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Consuming the Arts

Dr Gretchen Larsen is a lecturer in marketing at Bradford University School of Management. Prior to that, she was a lecturer at the University of Otago in New Zealand. She developed and tested a framework depicting the relationship between the consumer's self-concept, the symbolic properties of music and the consumption context. Her work currently focuses on the consumption of live music, particularly at festivals and she was part of a team that gained ESRC funding to run a seminar series on 'Rethinking Arts Marketing'.

This session provided insights into how our audience, visitors or participants think and how they make decisions about what to attend.

Changes in Marketing Thought

Those involved in the academic side of arts marketing and consumption will already have observed the large amount of research that is being conducted by a vibrant group of researchers. It takes a broad view of what we call the arts, including everything from publicly funded to private sector arts and from the traditional arts to popular culture. This is because there are commonalities in consumer behaviour across the art forms which help us understand arts consumption and marketing, even though each specific incident of arts consumption should be treated as unique.

A range of terms are used to describe those who attend the arts; attenders, listeners and viewers to fans. However, the overall term we use is *consumer*, which we feel is an appropriate term given the breadth of our definition of consumption.

In the beginning, marketing inherited an economic model based on the exchange of goods:

	<i>Traditional Good-Centred Dominant Logic</i>	<i>Emerging Service-Centred Dominant Logic</i>
<i>Primary Unit of Exchange</i>	Exchange for goods	Exchange to acquire knowledge, skills or services
<i>Role of Goods</i>	Goods are end products	Goods are intermediate products used by consumers in the value creation process
<i>Role of Consumer</i>	Recipient of goods. Marketers do things to consumers	Co-producer of service. Marketers do things in interactions with consumers
<i>Determination and Meaning of Value</i>	Exchange value	Value in use
<i>Firm-Consumer Interaction</i>	Consumers are acted on to create transactions with resources	Consumers are active participants in relational exchanges and co-production
<i>Source of Economic Growth</i>	Wealth obtained from owning, controlling and producing products	Wealth obtained through the application and exchange of knowledge and skills

Adapted from Vargo and Lusch 2004

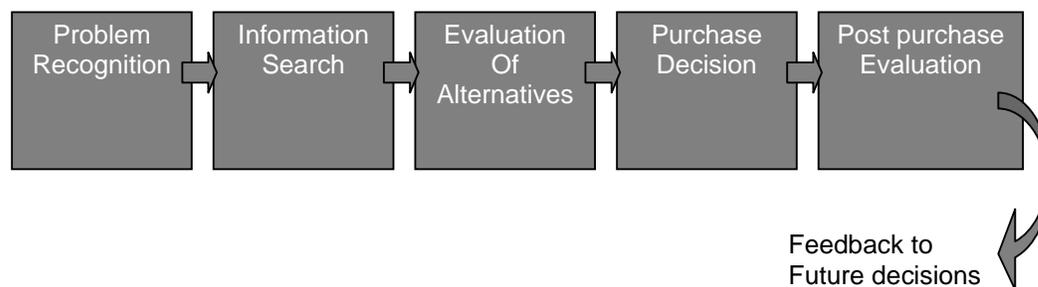
This view [middle column in diagram above] states that the main purpose of economic activity is to make and distribute things that can be sold. In order to achieve maximum efficiency, the goods should be made away from the market and stored until they are required, and then sold on to make a profit.

Many of the key concepts of marketing derive from this model; for example, the four Ps. It is clear however, that the arts do not fit into the goods centred dominant logic, due to the intangible and experiential nature of arts product, particularly in the case of the performing arts, because of the inability to separate production from consumption (the performance is the product that is consumed at the same time as production).

In the last two decades, we have begun evolving towards a new dominant logic. This is as a result of a debate about the usefulness of the 4 Ps framework and its lack of recognition of marketing as an innovative force. The service centred dominant logic [third column in diagram above] is a positive shift for arts marketers, as this new dominant logic is close to what successful arts marketers had been practising for some time. Consumer research also reflects the move towards service centred dominant logic. The role of the consumer has shifted from being that of a recipient to that of being a co-creator of the service experience; the consumer is now perceived as an active participant in the process.

