



Digital Media Marketing for Dance: Enhancing Audience Engagement with Ballet Companies and Concert Dance Performance

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Abstract

Digital media play increasingly important roles in daily life, including directly influencing users' interactions with others. Digital media marketing has become an increasingly important tool for dancers and the dance industry. Audience members and observers of the dance industry have grown and larger demographics beyond the dance world have been engaged through digital media marketing efforts and social media platforms. Analyzing audience engagement on social media platforms can provide data to assist dancers, dance studios, dance companies, dance programs, etc. to define their target audience and push them to reach a larger and/or different audiences. In this paper the author assesses (1) the impact of digital media marketing on audience engagement in ballet dance companies and concert dance, and (2) how to effectively strategize to increase audience engagement, in dance.

Keywords: digital media, ballet dance, audience engagement, social media, attendance

Introduction

Globally, smartphones, tablets, computers, social media, videos, and blogs are increasingly integrated into schools, the workforce, and into most private and professional lives. The dance industry has experienced worldwide exposure by connecting communities from one area of the world to another through digital media. Particularly, by catering to younger audiences, the dance industry has used music videos, TikToks, virtual dance classes, competitions, and other contributors to the commercial dance world to capitalize on and increase audience engagement.

Professional ballet and concert dance companies, while later to the game, also utilize digital marketing efforts to attract audiences. Despite the increased presence of dance on social media platforms and news feeds, according to a study from National Endowment for the Arts (2018), attendance at in-person performing arts events, including professional dance, has decreased over

the last fifteen years. The lack of interest in the arts and diminishing funding has also resulted in limited research on this topic.

Could the more effective use of digital media better bridge dance to audiences, increase attendance, and generate additional tools for dance marketers to utilize in the future? The question is principal for concert dance and executive ballet companies to unpack. Thus, this paper explores the following questions regarding how the professional dance world utilizes digital marketing efforts and how consumers are responding to these efforts:

1. How does a company effectively market for dance in the digital age?
2. How does a dance company attract audiences to follow the company in real life and on social media?
3. In terms of public interest and exposure, is there a connection between ballet dance and concert dance companies?
4. Does effective marketing impact audience interest in professional dance performances and professional companies' online presence?
5. How can analyzing audience analytics on online media platforms help the dance company to enhance future marketing efforts?

Digital marketing solutions to increase audience engagement and performance attendance for ballet dance and concert dance companies will be posited. An additional objective is to raise awareness of the importance of functional digital marketing tools for the dance community and prompt further research in the field.

Scope of Project

This paper discusses the landscape of digital media marketing in dance—such as social media platforms, interactive websites, and online videos and pictures. More specifically, how audiences engage with digital media marketing for dance in ballet companies and concert dance reveals the public perception of these genres of dance. Understanding how these genres are marketed digitally and analyzing why or why not audiences respond to these marketing efforts can not only help these dance communities to enhance the engagement of their market but, also, provide indications to expand the market for the future. The review of current research on arts marketing/advertising and digital marketing relating to dance in media, which includes scholarly articles and peer reviewed journals, demonstrates how effective digital marketing for dance is/can be and how this information influences audience engagement and interest in ballet dance

and concert dance companies. The analytics offered in this paper include statistics on professional dance companies and their presence on social media, and demonstrates that effective digital marketing for dance can increase audience engagement.

Discussion of Digital Marketing

In the early 1990s, the field of digital media marketing emerged in response to the invention of the Internet. Digital media is made by and dependent upon electronic devices such as computers, tablets, and smartphones. These devices — now ubiquitous — create, distribute, and allow audiences to easily view content the marketing potential offers through social media platforms and websites, etc. Social media has become a new communication channel in marketing. Specifically it improves targeting to play a critical role in marketing operations (Chiang et al. 113). Digital media marketing is a comparatively newer tool for all types of businesses, and certainly for dance, and has accelerated a transformation of marketing in the dance industry.

Before the public availability of the World Wide Web and well before the use of the term ‘digital,’ radio television and emergent technologies were used to market the performing arts. While such marketing strategies enhanced the popularity of dance, they did not maximize their potential impact. According to Brenda Gainer in *The Services Industries Journal*, from the 1980s to 2000s, arts marketing focused on the product (dance) instead of how to market that product (the medium in which it is being marketed through).

