated with the Taiwanese opera in general according to the different age groups. Among them, up to 91.4% of attendees from the age group of 56-65 years strongly agree that they enjoy Taiwanese opera, followed by the age groups of 46-55 years (89.8%), 36-45 years (87.7%), and 26-35 years [85.1%; $\chi = 45.674, df = 12, p < .001 (sig. = .000)$. The finding also indicates that the older age groups (56-65 years and 66 and older) show higher familiarity with the MHY performers, which reached statistical significance ($\chi = 45.685, df = 12, p < .001$). This supports the notion that the positive attitudes of different age groups toward performing arts significantly and positively influence the art groups association.

To portray the audience's relationship with the performing arts group, Table 2 displays the agreement of involvement with the performing arts organization ac-

according to the age of the attendees. Among them, aged 56-65 years have the highest agreement (94.8%) in identifying themselves as loyal audience members of MHY, followed by attendees aged 66 years and older (87.1%), attendees aged 36-45 years (85.5%), and attendees aged 46-55 years (85.7%; $x = 85.37$, $df = 12$, $p < .001$).

For the mediators of emotional bonds of the audience with a performing arts organization, Table 3 shows the brand image of the performing arts organization as perceived by attendees according to their age. Most respondents (aged 36 years or older) perceive MHY as a patriotic symbol, with high agreement ranging from 95.6% to 100%. However, attendees aged 15 years or younger displayed the lowest agreement on this issue (82.8%; $x = 29.488$, $df = 12$, $p < .01$).

The emotional bonds of the audience with an organization motivate them for future attendance. Table 4 displays future intentions for attending any of MHY

performance according to the age of the attendees. Most respondents (aged 16 years and older) exhibit stronger positive tendencies of future intentions for attending the MHY performance, whereas the youngest audience group (aged 15 years or younger) displayed the lowest agreement (85.3%; $x = 36.229$, $df = 12$, $p < .001$). This supports the statement that a higher attachment by attendees to the show exhibits a stronger tendency to return for future performances. Furthermore, by using regression analysis, it supports the prediction that age is the predictor (3%, $r^2 = 0.2$) for the emotional bond with the Taiwanese opera organization. Older attendees tend to show greater loyalty and a stronger bond to the folklore performance.

Table 5 shows the different ages of the attendees and their varying preferences in ways to access information on the MHY performance. The cross-tabulation analysis showed that the WOM method is the main mode of

Table 3

Cross-tabulation of the age of attendees and their association with the brand image

Brand Image Variable	Age								Total
	Attitude	15&less	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66&above	
MHY legacy has shaped important Taiwanese culture	Disagree	3.4%	1.2%	2.6%	0.9%	1.3%	0%	0%	1.6%
$x^2=29.488$ · $df=12$ · $p<.01$ (sig.=.003)	Neutral	13.8%	7.0%	7.5%	2.8%	3.2%	3.4%	0%	6.1%
	Agree	82.8%	91.8%	89.9%	96.2%	95.6%	96.6%	100%	92.3%

Table 4

Cross-tabulation of the age of attendees versus revisit intentions

Future Intention	Age								Total
	Attitude	15&less	16-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65	66& above	
I will recommend MHY performance to others	Disagree	3.4%	0.9%	2.2%	0%	1.3%	0%	0%	1.2%
$x^2=36.229$ · $df=12$ · $p<.001$ (sig.=.000)	Neutral	11.2%	4.0%	1.8%	2.9%	1.9%	1.7%	0%	3.5%
	Agree	11.2%	95.1%	96.1%	97.1%	96.8%	98.3%	100%	95.2%

Table 5

Cross-tabulation of respondents' age and their source of access

Age	Word-of-Mouth n (%)	Outdoor Ads n (%)	Blogs n (%)	Official site n (%)	Newspaper n (%)	School n (%)	Others n (%)	Total n
15& Less	62(53.9)	37(32.2)	20(17.4)	15(13)	15(13)	12(10.4)	15(13)	115
16-25	147(45.4)	89(27.5)	79(24.4)	35(10.8)	24(7.4)	91(28.1)	30(9.3)	324
26-35	87(38.8)	32(14.3)	104(46.4)	30(13.4)	8(3.6)	12(5.4)	24(10.7)	224
36-45	97(49)	42(21.2)	61(30.8)	23(11.6)	24(12.1)	14(7.1)	20(10.1)	198
46-55	66(43.1)	38(24.8)	22(14.4)	22(14.4)	42(27.5)	12(7.8)	18(11.8)	153
56-65	30(60.8)	18(38.3)	3(6.4)	1(2.1)	11(23.4)	0	3(6.4)	47
66&Above	21(84)	3(12)	0	0	4(16)	1(4)	2(8)	25
Total	510	259	289	126	128	142	112	1086

communication for all audience groups, except for the respondents in the age category of 26-35 years. Outdoor advertisements such as banners and posters are especially important for the three age groups of 66 years or older (84.5%), 56-65 years (60.8%), and 15 years or younger (53.9%), whereas internet blogs are considered useful for the audience age groups of 26-35 years (46.4%), 36-45 years (30.8%), and 16-25 years (24.4%).

