Brand Equity and the Cultural Event: The Amalgamation of Multiple Brands for a Unified Marketing Communications Performance

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Abstract
The following paper details and analyses the concept of "brand equity" in organisations presenting cultural events. Firstly differences between branding issues pertaining to cultural products compared to conventional products are highlighted. Next is a discussion of the concept of brand equity, or the value of a brand, culminating in the presentation of a Model of the Consumer-Perceived Brand Equity in a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event, and, a Model of the Sources of Brand Equity in a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event. Following is the presentation of the notion that the branding exercise and the development of brand equity for a cultural performance product, generally is the amalgamation of the brand equity pertaining to multifarious sources in the creation of an event, for example - that of performers, directors, venue and sponsors. The paper concludes with an examination of a case study, examining the branding/brand equity components of entities amalgamating to stage a production by a principle theatre company in Sydney, Australia.

Keywords:
Brand equity, cultural organisations and events, multifarious sources, marketing communications, theatre company.

Introduction

This paper examines the generic literature on branding and brand equity, for both theoretical and practical frameworks, that can then be applied to branding in the arts and culture. From this search a model of the Consumer-Perceived Brand Equity in a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event, and, a model of the Sources of Brand Equity in a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event, is formulated. The paper concludes with qualitative data from a leading theatre company in Sydney, Australia, to illustrate the application of the generic branding principles to a specific performing arts organisation. This case study illustrates that the staging of an event involves the amalgamation of multiple brands resulting in a unified marketing communications performance.

Background

Issues pertaining to branding have for some time been regarded as critical to effective marketing management in many consumer goods and services markets, with many companies recognising that established and successful brand names are amongst their organisations' most valued assets (Aaker 1991; Aaker 1996; Keller 2003). Brands are increasingly being recognised for their role in simplifying consumer choice in an increasingly information-cluttered world, for acting as a signal and guarantor of quality (Spence 1974), and for providing a label depicting uniqueness, style, innovativeness and character. The collective value of these signals is known as brand equity (Keller 2003), and firms are increasingly realising that brand equity is a phenomenon worth understanding, developing, valuing and nurturing via astute management of the brand elements that constitute a particular brand (Brasco 1988).

Brand elements such as the brand name, logo or slogan all make contributions to the brand equity principles of brand image/associations and brand awareness (brand recognition & brand recall) (Keller 2003), via the application of the firm's marketing communications strategy which itself serves to drive the development of the organisation's brand equity.

The Staging of a *Cultural Event*

To date, most of the branding literature pertains to organisations whose output consists of more conventional products and services, which are eaten, driven, worn, employed or displayed. This paper however, recognises that cultural products differ. The focus of this paper is on the application of branding principles, and the development of brand equity by cultural organisations. What evolves is recognition of the importance of a nexus of brand equities of multiple entities at a particular point in time for a particular *cultural event*.

A cultural event consists of a multitude of entities with their respective brands and levels of brand equity, which amalgamate for a particular event to form a specific cultural product or event. Each event has a brand and level of brand equity of its own, which lasts for the life of the particular event. The entities considered include for the performing arts - the venue, the work, the writer (playwright, composer), the artistic director (conductor, choreographer), the performer(s), and the sponsor; and for the visual arts - the artist, the gallery and the sponsor. The bringing together of such a diverse set of entities, each with its own brand and brand equity, involves a huge responsibility on the part of the presenting cultural organisation, such as a theatre company or art gallery, to effectively direct such a multifarious relationship-marketing exercise. The staging of such a cultural *event* therefore requires an astute application of branding tools to facilitate the marketing communications task. It is therefore important to consider how cultural products differ from conventional goods and services.

Not a Common Product: What Differentiates Cultural Products and Organisations?

(Throsby 2001) details the definitional difficulties of the word "culture". Its origins lay in the tillage of the soil, and then generally widened to mean the cultivation of the mind and the intellect (p. 3). Throsby suggests that current usage is two-pronged; the first implies that "culture" is "an anthropological or sociological framework that describes a set of attitudes, beliefs, customs, values and practices which are common to or shared by any group" (p. 4), such as a youth culture, an Australian culture or a corporate culture; the second definition of "culture" is a more functional orientation suggesting the intellectual, moral and artistic aspects of human life. Throsby suggests that the word is useful in adjective form as "cultural" to describe "cultural goods", "cultural institutions" and the like, applicable to concepts that have the following generic properties (p. 4):

- some form of creativity in their production
- concerned with the generation and communication of symbolic meaning
- output that embodies, at least potentially, some form of intellectual property.

As such Throsby acknowledges that this definitional framework covers "the arts" as traditionally defined - music, literature, poetry, dance, drama, and visual art; as well as activities such as film-making, story-telling, festivals, journalism, publishing, television, radio, and some aspects of design (p.5). (Rentschler 2002) adds that the word "culture" encompasses practices, beliefs, shared values and identities, as well as the set of activities and products of those activities included in arts practice.

For the purpose of this study, we will define "cultural organisations" as those whose prime purpose is the production, sale or dissemination of goods or services from the Throsby list above. As such, cultural organisations differ in several important aspects from organisations dealing in non-cultural outputs.