In the late 1980s, when the focus on the product prevailed, utilizing subscriptions to market dance emerged as a new concept. Gainer (1989) argued that arts markets should recognize the changes in the evolution and the structure of their markets. She called for fundamental changes rather than simply adding new telemarketing campaigns or computerizing mailing lists. Gainer recommended that arts marketers adopt a long-term strategic marketing perspective, based on analytical techniques which incorporate both customer and competitor perspectives in their approach (Gainer 160). Fast forwarding to 2000, scholars such as Patrick Butler, suggested a more nuanced focus on the dance content of the marketing. Butler (2000) argued for marketers to progress from the usual description and application of marketing management techniques, to focus on illustrating the compelling and distinctive features of the arts (Butler 359).

In contrast, current arts marketing prioritizes “how” over “what.” For example, how to best market a product—for example, which online platform to use—instead of focusing on the

product itself. Social media entered daily life in the early 2010s and impacted marketing for dance. Social media was already an integral part of normal lives and defined how users found, shared, and processed information. Marketing shifted from television advertisements to digital media, emphasizing social media. Examples of social media include social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and many others. These web-based technologies help users to easily create content on the Internet and share it with others. Content includes: filming dance and uploading to YouTube, interactive items on the website, podcasts, behind the scenes blog for each show, blogging in advance of a performance about rehearsals, monthly e-newsletter, online interviews with choreographers, and more (Zaggelidou et al. 224).

Dance and theatre performance attendance is on the decline. Only a small number of market researchers have posited effective solutions. A recent study in 2018 on theatres in Milan sought to find the correlation on social media presence and increased attendance at performances. The study found that theatres must increase their marketing efforts. In person or online, theatres have to focus on reputation and brand. An additional emphasis is placed on developing any captive meaning and media that can increase stakeholders' range, revenues, and revenue diversification. The empirical research on social media confirms the results of cluster analysis for theatres. Results show that when supported by social media, the theatres profited from the growth in stakeholder engagement (Besana et al. 30). Digitized media and technology advance by the day. Marketers need to continue to anticipate, follow, and understand the impact that digital media can have on the arts to effectively market for dance.

Methodology

At the start of this research, only scholarly articles and peer reviewed journals on arts marketing, media, and audience interest on dance (which were provided on online scholarly databases) were considered. From this previous literature, few connections were made between digital marketing efforts by dance and consumer interest in dance. Soon after, the author determined that this topic is under-researched which generated more questions than initially anticipated.

How dance in the performing arts industry would be marketed as a product to consumers remained a question. Who the consumer (audiences) is also remains unanswered in both the physical and virtual worlds. To answer these questions, the author studied the data on several of the largest and most popular professional dance companies in the world and their presence on

social media. These companies included Paris Opera Ballet, Bolshoi Ballet, The New York City Ballet, Royal Ballet, Alonzo King Lines, and Nederlands Dans Theater. Of these companies, Paris Opera Ballet, The New York City Ballet and Alonzo King Lines dominantly used Instagram and YouTube.

According to Statista, the number of Instagram users worldwide as of January 2020 is *one billion* active users and the number of YouTube users worldwide as of January 2020 is *two billion* active users (Statista, 2020). Because of the enormous number of users, research remained specific to those two platforms. Data was collected on the number of likes, comments, and views for the three professional dance companies on the two social media platforms. The oldest and most recent posts on each of these platforms for the three companies were analyzed. The number of likes, comments, subscribers, and followers were noted to illustrate the evolution of audience engagement over time. As of April 2020, the Paris Opera Ballet had 419,000 followers on Instagram (@balletoperadeparis) and 62,000 subscribers on YouTube (Opera National de Paris); The New York City Ballet showed 444,000 followers on Instagram (@nycballet) and 81,2000 subscribers on YouTube; and Alonzo Kings Lines had 41,2000 followers on Instagram (@linesballet) and 3,380 subscribers on YouTube (LINESballet).