The school channel is an effective way to disseminate performance-related information to young audiences (under 25 years of age), especially for the age group of 16-25 years (high school students). Newspaper advertisements and reviews are influential for middle-aged (46-55 years) and elderly groups (56-65 years and 66 years or older). Performing arts websites were found to be more available to younger respondents (aged 55 or younger) than to their older counterparts (aged 56 or older). The relationship between gender and the satisfaction level was determined by using the *t* test. Gender is the only variable that reached statistical significance. The male attendees generally provided a higher score for performance, the arts organization, and the performers, compared to their female counterparts ($t = 6.677$, $df = 1253$, $p = .01$).

Results of ANOVA on the education level and the satisfaction level

	Education level	n	Mean	SD
(A)	Illiterate	9	47.11	4.485
(B)	Elementary	101	47.09	5.499 (D)
(C)	High school	399	45.88	5.574
(D)	College	626	45.11	6.345 (-B)
(E)	Post-Graduate	104	46.07	5.476
	Total	1239	45.61	5.979

Table 6 shows the relationship between the education level and the satisfaction level, determined employing ANOVA. Regarding the satisfaction level, attendees with an elementary school diploma comprised the most satisfied group ($m = 1.98$, $p < .05$ (sig. = .048), followed by attendees with a collegiate education with a bachelor's degree.

Table 7 shows the relationship between the education level and emotional bonding with MHY, which was determined employing ANOVA. The attendees with an elementary school diploma showed the highest and most positive level of emotional bonding, followed by the group with a junior or senior high school education ($m = 0.74859$, $p < .05$ (sig. = .027)).

Discussion and Conclusion

For the purpose of this study, MHY was an apt case because they retain consistent attendees while also recruiting increasingly larger numbers of young and highly educated audiences to participate in the cultural activity of Taiwanese opera. Traditional folklore operas are usually seen as appealing mainly by older male viewers as the piercing tones and intricate wordplay. However, one of the findings shows that frequent and loyal folklore performing arts audiences comprise mostly young students and women who are employed and have a collegiate education. The age of these young students and employed women attendees ranged from their twenties to their fifties. All audience groups were shown to rely mainly on WOM, including young students as well as elder attendees. The majority of the student groups (aged 16-25 years) usually obtained MHY information through WOM (45.5%), followed by through their school (28.1%), internet blogs (24.4%), and outdoor advertisements (16.8%), but less frequently from newspapers (7.4%).

Audiences with prior experiences of the performance and the performing arts group can be categorized into five groups: first-time attendees, occasional attendees, regular attendees, frequent attendees, and loyal attendees. Whereas occasional ticket buyers consider that the most important source of the performance information is traditional media channels (i.e., WOM, out-of-home advertisements, and newspaper reviews), frequent and loyal audiences rely on both new social media and traditional media to obtain information on the performance. The frequent and loyal audience groups differ from the other groups on most of the analyzed factors, but vary mainly in the high levels of involvement, satisfaction, commitment, and positive future intentions regarding the production. In addition, the different age groups attending the

Table 6

Results of ANOVA on the education level and the emotional bonding

	Education level	n	Mean	SD
(A)	Illiterate	8	13.5000	1.69031
(B)	Elementary	98	12.8980	2.59456 (C)
(C)	High school	395	12.1494	2.33501 (-B)
(D)	College	603	12.5257	2.14830
(E)	Post-Graduate	102	12.2941	2.15989
	Total	1206	12.4196	2.25725

Table 7

show and then attached to the show exhibit stronger tendencies to recommend the production to others.

In the past, the relationship between artists and audiences relied mostly on face-to-face communication and were geographically close. Because of the rapid development of internet technology, online communities have emerged as a form of networking to maintain social relationships based on mutual emotional bonds. This type of community can be formed regardless of geographical and physical constraints. The application of new media has undoubtedly changed the relationship between the performing arts industry and its audiences. Academic circles are currently reevaluating how to define a community, and most of this practice is largely due to the presence of affordable and accessible communication technologies. The internet brings people together from all over the world. For this study, a virtual community was considered the aggregation of the audiences and artists of performing arts events interacting based on a shared interest, where the interactions are at least partially supported or mediated by technology and guided by certain protocols and norms. Online communities are virtual societies that can be formed for any interest, and they are, for instance, established to discuss celebrities and performances.

We can no longer assume when watching a local folk art performance that it will be performed repeatedly in the same manner as it has been for centuries, and that the performers and audiences are participating for the same reasons that previous generations had participated. The folklore performance of Taiwanese opera has historically played the role in strengthening the sense of pride, identity, and prosperity of a Chinese community. The indoor theatre performance served as a space of dreaming for both audiences as well as artists whose past experiences stir present and future artists to imagine newer and even bolder ways to dream through performance. For long-term relationships bonding, it was suggested to be driven by the goal of directed emotional quality perceived by the audiences.

In conclusion, audiences have a significant relationship with performers, and they themselves perform in various contexts. This notion of performance thus offers an alternative theoretical framework for the microanalysis of audience practices. Therefore, when analyzing the interactive relationship between audiences and performers, this study recommends approaching the motivations and activities of audiences from the context of the community in which those audiences participate. One of the limitations of this study is that the findings cannot be generalized to the wider

market of performing arts outside of folklore culture. For future studies, an international-scale survey and comparisons with other folklore performing arts are recommended.

Footnotes

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