Firstly, their output generally combines private good and public good characteristics. Attendees must pay a price for a ticket. However the consumption by one person does not (wholly) preclude the consumption by another person, in the sense that even non-attendees may still feel pride in their country, city or town having a cultural entity, such an as opera company (Throsby and Thompson 1994). From an economics perspective this makes an optimal price, and the appropriate amount of government assistance, difficult to define. Together with the fact that the costs of mounting both visual and performing are generally high, some cultural organisations qualify for government assistance on the basis of their supply of merit goods (Throsby, 2001) which changes the market dynamics in comparison with conventional goods.

A second aspect of cultural organisations that differentiates them from conventional product and service marketers is that the output of these organisations is "creative". As such it cannot be standardised as can a product coming from an assembly line, or even a service that is repetitive. An intrinsic characteristic of a creative product is that it must differ from its predecessors. For the performing arts this differentiation occurs throughout the life of a creative product: from the creation of a script or score, its interpretation by different directors and performers, its presentation in a particular venue by a particular arts organisation etc. (Kotler and Scheff 1997) regard the performing arts as firstly a product - with core, expected and augmented parameters, and secondly as a service with characteristics of intangibility, perishability, inseparability and variability The visual arts product commences with a creative idea of an artist presented via a medium such as painting or sculpture. A piece of work thereafter has an unknown destiny ranging from total obscurity or even demolition through to public exposure and acclaim, in auctions, galleries or exhibitions. At various stages of the life of a cultural product - both performing and visual arts products will need to embark on "branding" in order to communicate their value to consumers, audiences, financiers or sponsors, the general public and governments.

A third aspect of cultural organisations that is particularly pertinent to branding issues is the transient nature of brand elements in the arts. An arts organisation's name, for example, The Royal Shakespeare Company, becomes a brand whose task is to communicate a certain brand equity to its consumers and publics over a period of operation. However, unlike a product produced on an assembly line, the consistency of a tried and true formula cannot be guaranteed in the long term, making the achievement and maintenance of long-term brand equity difficult to guarantee. This is largely because the key brand and product elements of an arts organisation are likely to change, either in an evolving manner, or even quite radically, as actors, directors, other creative personnel, management, and the works of art themselves, change and evolve.

General Principles of Branding and Brand Equity

Marketers of goods and services, are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of brands, branding practices and strategies, brand valuation, and brand equity, as an integral part of marketing and management practice.

According to Keller (2003) the word *brand*, is derived from the Old Norse word *brandr*, which means "to burn", based on the practice of burning identification marks onto livestock. In modern times, identification is still an essential function of branding. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines a brand as: "a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competition." Keller (2003) thus suggests that at one level, whenever a marketer creates a new name, logo, or symbol for a new product, a new brand has been created; while on another level, a brand is more than that - involving the creation of a certain amount of awareness, reputation and prominence, in the marketplace.

What is critical is that a brand provides a layer of identification or meaning, to *a product*, which thus facilitates identification and differentiation in the marketplace. Such a "product" may be a physical good, a service, a place, a person, an organisation, an idea, a performance, a work of art etc. Branding differentiation may apply at any of the five levels defined by (Kotler 2000); the core benefit, the generic product, the expected product, the augmented product and the potential product - through the use of parent branding, sub-branding, or the use of brand extensions. A brand then adds differentiating dimensions to products: such differences might be rational and tangible - related to product performance of the brand - or more symbolic, emotional, and intangible - related to what the brand represents". Collectively, these varying layers of identification add up to the notion of *brand equity.*

The Marketing Science Institute (Brasco 1988) describes brand equity as the set of associations and behaviours on the part of the brand's consumers, channel members, and parent corporation that permits the brand to earn greater volume or greater margins than it would without the brand name. This gives the brand a strong, sustainable, and differentiated advantage over competitors. (Aaker 1991) defined brand equity as the degree of power or reputation of a brand, and later introduced the concept of consumer based brand equity in management, detailing aspects such as brand loyalty, brand competition, a brand's functionality, and brand valuation (Aaker 1996). Keller (2003) defined consumer-based brand equity as “the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand” (p. 60), and segments consumer perceived brand equity into brand awareness (recall and recognition), and brand image (associations, attitudes and benefits).

The concept of brand equity in conventional product or service organisations, may be viewed from the different perspectives of investors, retailers or consumers (Cobb-Walgren et al. 1995). Thus brand equity can be measured as the value of the brand to a firm giving the financial perspective of a firm's asset, or, as the value of the brand to consumers (consumer based brand equity) which provides more of physical product perspective to the consumer (Stegemann 2004;

Kamakura and Russell 1993). When viewed from the consumer perspective (Keller 1993) effects are evident, such as consumers being prepared to pay premium prices for particular brands, and displaying brand loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001) and the value that the brand represents as information to the consumer (Hoyer and Brown 1990). When viewed from the corporate perspective of investors, manufacturers and retailers, effects are evident such as cost advantages (Stobart 1989), cash flows (Shocker and Weitz 1988), and earnings and securities (Brasco 1988), that derive from a company's brand.

The consumer perspective of brand equity involves the concept of signalling whereby consumers treat brand images and associations as signals or cues regarding the nature of product and service quality, reliability and image or status (Swait et al. 1993), which involve information (indirect purchase use) functions as well as image (direct cost and benefit) functions (Hoyer and Brown 1990). Branding is thus about empowering products and services with the power of brand equity which relates to the fact that different outcomes result from the marketing of a product or service because of the presence of its brand, which acts as a signal to consumers in the marketplace providing economies of information search.

