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Marketing Artertainment: Are Museums Jumping on the Brandwagon?

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Abstract
The purpose of this paper is to argue that greater awareness of the traditions and innovations in marketing language, as exemplified in museum marketing, leads to enhanced ability to understand branding as a strategic tool. Successful art galleries can be thought of as branding “artertainment”, actively engaged in bringing the art world and popular culture together in a competitive aesthetic arena. This paper sees branding straddling culture and linguistic criticism to look at its complex underpinnings in verbal and linguistic processes that link to larger socio-cultural issues on how brands work. It generates novel concepts and develops theory for marketers.

Introduction
How are museums and galleries using language to jump on the brandwagon? Just as the demarcation between different artistic forms has become blurred (Scott 1993: 269) with the use of text, imagery and sound—as found in film and print advertising—all colluding to produce meaningful signs which have cultural significance, so too have other formerly salient boundaries been eroded within the context of marketing museums and galleries. Thus, aspects of marketing, such as its language and concepts, are now employed in arts organisations. Branding is crucial in order for arts organisations to ensure long term viability (Aacker 1992: 56) and assure a place in the cultural landscape. Brand personality, built up by direct and indirect contact between gallery and audience (Aaker 1997: 348), interacts with audience personality to create a dynamic which relates to the success, or otherwise, of the marketing (Aaker 1997: 355). Successful galleries are actively engaged in bringing the art world and popular culture, as exemplified by the club scene, together in a competitive aesthetic arena (Drever 2007), hence bringing new audiences to galleries. This marketing strategy has been referred to as providing “artertainment”. “Artertainment” is defined in this paper as entertainment which delivers a message about art in order to draw a wider, more diverse audience to the gallery. The relationship between the two contributing elements of the word is variable and subject to interpretation.

Artertainment is a neologism formed by the word formation process called blending. A blend may be defined as the result of the amalgamation of two, or possibly more, words, at least one of which has lost some phonological content in the amalgamation process. Artertainment comprises of two contributing words: art and entertainment. In accordance with the majority of this type of headed blend, the fore part of artertainment: art provides adjectival information about the hind part of the blend: entertainment which is the head of the construction.

One of the potential criticisms of artertainment as a marketing strategy derives from the very fact that the predicate of the blend is entertainment. This is a criticism which has also been levelled at the use of edutainment as a museum marketing strategy. Critics suggest that the implication is that the most important element of the experience is its ability to amuse and engage (Resnick 2004). More deeply embedded is the notion that art and education are bitter pills to swallow and require assistance from sweet, palatable entertainment. The authors
prefer to view arertainment and edutainment as representative of creative and democratic approaches to encouraging participation and engagement with culture, thereby ensuring long term viability for important cultural institutions.

Using the case study example of the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), this paper argues that branding “arertainment” straddles culture and linguistic criticism to identify complex underpinnings in verbal and linguistic processes that link to larger socio-cultural issues on how brands work. It generates novel concepts and develops theory for marketers. Semiotics provides a method with which to discover the structure of systems of signs and thus represents a useful framework for the analysis of marketing, as shown by Echtner (1999) in the field of tourism.

Importantly, the NGV sees itself as doing more than educating and entertaining which these branding activities suggest: ‘in a secular context, it builds an emotional experience about life, creativity and change’, says Lisa Sassella, NGV’s Head of Marketing and Sponsorship ‘creating what is now called arertainment. Arertainment is a contentious concept, but nonetheless important as it brings people and art together. People who may not otherwise see art, or appreciate it’ (2007).

Sassella’s comments echo contemporary commentary in the arts. The shift away from elitist divisions in access to and engagement with cultural product is at the heart of this new approach to marketing in evidence at the gallery. The democratisation of the arts encourages a new role in which providing a commentary on ordinary life is positioned as valuable (Swirski 2005: 32). Making reference to the commonplace encourages personal connection (Scott 1993: 261), which facilitates engagement—necessary to build up loyalty, foster notions of quality and solidify brand equity (Aaker 1992). Using creative and contemporary language cultivates the relationship between gallery and audience.

The NGV’s contemporary mission is to illuminate life by collecting, conserving and presenting great art. In other words, ‘the gallery has a big place in the community by shedding light on life’ (Sassella 2007). The notion of arertainment conjures up certain images of art gallery activities in order to implement its mission. One of the most successful is the annual Melbourne Winter Masterpieces, a series of blockbuster international exhibitions in Melbourne’s winter used to pull tourists and locals into the city and the gallery. Collaborations between the gallery, the major events company, the city council and an indemnity scheme see major exhibitions fill the gallery with people to sell-out international shows of French impressionists, Dutch masters and twentieth century modernists. For these exhibitions, the ratio of tourists visiting the exhibitions increases by ten percent. The high visitor numbers in the new millennium point to the success of arertainment as an income source and branding exercise. However, quality associations are integral to brand equity, as Beverland (2001), Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) found. This is consistent with Di Maggio’s (1985) argument that when the product is quality, attention needs to be focused on audiences as well as services.