Along with the author's quantitative research, the actual content posted to Instagram and YouTube was analyzed. The most viewed and most liked content from each company throughout their social media presence plays a role in this analysis and can help establish future marketing efforts. Although some posts and videos were posted multiple years ago, they still continue to gain more likes and views than recent posts due to the choice of content. The content that receives the most engagement by professional ballet and dance companies appears to either relate to the company as a whole or a post/video of a company's best-known performance(s). The tables in Visual Resources provide statistics on the three companies' engagement on Instagram and YouTube as well as a comparison from the beginnings of their digital marketing efforts on each platform to the beginning of April 2020. The data was collected to further understand what current, well-known professional dance companies are doing on social media to positively impact their companies, revenue, and followings, while also getting a better understanding of what these dance companies could be improving upon to increase audience engagement in the interest of the consumer.

Connections made through the author's personal research were provided to link effective digital media marketing strategies to ballet dance companies and concert dance. Visual Resources reveal the data and tables.

Inquiry

understanding the product. The art of dancing exists in the popular imagination. But to whom does dance matter? Understanding dance on a deeper level can be difficult for many who are not involved in the arts. Defining the product, along with its value to the consumer, is key to marketing it. American Marketing Association defined marketing as the “activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.” Professional ballet and concert dance companies offer physical dance performance and entertainment in exchange for attendance and funds. The product in professional dance companies is habitually defined as an upcoming performance, a specific dancer, or the company in general. Certain promotions or posts in digital media can define the product more specifically to follow micro-marketing tactics. Marketing for dance has continued to follow a basic marketing strategy that mirrors other industries throughout most of history. In 2013, Eleni Zaggelidou and colleagues emphasized that the marketer have a clear understanding of all the resources available-including digital media platforms in digital marketing. Zaggelidou and colleagues in “The Effect of Marketing on Dance Activity” published by the Journal of Physical Education & Sport, offered a marketing plan for dance marketers to follow. (Zaggelidou et al. 227):

1. Define the product (dance).
2. Define the market (audience).
3. Define the goals to be attained (the goals must be measurable).
4. Develop the strategy (list the techniques involved).
5. Develop a plan of evaluation (every marketing plan must be able to be evaluated).

The sequence follows a primary marketing strategy but in the dance industry, following step number two—defining the market—is one of the most difficult parts. Defining and understanding the audience would allow marketers to market the product to its fullest potential. While arts organizations might at first appear to be production and

sales oriented, in reality their inherent sense of the market becomes clear with a degree of understanding and openness to their audience members (Butler 360).

investigating public interest in concert dance. Presence at performing arts events is decreasing on an international level, especially in the United States. United States figures show that consumers are attending fewer performances (LaPlaca Cohen 2014). To maintain current attendance, marketers need to understand the current and past interest in dance and performing arts. Audiences of dance have congregated throughout time, but specific audiences vary from the location of performance to the genre of dance and audiences have different motives for each show they desire to attend. In the “Understanding and Measuring Consumption Motives in Performing Arts” published in *The Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society* (2017) Pieter De Rooji and Marcel Bastiaansen assert that in order to effectively address decreasing numbers of visitors and decreasing subsidies, performing arts institutions must become more customer centric. Customer experiences of performing arts events are particularly influenced by consumption motives and the research shows consumers have different sets of motives, at different times, for attending performing arts events (Rooji & marcel 118). Thus, if performing arts venues understand consumption motives, they can design appropriate customer experiences in order to increase satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Adding to the complexity, Manuel Cuadrado (2018), found that public interest in the arts is gendered and, also, strongly associated with feelings and emotions. According to Cuadrado, major differences regarding the consumption of dance may be explained by gender. Women scored higher on diverse motivations to attend plays such as personal, emotional, learning. Men scored higher on barriers to attendance, such as dislike, other options, and misunderstanding. Distinctions in every aspect of perceived value of dance were statistically significant, and higher for female survey participants. Such results could help marketing decision makers relevantly adjust their strategies (Cuadrado 147). A 2015 National Endowment for the Arts report detailed demographic data regarding the attendance of various performing arts events between 2002 and 2012 (NEA, 2015). Across the classical performing arts, including ballet, the majority of attendees are white, hold a college degree, have an annual income above \$50,000, are female, and are over the age of 44 (Page & Robins 4, 5).