Blackston (1995) adds a personality element to this concept, and distinguishes two further components of brand equity - brand value, and brand meaning (attitudes, images, association and personality). Other authors present some or all of these brand equity variables as critical components of brand positioning strategies (Aaker 1982; Sujan 1989).

Companies develop brands to create value, increase market shares and boost cash flows (Stegemann 2004). Increasingly, it is being recognised that the successful establishment and development of the equity of a brand in the mind of consumers, is the key to marketing success, providing a source of understanding of past marketing actions and performance, and a guide to future strategic, communications and marketing actions. Keller describes how the brand equity concept can be applied to physical goods, services, retailers and distributors, online products and services, people and organisations, places, ideas, causes and, finally, the category of sports, arts and entertainment. The following consumer-based brand equity model (Figure 1), has been adopted from the original model by Keller (2003), and illustrates the interrelationships between the concepts discussed, and will lay the foundation for this paper.

Figure 1:
Consumer Perceived Brand Equity (Adopted from Keller 2003)

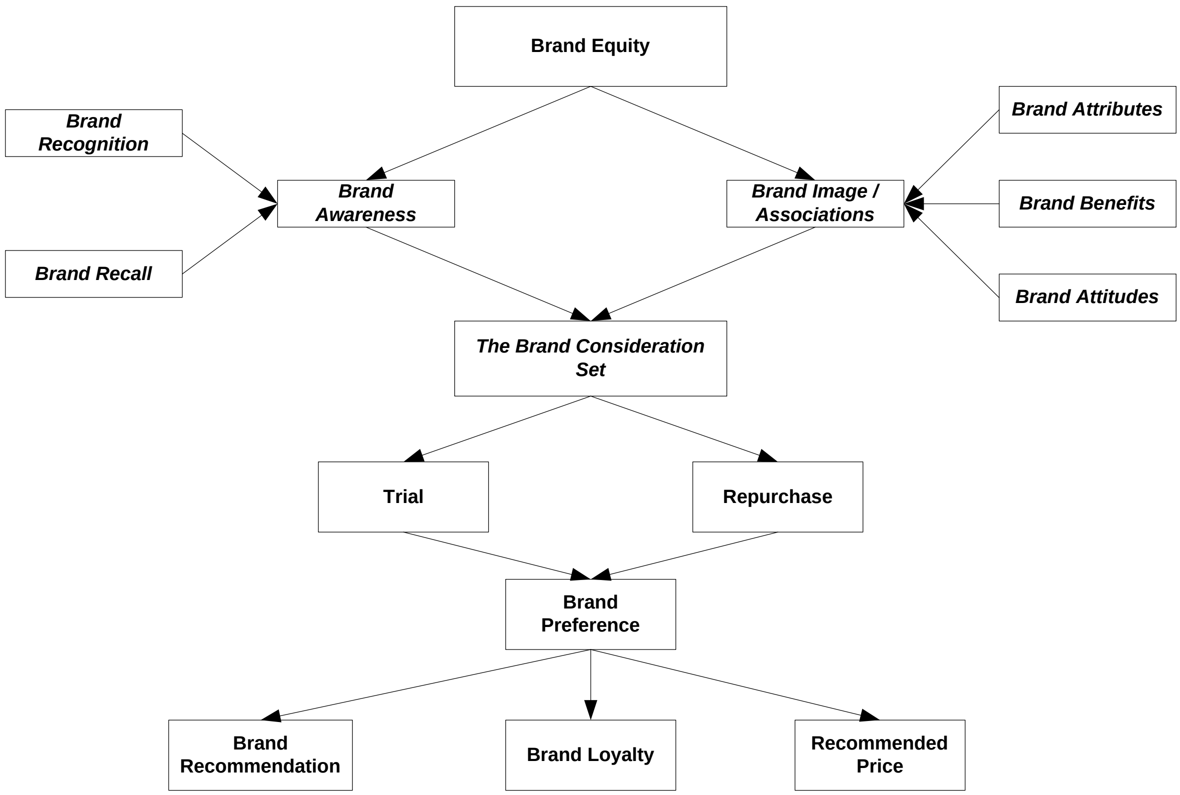


Figure 1 illustrates Keller's (2003) dissection of consumer-based brand equity into components of brand awareness and brand associations, and their respective sub-components. Collectively these influence the consumer's consideration set, which instigates the consumer decision-making/purchase process. Although Keller's model has been mostly applied to conventional goods and services, it forms a useful basis for considering branding issues in cultural organisations.

Branding in cultural organisations has received scant attention until recently, with recognition of the brand equity-brand value concepts, and their leveraging possibilities only now beginning to be seriously investigated by many performing and visual arts organisations in Australia. Cultural branding and brand equity will now be examined in more detail.

