

Jeannie Arthur, FreshMinds ***Engaging Broader Audiences***

Jeannie Arthur is managing director of FreshMinds Research and an aspiring photographer. Prior to joining FreshMinds, she worked at PA Consulting where she specialised in organisational design and change management. At FreshMinds she has worked with a wide range of clients in both the public and private sectors to enable them to understand their customers and measure the impact of strategy and marketing initiatives upon the organisation.

In this session Jeannie outlined key findings from FreshMinds' *Culture on Demand* report commissioned by the DCMS. It explored how demand is formed for an arts event or activity, what drives attendance and what influences audience / visitor behaviour from a range of participants and in particular from those in traditionally hard-to reach groups.

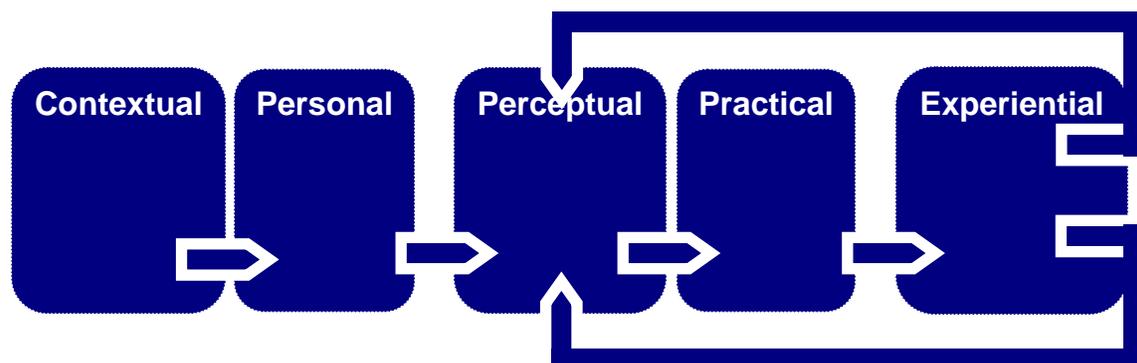
Cultural Engagement is Self-Reinforcing

This presentation summarises the reports that FreshMinds presented for the DCMS looking especially at the demand model created, the key drivers for attendance from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, disabled people and 'lower' socio-economic classes as well as looking at a couple of case studies. It was nine months work for a team of people and this is only an overview; the full report is available to download from the DCMS website.

'Culture on Demand' was essentially a review of the current literature, followed up by interviews with experts and the analysis of relevant case studies.

The Demand Formation Model

This model, though produced by FreshMinds, is based on work undertaken by others, especially McCarthy et al (2001), Morris, Hargreaves and McIntyre (2005) and Yoshitomi (2000). It looks at the stages involved in attending and experiencing the arts.



In the first box are the wider contextual factors that an individual takes into account such as socio-demographic and socio-cultural factors.

The second box is personal, representing the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, identity, educational and other personal factors which are important. We are all different as individuals.

In the third stage are perceptual elements in which contextual and personal factors are put through 'a lens of perception'. If you imagine a person thinking about going to see an exhibition and the choices they make, the contextual and personal factors drive the decision about whether they want to go. Then the 'perception lens' is applied. Will I fit in if I attend this exhibition? Is it going to feel right?

The fourth box contains practical factors: do people have time to go and attend a particular event? Do they have enough money? Are there access constraints? Is it local?

The fifth stage involves experiential aspects: whilst there is plenty of research around the contextual and personal factors that drive demand and about the practical barriers that need to be overcome, there is relatively little research about experiential elements and yet this is vital to pulling it together in a holistic sense and understanding feedback. If somebody goes to an event, this has a big influence on whether they decide to go to another event. That experience feeds back and creates a leap back to perception and then has an impact on whether they will make time.

Key Demand Drivers

By digging deeper into the key drivers of demand it is clear that there are many that are common to all audiences.

- Family - the family unit is important as demand is often driven by engaging not just with an individual, but with the family as a wider group.
- Socialising - people want to be part of something wider than their family unit and to become involved with the wider community
- Experiences – the feedback loops from previous experiences
- Identity - not just as an individual but in finding a place to be
- Trust – being secure within a setting

Next, we will look in more detail at three specific groups: Black and Minority Ethnic groups, disabled people and the 'lower' socio-economic groups.

Disabled people

The vast majority of the literature on disability reiterates the importance of practical barriers in determining levels of engagement. These barriers aside, the drivers which most strongly pertain to disability groups include:

- The desire to feel 'normal' – that is, to belong as a full member of society. In many cases this desire can override all others and it is important to recognise that many people who have a limiting condition do not consider themselves disabled in the first place.
- Therapeutic and health benefits of culture for certain forms of disability have received some support, though this remains a contentious issue in the disabled community, given the potentially patronising overtones that 'healing' can imply.

- Confidence and self-expression appear to be a strong driver for some disabled participants. The disability arts movement, albeit a politicised one, is indicative of an underlying desire among disabled groups to make their voice heard.
- Representation is closely linked to the idea of self-expression and reflects a desire to see in culture more widely, a broad and authentic representation of disabled people and disabled artists specifically.
- Experience can assume a heightened sense of importance for some disabled groups because of the difficulties involved in attending in the first place. Negative experiences in the past have a detrimental effect for future demand.

Black and Minority Ethnic Audiences

Although treated as a group, this group contains many sub-sectors. Engagement, whilst lower than the average for all adults, masks a number of crucial nuances: many Black and Minority Ethnic audiences fall into lower socio-economic groups and ethnicity in these cases is less of an issue than deprivation or lack of access. Many studies indicate that Black and Minority Ethnic groups are heavily involved in culture, but either community-based culture, or activities which are not self-reported as culture.