A surprising indicator as to why the public consumes art and dance is that it is in the consumers' self-interest and makes them feel better about themselves. Performing arts audiences

attend shows, “selfishly,” in other words, for themselves. The Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society discusses this idea in-depth: consuming performing arts is a “resource for active self-making” (Hesmondhalgh, 330) or self-representation (Larsen et al. 2009), because it symbolizes meaning. Performing arts attendance is an opportunity for identity affirmation and expression. Moreover, the idea is that some visitors want to belong to a specific social world, populated by like-minded people. The opportunity to meet people with shared identities is an important reason for participation in leisure events. This implies that the performing arts venue is a meeting place for like-minded people. In short, the symbolic value of cultural engagement is that it enhances a sense of community (Gainer 1995; Hesmondhalgh 2008), which may be used to distinguish oneself from other groups (Rooij & Marcel 132).

In short, public interest in professional ballet companies and concert dance is encouraged by motives, gender, and the consumer benefit.

how to expand the current audience through digital media. The analysis of the general interest in concert dance offers pathways to expand the current audience. Focusing on reaching different demographics through different marketing strategies, along with digital marketing, can aid arts marketers. Targeting new audiences, in addition to continuing targeting the current audience, can increase attendance and revenue.

Considering that more upper-class women attend performing arts events than men, one solution to increasing attendance may be to develop programs that reach a more diverse audience (Page & Robins 4, 5); for example, by targeting men without losing the current audience of women. In Dance Magazine’s article, “Raising Revenues: Ballet companies today are proving that building new audiences for dance *is* possible,” Ashley Rivers suggests that ballet companies should “sell like a sports team.” Several companies have found success using strategic scheduling and adopting adjustable pricing scales similar to those used in professional sports, which prices tickets based on demand (Rivers 54). This type of marketing attracts broader demographics, including men and lower income-brackets

De Rooji and Marcel Bastiaansen (2017) suggest that allowing consumers to provide feedback and express their interests to the professional companies through conversation or online platforms will increase the retention rate of audience members. In the digital world that consumers are familiar with today, utilizing digital media will be in the company’s interest. Performing arts organizations should consider how they can improve customer experiences

throughout the customer journey, including pre- and post-consumption. They should facilitate the “social decision-making process” by introducing an online tool for customers to discuss the selection of performances. Organizations can enhance aesthetic experiences by providing digital material such as videos and music fragments. Moreover, they should facilitate social interaction between performing arts attenders by creating additional meeting places. Groups of heavy users might be interested in getting together in small groups before the performance starts to receive some additional background of the performance (Rooij & Marcel 132). In theory, utilizing this suggestion would abide by audience members’ interests and generate more engagement in person and online.

Ashley Rivers of Dance Magazine reviewed dance companies who have taken advantage of digital and social media platforms. A number of ballet companies have promoted themselves through social media while also bringing social media to their company performances. Ballet Austin creates social media stations in the theater, designated spaces with a backdrop, and themed props for people to take photos. The company utilizes a “social media aggregator,” which lets it choose posts with the ballet’s hashtag to project onto screen. This encourages word-of-mouth advertising, because audience members love looking for their personal photos. Along with incorporating digital media in their shows, Ballet Austin has also held rehearsal live-streams through video to attract more patrons. This has not been too successful, but it takes time to see if novel approaches are ultimately profitable in any industry (Rivers 56).

As COVID-19 is a new factor to consider within the operations of the dance industry, the impacts have displayed the absence of dance performances and have encouraged work that can be done to increase engagement. Lauren Wingenroth of Dance Magazine (2020) spoke to ten leaders in the dance industry in hopes to provide suggestions as to how the industry can continue to survive despite the absence of performances. Leaders discussed the impacts of digital media and stated that the shared learning that’s currently happening in virtual spaces will serve as a catalyst to revolutionize dance practices. This is the time to revitalize dance communities on virtual platforms. Live performances will happen again, but this moment highlights other creative opportunities and needs across the field to reinforce a system of support for making and distributing digital dances, too (Wingenroth, 2020). Mastering the promotion of dance through the digital space will hopefully encourage an increase of engagement for online and physical performances in the future.