Branding and Brand Equity in Arts and Cultural Organisations

Brand equity in the performing and visual arts provides challenges in defining and communicating branding dimensions and boundaries that do not necessarily pertain to more conventional products and services. One of the fundamental reasons for these challenges lies in the fact that in arts and cultural organisations the concept of brand equity spreads beyond simply the consumer or the firm. The brand equity also involves sponsors, the community, audiences, subscribers, governments, suppliers, performers etc. with their accompanying multiple layers of branding with multiple consumers or audiences, that may differ at varying points in time. Take for example, a 2004 performance in Sydney of the play called "Amigos" written by the renowned playwright David Williamson, starring the equally renowned actor Gary

MacDonald, presented by The Sydney Theatre Company, directed by Jennifer Flowers in the Sydney Opera House, and sponsored principally by Jaguar. This cultural production could as such be seen to encompass at least six significant brand names: the work, the playwright, the actor, the director, the venue and the sponsor(s). Each of these entities carries its own brand equity which may attract patronage in its own right, and which may justify a marketing communications strategy in its own right. But in combination, at a certain point in time, the product becomes a particular *event*, - which represents an amalgamation of the multifarious brands and brand equities that constitute that event. This amalgamated product, or *event*, combines the individual levels of brand equity for its components. Give the principle, that the whole is mightier than its parts, it would be hoped that the brand equity of the event is magnified. The communications strategies however may not always be clear-cut, and the amalgamation of brand image and brand awareness (Keller, 2003) of these various participating entities, may in fact provide certain dangers for each of the participating organisations in terms of their individual and combined brand equity.

In general, the arts in Australia have started to adopt a marketing orientation over the past decade, often because of the pressure of changes in government funding policies decreeing a move to greater market self-sufficiency, or the demise of the organisation (Souter and Close 1997). This has necessitated the adoption of a greater marketing orientation by most arts organisations as they have had to place more emphasis on attracting consumers, rather than only concentrating on staging productions (visual or performing) (Kotler and Scheff 1997). Initially some were concerned that a move from a production orientation to a marketing orientation would jeopardise and stifle creativity, originality and scope of artistic expression as the market may simply demand “rehashed” well-known performing arts or predictable visual arts. The counterargument to this was that greater audience demand would facilitate richer artistic expression. The viability of arts organisations facing such pressures is a balance between achieving the creative mission and establishing and satisfying audience needs (Rentschler 1999).

In order to achieve this balance, arts organisations in the past decade in Australia have had to become more marketing oriented, developing marketing strategies that utilise market segmentation, target marketing, positioning and the more astute use of a marketing mix, in particular more focussed and concerted strategic marketing communications efforts. Some of the these marketing efforts have been assisted by bodies such as the Australia Council which has provided funding for some marketing training and the formation of bodies such as AbaF (Australian Business Arts Foundation) which acts as a “dating agency” between businesses offering sponsorships and arts bodies seeking sponsors.

However the emphasis in the marketing efforts of brands by cultural organisations, seems to be underutilised. Although arts organisations are developing an increasing tendency to use a variety of communications tools, our belief as researchers is that it is without a real understanding of the value of developing their brand equity, general branding possibilities are largely being overlooked.

This paper is part of a wider study examining brand equity in the broader cultural context of the visual and performing arts. However, this paper will consider only the performing arts. Initially some theoretical issues will be examined in the context of existing relevant literature, which leads to the development of a Model of Consumer-Perceived Brand Equity in a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event (**Figure 2**), which is an adaptation of Keller's (2003) CBBE model, and a Model of the Sources of Brand Equity for a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event (**Figure 3**). The paper concludes with an Australian case study that showcases the principles espoused in the developed models.

Research Objectives

There are three main research objectives expressed in this paper:

i. To examine the application of the Model of Perceived Brand Equity (Adopted from Keller 2003), to cultural organisations. This model is depicted in a Model of Consumer-Perceived Brand Equity in a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event (**Figure 2).**
ii. To examine the role of branding, and the understanding of the concept of brand equity in cultural organisations, especially as pertains to the branding relationship that becomes necessary as the multifarious components of a *cultural event* merge. This set of relationships is depicted in a Model of the Sources of Brand Equity for a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event (**Figure 3**).
iii. To examine just how effectively cultural organisations, especially those in a coordinating role, such as a theatre company, currently, or have the potential to, utilise marketing and branding communications tools to establish and enhance brand equity.

Discussion of Research Purpose of Paper

The Model of Consumer-Perceived Brand Equity in a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event (**Figure 2)**, is an extension of Keller's model (from **Figure 1**), illustrating how consumer-related brand equity develops in a cultural organisation. The main source of difference in the brand equity development process of cultural events, as opposed to conventional goods and services, lies in the components of Brand Image/Associations, which are Sources/Attributes, Benefits and Attitudes. Figure 2 illustrates the variables of these constructs, as relating to aspects of a performance production, such as the roles and reputations of individuals such as actors or artistic directors. Such elements of the marketing mix relate largely to the fifth "P" as People. As such, this forms a point of differentiation from the conventional "4 P's" of a product's marketing mix. Collectively, brand equity components of brand awareness and brand image/associations lead to the cultural consideration set, then onto the consumer decision process for a cultural product. The delineation of a cultural product, then becomes recognised as the amalgamation of multifarious components, the individual components of brand equity pooling to form a creative product or *event.* **Figure 3** details this Model of the Sources of Brand Equity for a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event.

Figure 3 maps the contributing components to a generic (performing arts) event. Each of these components, such as the leading performers, the venue or the sponsor, has a pre-existing level of brand equity used in the independent marketing of that entity. However for the staging of a particular performing arts event, the reputation or brand equity (and the brand elements) converge to package a particular *cultural event* - which must then form its own brand equity for the duration of the event. This is a unique brand-management and marketing scenario, not faced by marketers of conventional products or services. This model helps to explain why the concept of brand equity in the arts is so complex: the staging of *Hedda Gabler* with Cate Blanchett by the Sydney Theatre Company at the Wharf Theatre is a totally different event than would be the staging of the same play, by the same company, with a lesser known actor, in a regional centre. This raises the question for all arts organisations, of just how important is the brand equity of their presenting organisation, and what can such organisations do, if anything, to use brand management with marketing communication tools, to develop, maintain and build their brand?