From Purchaser to Consumer

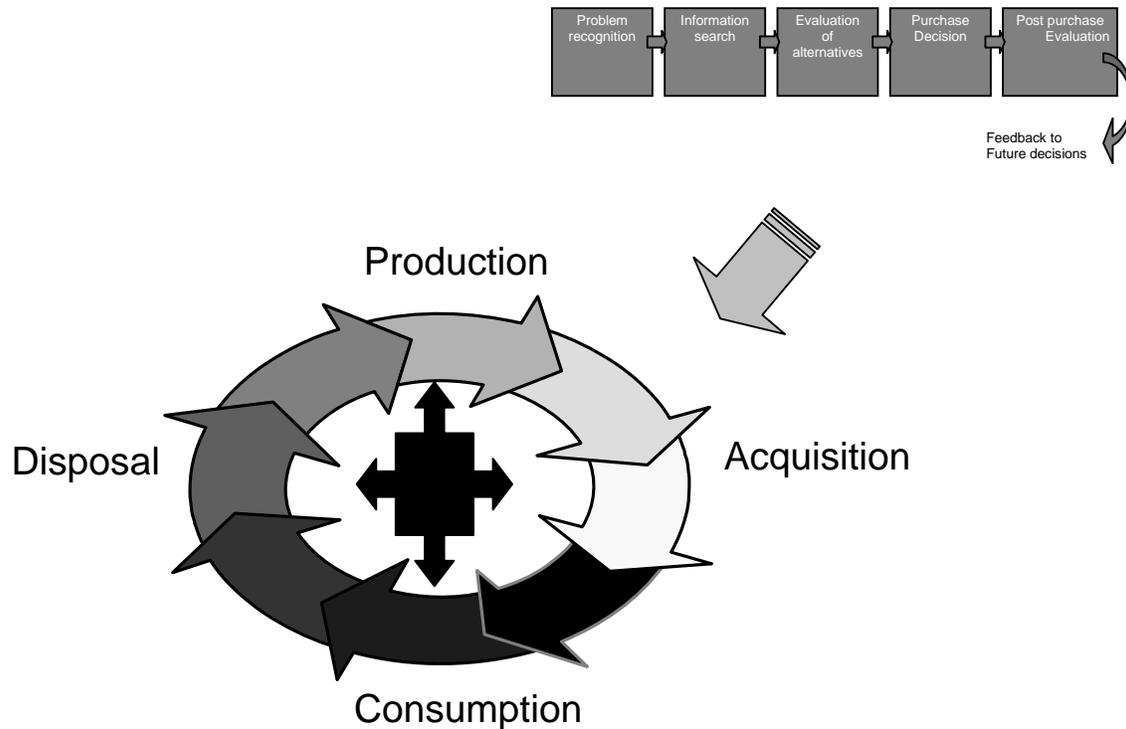
In the past, consumer research was focused on the purchase process and this made sense, as consumption was about offering value to passive consumers. Consumers were reviewed as resources and marketers wanted to know why consumers bought products and what influenced their decisions. Accordingly, researchers took a psychological approach to understanding behaviour. Much of the early academic research on arts consumption reflects this emphasis on purchase. The decision-making process is one such example.



For example, Andreasen and Bilk made a study in 1980 which showed that lifestyle, attitudes and developmental experiences are better predictors of attendance at performing arts than socio-economic variables.

The decision-making model is limited in that it assumes that all consumer behaviour is rational. It also does not take account of the variability of the individual.

This purchasing process has now evolved into a circle of production and consumption, where the parts of the cycle can now be skipped, moving from production to disposal, for example.



Our behaviour might better be described as emotional, situational, aspirational, and sometimes impulsive for clearly not all of our decisions are rational. For example, take the decision to visit the Royal Opera House. The decision to purchase (the ticket) might be prompted by a desire to see friends, a snap decision, desire to see a particular performance, or result of a comparison of other equally good options. There are also the expectations of the event, perhaps even daydreaming about what the evening might be like; the organising, who is going, what people are going to wear. We are also influenced by the evening itself, the dinner and drinks, the performance and if it was a particularly transformative experience, maybe even changing our opera consumption behaviour or being able to tell friends stories about it for years to come.

The circle of consumption [above] illustrates that consumption is comprised not only of purchasing, but also of purchasing, disposal and even production. New art can be created from all products that have been discarded. A concert will have been consumed once it has been attended. The ticket may have been acquired by means other than the purchase: it may have been a gift. Moreover this process does not have to move full circle through all the stages. We might skip out purchase by handing on a record album from family member to family member. Consumption and creation occur simultaneously. Looking at the circle of consumption, one particular feature of the performing arts is that consumption is simultaneous with disposal. This is a consumption situation which clearly follows the service centred dominant logic.

Arts Consumption Experiences

This model of consumption opens the door for a wide range of research into consumption.

There is a growing body of research under the title of consumer culture theory (the influence of various social structures upon consumption), focusing on topics such as the construction and expression of identity, the pursuit of the influence of various social structures upon consumption and the systems of meanings that channel consumers' thoughts and interests.

This necessitates a multidisciplinary approach to incorporating psychological, sociological and anthropological perspectives and the full range of research methodologies, not only surveys, but in-depth interviews and various kinds of ethnographies. Such research is very useful for a marketer working within the new service dominant consumer logic marketing.