Conclusion

It is still uncertain whether or not there is a direct correlation between utilizing social media platforms and increased audience engagement for professional ballet companies and concert dance. What is certain however, is that utilizing digital media platforms to the fullest extent will increase advertising and awareness of the professional company. It is clear that the more years social media platforms have been active for and the more posts provided on those platforms, the higher the virtual engagement and following. A triumphant strategy stays confident in its product—great dance and dancers—and keeps in mind that the goal is to always emphasize the product (Rivers 56). The main goal of digital media for dance companies must be to highlight the dance and the dancers. Suggestions of altering marketing techniques to cater towards different demographics, such as men and younger people of middle-to low-income, while also incorporating more digital media techniques demonstrating various aspects of the company, could conceivably increase attendance at performances and increase audience engagement as a whole. Many businesses and companies may need to increase their brand’s awareness as the world confronts COVID-19. In the escalating impact of social distancing society, on businesses, and on the economy, it is distinctly important to understand the benefits and influence that digital media can exert. Executive dance companies should take this time to master their skills within the digital media world to utilize platforms to their fullest extent to ensure they maintain engagement with their current audiences as they create new environments to invite other audiences. Investing in virtual audience engagement now could translate into audience presence once public performances are allowed to operate again. Continued research to develop efficacious digital marketing tools is even more critical to audience engagement for professional ballet dance companies and concert dance performances in these changing times.

Visual Resources

Table 1. Ballet Opera de Paris: Instagram (April 7, 2020)

		Instagram	
# of Followers		419,000 Followers	
Engagement on First Post (Oct. 2, 2014)	211 Likes	3 Comments	
Engagement on Most Recent Post (April 7, 2020)	13,128 Likes	79 Comments	
Years Between Posts		6 Years	
Increase of Engagement	12, 917 Likes	76 Comments	

Note. Paris Opera Ballet, @balletoperadeparis (April 7, 2020).
<https://www.instagram.com/balletoperadeparis/>

Table 2. Ballet Opera de Paris: YouTube (April 7, 2020)

YouTube		
# of Subscribers	62,300 Subscribers	
Engagement on First Post (Feb. 15, 2013)	61,301 Views	527 Likes/0 Comments
Engagement on Most Recent Post (April 7, 2020)	1,899 Views	2 Comments
Years Between Posts	7 Years	
Increase of Engagement	-59,402 Views	2 Comments

Note. Paris Opera Ballet, Opera National de Paris (April 7, 2020).
<https://www.youtube.com/user/operanationaldeparis/>

Table 4. New York City Ballet: YouTube (April 7, 2020)

YouTube		
# of Subscribers	81,300 Subscribers	
Engagement on First Post (2011)	19,448 Views	87 Likes/0 Comments
Engagement on Most Recent Post (April 7, 2020)	20,216 Views	802 Likes/44 Comments
Years Between Posts	9 Years	
Increase of Engagement	768 Views	715 Likes/44 Comments

Note. New York City Ballet, NYC Ballet (April 7, 2020).
<https://www.youtube.com/user/newyorkcityballet>.

Table 5. Alonzo King Lines: Instagram (April 7, 2020)

Instagram		
# of Followers	41,200 Followers	
Engagement on First Post (April 30, 2014)	66 Likes	2 Comments
Engagement on Most Recent Post (April 7, 2020)	2,343 Views	6 Comments
Years Between Posts	6 Years	
Increase of Engagement	2,277	4 Comments

Note. Alonzo King Lines @linesballet (April 7, 2020).
<https://www.instagram.com/linesballet/>

Table 6. Alonzo King Lines: YouTube (April 7, 2020)

		YouTube	
# of Subscribers		3,380 Subscribers	
Engagement on First Post (March 18, 2011)	29,769 Views	182 Likes/0 Comments	
Engagement on Most Recent Post (April 3, 2020)	104 Views	2 Likes/0 Comments	
Years Between Posts		9 Years	
Increase of Engagement	-29,665 Views	-180 Likes/0 Comments	

Note. Alonzo King Lines, LINESBallet (April 7, 2020).
<https://www.youtube.com/user/LINESBallet>.

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