Little past research has recognised the multifarious brands and their respective levels of brand equity, that constitute an *event* in the arts. The third research objective of this study is to investigate this phenomenon to see how marketing communications tools are used to develop, and communicate the brand equity of an *event*, as well as that of the principal cultural organisation concerned. The range of marketing communications tools considered includes the following: advertising, sponsorship, public relations, publicity, event marketing, point-of-purchase promotion, E-Marketing, direct marketing, and government liaison. In conjunction with the usage of these broader communication tools are the usage of more specific tools of branding such as brand name, labelling and packaging, logos, jingles, patents and copyrights. Together these marketing communication and branding tools form a collective force that helps to create brand equity of an entity; but with arts marketing the brand equity of the principal organisation may at times become confused and blended with that of the particular *event* being marketed.

Figure 2:
Model of Consumer-Perceived Brand Equity in a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event.

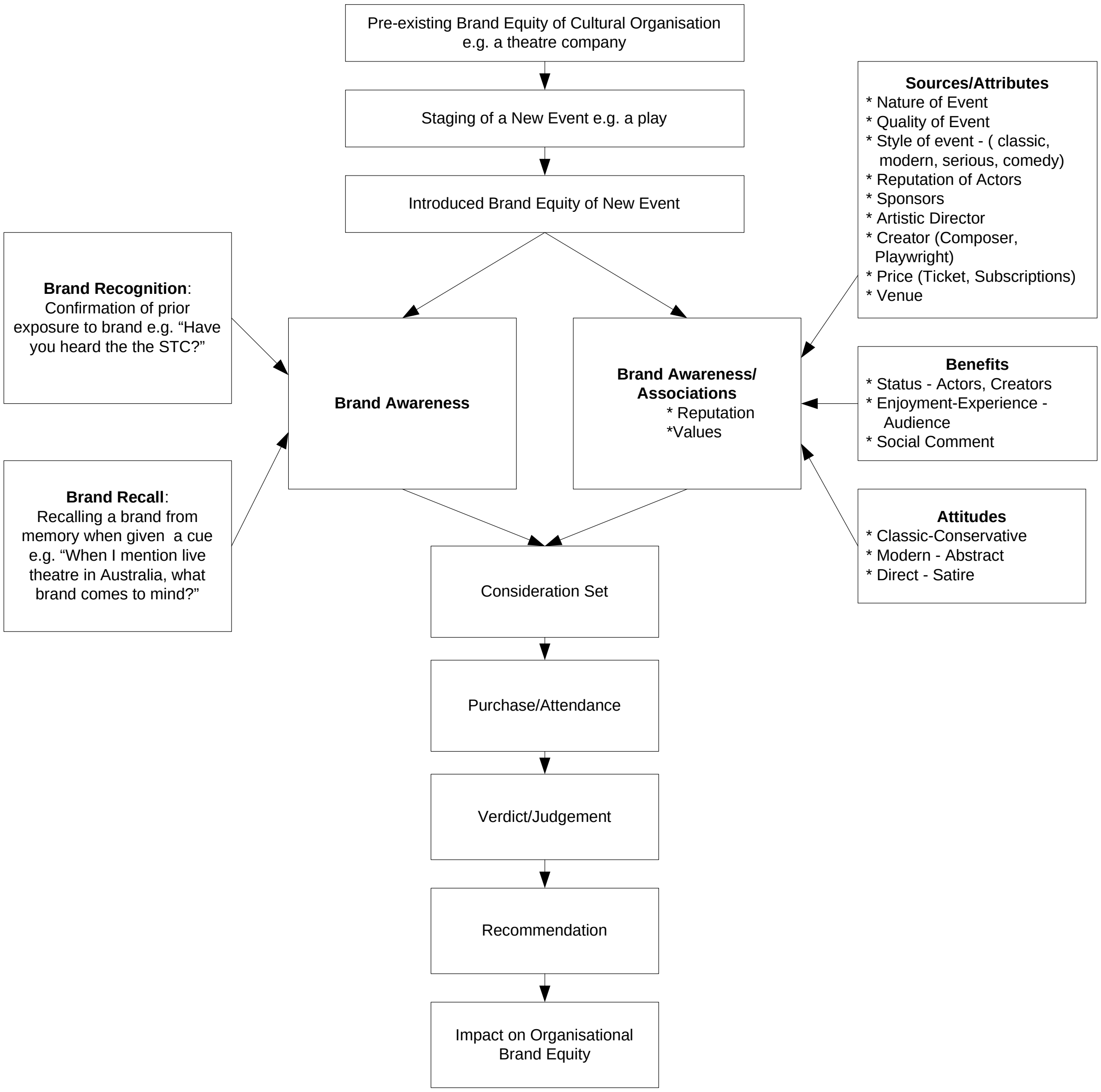
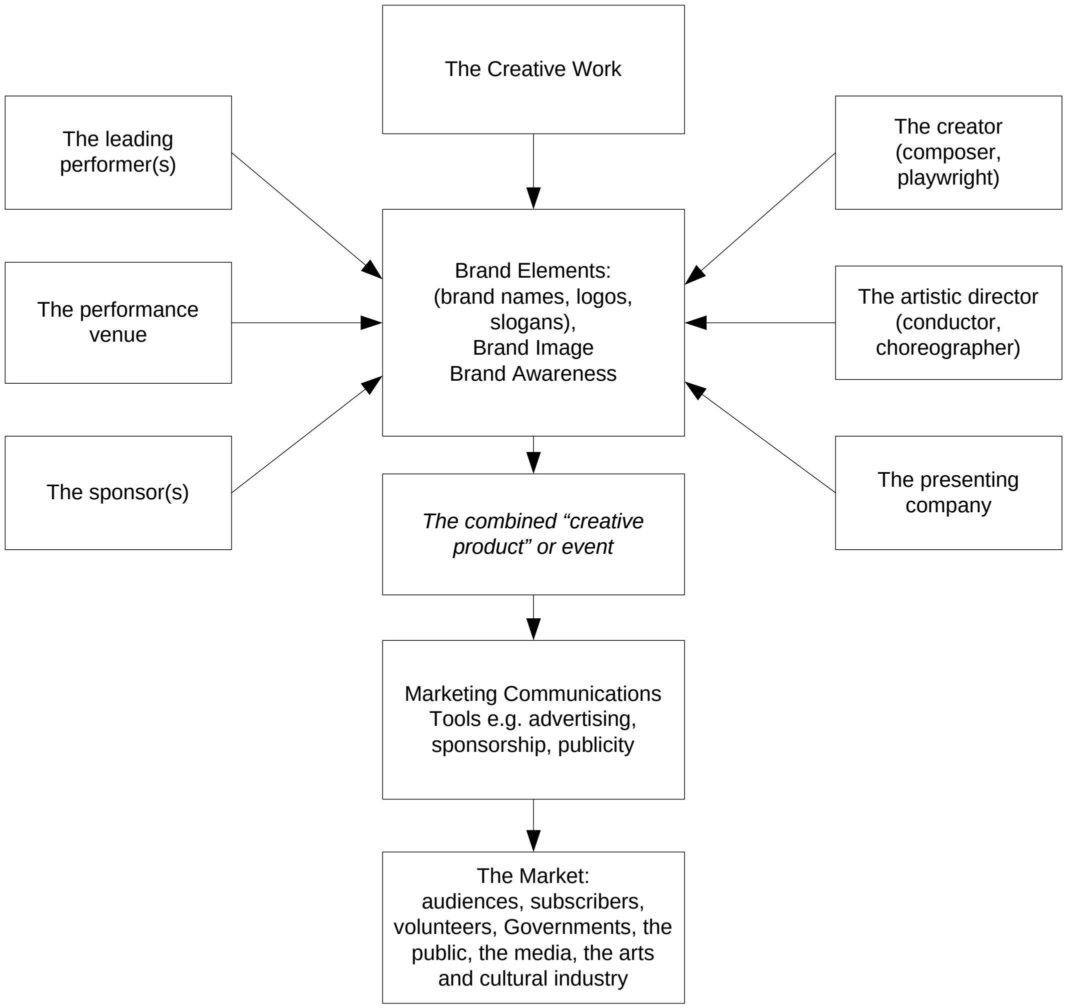