Consumption experience is one area that has been very well researched: anticipated consumption, purchase experience, various consumption experiences such as association, dissatisfaction, satisfaction, slow and even transformation and remembered consumption or nostalgia. The quality of any experience is going to be mediated by a range of factors, as identified by Goulding (2001) in her survey of museum experiences.

- socio-cultural
- cognitive
- psychological orientations
- physical and environmental conditions

A number of these findings have been researched and investigated further, looking at embodiment, movement and physical movement to explore how people navigate and co-create their worlds. People share and display their experience of visits through their verbal and non-verbal reaction and interactions. It seems that intertwining mind and body is crucial for creating an unforgettable consumer experience. Therefore, these aspects need to be taken into account when designing public consumption spaces.

Goulding's research showed that museums, by providing a glimpse into history, provide a space for various nostalgic experiences, which means that exhibitions should combine interpretation with the opportunity for imaginative escape and they should try to include historic artefacts to create nostalgic experiences.

Arts Consumption, Meaning and the Self

The construction and expression of identity is a key reason why people say they attend raves. The work supports the post modern conceptualisation of the fragmented self and shows that the compartmentalised life of the working week and weekend rave are means of showing one's identity. This is called symbolic consumption.

A number of academics have used the research method of personal introspection to gain an understanding of the relationship between artistic preferences and their sense of identity.

It is through rituals that meaning is communicated. In my [Dr Larsen's] own research on the cultural consumption of music, the authenticity or believability is enhanced by certain rituals being enacted simultaneously, such as singing along to the music or dancing to it, consuming related paraphernalia and also being able to knowledgeably discuss the music.

Arts Consumption and Cultures of Consumption

Consumers can be seen as both culture bearers and culture consumers. Researchers are interested in how culture reconfigures consumption and how consumption reconfigures culture. There is much discussion about types and groups of audiences, from fans to cultures and subcultures.

A culture of consumption:

'a particular interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts and objects that particular groups use – through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities and meanings – to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their members' experiences and lives' (Kozinets 2001)

Another area of research has discovered that consumers create communities in many different ways as part of a culture of consumption. Research into music festivals reveals that, consciously or unconsciously, arts marketers are using utopian images and subtexts to promote music festivals.

The Aesthetic Consumer

Aesthetics in everyday life produces consumers as aesthetic subjects; consumers bring their aesthetic evaluation into everyday life and thus judge both art objects and everyday objects aesthetically. This is apparent in everyday experiences: customers look at objects such as clothing, or kitchen appliances, with lifestyle in mind.

- The role of aesthetics in everyday life aestheticises and produces consumers as aesthetic subjects (Venkatesh and Meamber 2008).
- It problematises distinctions between production and consumption (Firat and Dholakia 1998)
- Art as a social model in which consumption and production co-exist and are mutually constitutive (Attali 1988)
- Arts yield powerful insights into broader issues of consumption, markets and culture (*Bradshaw, forthcoming*)

This leads to the creation of cultural meanings, competition, style and recreation. However, it blurs the line between production and consumption. Art can be considered a social model in which art and production co-exist. This resonates powerfully with service centred dominant logic and it should help our understanding of consumption: rather than decanting marketing principles into an arts marketing context, we should be looking towards arts marketing as the way to provide powerful insights into broader issues such as consumption, audiences, and markets.

Conclusions and Implications

Widening our understanding of what constitutes consumption, from the decision-making process to the circle of consumption requires a more detailed and richer understanding of our consumers. This is of fundamental importance if we are going to work with our consumers to

co-create a valuable experience. This requires a new way of thinking about the roles of audiences and consumers; it is no longer appropriate to consider them as passive recipients of artistic offerings; we need to understand our consumers, get involved with them and get involved with them to discover ways of co-creating a valuable consumption experience that is ultimately rewarding for the consumer, the artist and the organisation.

In order to know the consumer better and the kind of experiences they are having or seeking, we must move beyond descriptive quantitative surveys and conduct studies of enquiry. Surveys have their place, but at a policy and practitioner level, there is a crying need for qualitative research which provides detailed understanding of our consumers. There are many interesting and exciting methods available, many of which have been discussed at this conference. We must also consider working across disciplines and with the academic sector in order to achieve this greater understanding of arts consumers.

Finally, the underlying themes necessitate that marketing plays not only a technical role, but a key strategic role in arts organisations, and this must be driven by an intimate knowledge of the organisation's consumers.

The challenge for the organisation is to learn from, and work with its consumers to create practical, innovative, imaginative experiences that not only co-create valuable experiences but also put arts marketing and consumption at the forefront of marketing practice.