- Popular music plays a more important role than for other groups, but particularly for those of African and Afro-Caribbean origin.
- Socialising plays a central role in informing leisure choices for Black audiences in particular although 35% of Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups also cited opportunities to socialise as a reason for attending arts events.
- Identity as a term is more explicitly articulated by Black and Minority Ethnic groups than any other. Issues of ethnicity as a marker of another place or culture assume a higher degree of importance, particularly those who are first-generation immigrants, refugees or asylum-seekers.
- Culturally-relevant content creates 'links to a known culture' which drive perceptions of more traditional Western cultural forms as pertinent to needs.
- Locality is especially important, so local media, word of mouth and specialist media are all more likely to contribute to engagement than for the other priority segments.

Lower socio-economic groups

The C2DE group is a huge number of people (45% of the UK population) with many sub sectors and demand drivers for people from these stratifications being less well defined in the literature, but a number of trends emerge

- Socialising is a crucial component of engagement. Evidence shows that these groups consider the opportunity to socialise as an important motivator for attendance. Attending in a group is a more important feature of attendance than average.

- They are more likely to want a sense of fun rather than learning or educational outcomes. These relative priorities are inverted for lower socio-economic groups compared with ABC1 audiences.
- Experiences resonate strongly with this group. Embedding cultural activities within familiar environments or turning culture inside-out have been shown to have a positive effect on perceptions of culture.
- Trust is a fundamental issue. Studies show that institutional or public service provision is viewed with scepticism and mistrust. Alternative channels assume a greater importance here than for many groups with social networks and familiar locations being important drivers for attendance and participation.
- Issues of local interest or activities on offer close to home also receive proportionally greater levels of interest. They are less likely to travel to spend leisure time and attendance is at locations no more than 30 minutes from the place of residence.

Getting the balance right

The challenge lies in understanding the drivers for different groups but at the same time getting the balance right between tokenism and mainstreaming. Rather than trying to understand one driver, it is about understanding them, understanding the complexity and then applying it at a certain degree of subtlety.

We need to be more subtle in how we are trying to engage with people, so rather than having a photo of a black person or an overt reference to a wheelchair, we need to create a genuinely authentic cultural reference, making sure that that is something that people can relate to. We should use these drivers to augment existing strategies rather than re-engineer strategies.

Case Studies

The Balti Bus

The play, *The Balti Kings*, was written by Tamasha Theatre Company and toured in the UK. The project was aimed at encouraging attendance and providing more culturally diverse programming and in this particular instance used an extensive outreach programme for South Asian communities in the Yorkshire region. They aimed to take a very holistic approach to attracting a diverse audience and it provides a good example of a project which uses the social motivation of participants.

On the evenings of the performances, activities were laid on in foyers in order to provide a sense of an interactive element and create an atmosphere akin to that of a festival.

Using the 'Balti Busses' to transport people to the event meant they arrived early and the entertainment in the foyer was a focal point around which the audience could mingle, socialise and feel supported by their peers. According to the evaluation report the audience loved singing along with the karaoke and clapping to the music.

The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art

The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art opened in 2002 and commissions and presents programmes of international contemporary visual art. The gallery has no permanent collections but an ever-changing calendar of exhibitions and activities that explore contemporary artistic practice, such as 'blockbuster' exhibitions of innovative work and projects created by artists working within the local community.

Baltic has had over 40 exhibitions and 2 million visitors since it opened and aimed to bring in a wider audience by making it more accessible.

It has developed a strategy based on:

- Moving parts of the exhibitions outside
- Actively engaging with intended audience
- A community outreach programme
- Baltic's artist residency programme
- Use of technology
- A strategic marketing campaign
- Evaluation and research



1. Moving parts of the exhibitions outside

This removes barriers about the threshold of the venue and makes people curious about what might be inside.

2. Engaging with intended audience

This involves being realistic about connecting with an intended audience such as looking at what they do in their free time: the television they watch, magazines they read, fashions they wear.

It's 'all about programming': what does the person in Gateshead want? What interests, amuses or engages them?

3. Community outreach programme

Curators go into the community and schools to make presentations, but the aim is not only to show and perform, but also to gather information on what the Gateshead community is interested in and for them to present to them.

4. BALTIC's Artist Residency Programme

This forms an integral part of Baltic's activities and is an important element of their role as an originator of new works. 'Resident Artist Connects' is a programme that connects with the 'at risk' teen group and teaches basic colour theory and team work.

5. Technology

Baltic tries to reach out using what people are familiar with. Many exhibitions [elsewhere] have plasma screens on the wall with headphones, but Baltic has taken it further. Visitors can pick up a hand-held console with the artist on video leading them through the gallery.

6. Marketing campaign

Specific marketing to target narrowly defined groups includes things like the 'Spank the Monkey' project which uses stickers/ buttons/ packs for students with things they might use

7. Evaluation

There is a strong evaluation programme which enables the organisation to keep learning and moving forward.

Key takeaways for arts marketers

It's important not to focus on one driver as there is no single silver bullet to engage with all these different communities. Success should be based on understanding, interpreting and getting under the skin of the complexity of our audiences, creating and evaluating strategies that we have to engage with these people.

Also vital is the need to creating genuinely authentic experiences for people, *not* being 'phoney'.

And finally to consider the whole experience in a holistic manner, not just understanding one aspect of it but to ensure that it all fits together and to build that experience and understand the impact that it has on future participation in culture and the arts.