Figure 3:
Model of the Sources of Brand Equity for a Cultural (Performing Arts) Event.



Research Questions and Hypotheses

As shown in the model diagrams, a cultural organisation's branding efforts and resultant brand equity are dependent on relationships with many other entities, including the final consumers or audience. Marketing communications are thus critical in brand management and the establishment and building of brand equity. Emanating from this model are the following research questions to be addressed in this study:

The four major research questions to be answered are:

a. How much do arts organisations currently understand and value their brand equity?
b. What role does the brand equity of contributing *sources* play, in determining the overall brand equity of a cultural *event?*
c. How is the brand equity of contributing *sources* managed in the staging of an *event?*
d. How effectively do cultural organisations use marketing communications/branding tools, to aid in the development of, and enhancement of brand equity?

The major hypothesis is that in cultural organisations:

> **The brand equity of a cultural event is the sum of the brand equities of the contributing components; and that there is a correlation between the use of marketing communication tools and the level of brand equity able to be achieved.**

This may be broken up into a number of sub-hypotheses, as follows:

a. Brand equity remains somewhat of a mystery to many arts and cultural organisations, but its importance is increasingly being recognised, understood and nurtured.
b. The overall brand equity of a cultural event is the sum of the brand equity of the contributing sources.
c. The management of the branding (and brand equity) of a cultural event requires careful management of the branding (and brand equity) of the contributing sources
d. Most arts and cultural organisations are endeavouring to utilise marketing communications tools, and elements of branding to aid in the development of, and enhancement of, brand equity.

From the outset of this study, it is maintained that marketing communications help facilitate the establishment and maintenance of brand equity in the cultural industry both on a business-to-business basis, and between the organisations and final consumers. In general we argue that without marketing communications, the cultural organisations would not be able to build this brand equity. This argument leads to our main hypothesis.

Methodology

The study is a qualitative study, focussing on an in-depth case study, as recommended by (Yin 1981), of a performing arts organisation in Sydney, Australia, selected to provide a number of practices pertaining to branding, marketing communications, and the development and utilisation of brand equity of one cultural organisation, representing the amalgamation of the brand equities of its multifarious components. The prime source of data involved personal interviews with key marketing (and brand management) personnel from the theatre company. Additional data was gathered through examination of Annual Reports, Subscription Brochures, Programmes and the website of the theatre company, as well as information from reports and websites from relevant Government organisations. This was a type of triangulation process ensuring the provision of accurate facts of the case.

Case Study Results - Sydney Theatre Company (STC)[1]

Background

STC was established in 1978 as the resident company at the Drama Theatre of the Sydney Opera House, having been derived from the Old Tote Theatre at Kensington. STC moved to The Wharf when the Pier 4 and Pier 5 refurbishment took place in 1984, providing STC with office space and the Wharf 1 and Wharf 2 theatres, as well as a set workshop and rehearsal space.

STC has always been, and remains, the "flagship" or state theatre company of Sydney, and as such is the recipient of funding from Federal (Australia Council) and State (Arts Council) governments. Certain responsibilities, and certain privileges are associated with government funding, which will be later discussed. Nonetheless, levels of government funding have dropped from approximately 50% in the 1970's to approximately 10% currently. Sprott explains "We rely a lot more on box office, corporate sponsorship and other fund raising, which is why the STC brand has become so important - to audiences, to corporate sponsors, and to the general public".

Branding Elements

The STC Brand Name Product

The STC brand and associated sub-brands, apply to a diverse range of cultural entities, as described in the following excerpt from the 2004 Annual Report: "The annual subscription season features up to eleven plays including recent or new Australian work, as well as interpretations of theatrical classics and contemporary overseas works. In addition to its annual subscription season, STC's work reaches a variety of audiences in many different ways: new commissions and play development programs; a development stream of work Wharf 2 Blueprints; and annual Educational Program and The Wharf Revue. Additionally, STC regularly co-produces and tours its productions throughout Australia and overseas, playing annually to audiences in excess of 300,000".

STC is the state theatre company. As explained by Phillipa Stott, this is a unique and powerful aspect of its brand - and involves a responsibility as the flagship theatre company of the state, that cannot be taken lightly. This gives the company a geographical focus based on Sydney and the state of NSW. It is not a National company, although some shows go on national tour, usually on request. The flagship status of the STC brand also implies a responsibility towards artistic development and not juts the commercial staging of plays. As such STC commissions a lot of new plays (which may not necessarily end of on stage), provides forums for young playwrights and directors, and has a strong educational wing, which encourages attendance at plays to school students for pleasure and assessment purposes.

The importance if the STC brand is probably strongest in the eyes and minds of the subscribers, who make a commitment to a certain number of STC plays at the onset of the subscription season, often before the full casting is announced. STC works hard to make subscribers pleased with their commitment, with preferential seating, some price incentives on play packages, and the issue of a STC card offering certain shopping benefits in the CBD, and occasional mail-outs with additional offers throughout the season. As such subscribers experience considerable brand loyalty and commitment to the STC brand.

At the other end of the consumer spectrum, occasional or casual ticket buyers probably show little awareness of the STC brand, and certainly display little brand loyalty. Such consumers probably rate an STC play as simply an "event" which likely competes for time and money with movies, musicals such as *The Lion King*, sporting events, and even watching television or going to the pub. Since these consumers help to use up the residual tickets, considerable resources are required to create awareness and inspire demand from this cohort, in other words, a hard sell is required. This segment cannot be overlooked, as it represents a growing cohort, characterised by the making of a last-minute decision to go on an outing.

The Artistic Director - a Critical Brand Element

The STC repertoire tends to be a mixture of new and known Australian works, new international work, and some classics. As such the STC brand is very much the imprint of the Artistic Director, Robyn Nevin, with the repertoire representing Robyn's relationship with, and knowledge of, performers and performance opportunities both locally and globally. Former Artistic Directors were Richard Wherrett and Wayne Harrison, both of whom projected strong and different styles that resulted in equally different brand personalities for STC. Robyn's style is to provide a season or a work with her strong endorsement, then lets the show speak for itself; however she is always the face of the launch with her photograph accompanying a launch, or a subscription catalogue, in an authoritative manner. She is an appropriate person for this role, with her impressive history as a great Australian actress and director, who has successfully steered STC artistically and commercially for the past five years. The fact that Robyn still performs in, and directs, the occasional STC production, adds to her credibility, with audiences, performers, industry participants and sponsors. She is a critical element of the STC brand.

Plays and Performers

For some patrons, the only brands that matter are those of the play, the playwright or the performer(s) - and not the theatre company itself, or the venue. In such situations, a theatre company has to balance optimal supply with (potentially unlimited) demand. One such scenario was the 2004 STC production of *Hedda Gabler* featuring Cate Blanchett, performed at the small Wharf Theatre as agreed to with Cate Blanchett because she prefers performing with a small and intimate audience. In this case most seats were occupied by STC subscribers because of its popularity, and as such, this work became a sort of reward to subscribers for their loyalty to STC. In fact the *Hedda Gabler* - Cate Blanchett play, would have sold to full capacity at the largest venue in town for many months; but the commercial imperative is not always the key determinant.

The Venues[2]

The Wharf Theatres are part of the landscape of STC, intimate, characteristic, and warm, and considered by many to be an integral part of the STC experience. Audiences and performers enjoy the ambience offered by these small venues, with restaurant and bar facilities in the immediate vicinity. Until recently, STC lacked a large-capacity venue with soul. However the new Sydney Theatre which is under the management of STC has now filled this void. In addition, performances at the Sydney Opera House incorporate the brand image of Sydney Opera House and its splendor, and may well be the chosen venue of overseas visitors to Sydney, wanting a theatre-tourism experience.

Other Brand Elements

When asked about the various brand elements used by STC - the name of the Sydney Theatre Company, the logo, symbols, characters, slogans or trademarks, it was agreed that STC does have a certain house style that reflects very much Roby Neven's philosophy that it is an ensemble putting on a show, and not a particular star. In examining a poster for *The Club,* there is the STC logo and watermark on the top corner, strong colours are used, and the whole cast is always listed, even if a prominent actor is performing; it is a somewhat understated non-Hollywood style, but that reflects Robyn's general ethos. In Hollywood, Cate Blanchett would be bigger than *Hedda Gabler* but this is not our style. The Marketing Manager concedes that sometimes this is a bit of a restriction on their promotional styles, but as Artistic Director, Robyn sets the tone, and that's the framework all agree to work within with consistency. This style does give the company an aura of authority, confidence and respectability. "We consider that for all parties in the STC relationship - subscribers, occasional ticket buyers, employees, sponsors, artists, the public - the STC brand is seen as an imprimatur of quality. As the state theatre company it is important that we are not seen to be trying to be too commercial or manipulative in the market place. But our market positioning is as the 'flagship' theatre company in Sydney. We don't benchmark ourselves against other companies - we tend to have a natural authority. The tone of our communications is "quality". This is the ethos of our corporate brand".

The annual subscription catalogue is considered to be the most important tool for communicating STC's brand qualities. According to Keller (2003), brand knowledge consists of brand awareness and brand image. For STC the brand awareness is very high amongst the theatre-going population, and the STC brand image is high in terms of both strength and favourability. The brand image scores lower on uniqueness as there are other theatre companies with perhaps a more creative brand image. Branding and marketing communications entail advertising via billboards, posters, newspapers, the Internet, and for selling tickets to particular plays - television.

Sponsorship and Relationship Marketing

Theatre companies such as STC engage in relationship marketing with other businesses in a number of forums. One is a connection with the hotel industry. Brochures promoting current productions are usually left in hotel foyers in the hope that the tourist segment will be interested in a booking. Hotel concierges are sometimes invited to previews, so that they may act as leisure consultants to their hotel clients. However STC shows often sell out, so that seats can't really be guaranteed in advance to a travel group. This situation differs from say the shows in the West End of London that run for much longer seasons. However the Opera House does its own promotions of shows running. So to some extent there is a joint-branding strategy between STC and Sydney Opera House (as well as Opera Australia, Sydney Symphony Orchestra and so on). If capacity exists for a certain play, then a form of synergistic or relationship marketing might also exist, for example, in 2003 when *The Club* with John Wood was being staged, STC went beyond promotion norms to do a joint promotion with the Sydney Swans with an offer to their members.

Sponsorship of Sydney Theatre Company[3] is recognised as a sophisticated marketing tool that has the potential to add value to your business and inspire the creativity of stakeholders. The STC website states "we offer partners dynamic, reciprocal packages - individually tailored by our marketing and sponsorship professionals to meet your specific entertainment and business development objectives". Sponsorship as a marketing tool is both prolific and dependent on brand integrity. STC values these sponsorship relationships, offering integrated sponsorship events that recognise the mutual benefit of a successful sponsorship relationship. The motivation for these relationships is income and loyalty. Both sponsor and sponsee organisations benefit from the public exposition of their partnership of brands, in a sponsorship. During 2004 the Principal Sponsor of STC was Jaguar; the beneficial synergy of the prestigious STC and Jaguar brands was represented by the presence of a Jaguar in the foyer of the STC Wharf Theatre for much of 2004.

Findings

Although results emanated from only one organisation, they served to address the research questions in this paper in a useful manner. The particular theatre company is regarded as Sydney's flagship theatre company, operating with a high level of organisational brand equity as indicated by its receipt of Government funding, prestigious sponsorships, its use of prestigious venues in Sydney including The Sydney Opera House and the new state-of-the art Sydney Theatre, its selection of plays in a season, its employment of many well-known actors, and its creative positioning by a prominent artistic director. This case study addressed the four research questions and hypotheses in a constructive manner. This particular performing arts organisation showcased marketing and branding practices that suggested that this organisation:

- understood and valued its brand equity?
- understood the important role that the brand equity of contributing sources played, in determining the overall brand equity of a cultural event?
- managed the brand equity of contributing sources in the staging of an event?
- effectively utilised marketing communications tools and branding tools, to aid in the development of, and enhancement of brand equity.

The study recognised that this organisation is a leader in arts marketing in Australia, and as such may not necessarily be typical, with greater resources and expertise than smaller organisations may have at their disposal. However the examination of this case study serves the purpose in this paper of placing our model, into a real life context, supporting the key hypothesis:

> that the brand equity of a cultural event is the sum of the brand equities of the contributing components; and that there is a correlation between the use of marketing communication tools and the level of brand equity able to be achieved.

Notes

[1] Interview with Phillipa Sprott, Marketing Manager, STC, December, 2003.

[2] Venues

The brand of a performance company is inextricably linked with a venue's brand, and as such forms a combination of brand-experience or brand personality. STC has access to the following venues:

Wharf 1 Theatre - capacity approx. 325
Wharf 2 Theatre - capacity approx. 200
Sydney Theatre - capacity approx. 800
The Drama Theatre - Sydney Opera House - capacity approx.525
The Playhouse - Sydney Opera House - capacity approx. 380 (no longer used)

[3] www.sydneytheatre.com.au

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