The Melbourne Winter Masterpieces exhibitions link the NGV as the most popular cultural precinct in Melbourne (Arts Victoria 2007) with tourism. The tourism campaign, ‘It’s easy to lose yourself in Victoria’ is interwoven with culture as, ‘It’s easy to lose yourself in the arts of Melbourne.’ Melbourne Winter Masterpieces are promoted as interweaving Melbourne as the cultural hub of Australia. Second, tourism is the extra investment in Melbourne Winter Masterpieces where international art comes exclusively to Melbourne and draws the
artertainment crowd as well as the connoisseurs to these exhibitions. The use of brand through artertainment places the NGV as an attraction of major social and economic value to the city, a key reference point for the cultural precinct in which it is located and an example of branding of a certain kind of aesthetic. There is little doubt that artertainment, whatever might be the criticism of it, brings people through the doors in large numbers, especially those who might not otherwise visit the gallery, as the gallery attendance numbers in Figure 1 clearly show.

![Figure 1: NGV Attendances 1969-2005](image)

**Semiotics and Brands**

Semiotics provides a method of understanding mediated culture in linguistic and in non-verbal manifestations (Pierce 1934: 302). The interaction between the sign, the designatum and the interpretant is the locus of making meaning. Semiotics enables analysis not only of denotative meaning, but also of connotative meaning, which is forms a significant part of the overall meaning invoked by a sign. Connotation, as employed in the NGV’s marketing to a new audience of young professionals, is powerful in its capacity to evoke perceptions and feelings about its referent (Danesi 2002: 48). Contextual analysis of NGV promotions material shows that each communicative act entails or serves a specific function: emotive, conative, referential, poetic, phatic and metalingual (Danesi 2002: 45). This is applicable not only in the use of the neologism, *artertainment*, as a sign, but also in the broader analysis of other marketing documents, such as programmes, brochures and advertisements, which combine to present the NGV brand.

Analysed within the framework of semiotics, the 2007 promotional material for the *Melbourne Winter Masterpieces* can be understood to be a sum of its functions as a communicative act (Jakobson 1960). The *addresser* (NGV) is *expressive*, using words like ‘ripe’, ‘new’, ‘strength’ and ‘grand’ in the titles of the articles. The *message* (*Melbourne Winter Masterpieces exhibition is upcoming at the Gallery*) is *poetic*, having an aesthetic effect on the audience, employing multilayered text, bright colours, non-academic text and clever text layout to produce promotional material which combines didactic exposition with practical information, endowing the product with an air of accessibility. It is *conative*, exhorting the *addressee* (the intended audience) to be influenced by its offerings. *Context*, which provides the audience with a guarantee that this experience is authentic, is *referential* and is achieved by the implicit allusion to the NGV brand. The NGV’s own brand is further
authenticated by the direct reference to the highly regarded Guggenheim, in turn evoking feelings and perceptions associated with that renowned institution’s valuable brand. The phatic mode of contact is in the form of a free supplement in a Sunday newspaper; the absence of price evokes notions of affordability, its arrival on Sunday, the traditional ‘day of rest’, evokes notions of leisure: the two combine to evoke perceptions of accessibility. The brochure is likely to be read in a domestic setting, nurturing a perception of a relationship with the gallery as an element in domesticity. By exploiting the various elements of the communicative act within one sign, the NGV is consolidating its brand in line with current global trends in the arts.

Lury (2004) offers a new approach to defining branding, suited to this article’s focus. Brands are understood to be a means of exchange between organisation and audience (to use museum terms), which generate patterns of social relations activity. The work of Bourdieu (1984) and Baudrillard (1990) suggests that art consumption through metaphor is supported by a system of social significance. Brands are given meaning in a social context, through words and images that interact with the audience. Schroeder (2005, 2006) asserts the validity of comprehending the artist as a brand, underlining the broad applicability and importance of brand as a concept. It has been suggested that branding cultural product is of limited success (Seabrook 2000: 105) as the parameters for judging consumer desires are less easily identifiable. Consumers of art wish to be “spoken to as individuals” (Seabrook 2000: 106). The unfeasibility of this task thus requires gallery marketing of its cultural product to appeal to consumers’ desires for entertainment. In this the NGV joins a cohort of other arts organisations who have realised that the elitist nature of highbrow culture is obsolete, its status conferred by academic sources whose parameters are subject to constant change (Swirski 2005: 29, 177). In this paper, we consider the use of the word “artertainment” in branding the NGV. For the NGV, verbal branding allows the art gallery to disseminate its cultural capital to a wider audience. Sharing the meaning of art with a wide audience gives the art gallery symbolic meaning.

Artertainment as Brand

Cultural institutions, such as the NGV, seek to repackage their brand and product in order to broaden their audience. A decline in government funding precipitates this movement. In order to encourage audiences to engage with their cultural product, institutions such as museums and galleries have been forced to break down the traditional barriers between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and to foster a newfound respect for horizontal relationships (Gitlin 1989) between their audiences and themselves. The change in the perceived role of cultural institutions (Kelly 1995) has had consequences for museums, not only in terms of their content (Ravelli 1996) but also in terms of their marketing (Rentschler and Geursen 2003). Once the locus of the gatekeepers of information, museums now provide infotainment or edutainment, combining information and entertainment through active interaction and participation with the exhibitions (Ravelli 1996). Museums invite participation from the viewing public, further dissolving the demarcation between audience and institution. The adoption of this approach has not been without its critics in the museological sector.

Artertainment poses no semantic or semiotic difficulty for the present day audience. It is understood that the splinter tainment connotes its derivative entertainment. The initial part of the word contains adjectival information which provides the hearer/reader with sufficient information to decode that the entertainment provided will be in the sphere of art. Tainment, which is not a word, nor yet a suffix, is a sign which connotes the linkage of concepts
associated with its derivative. A literal definition of the fragment *tainment* is not possible as currently it lacks linguistic status. It is, however, clearly a sign, in the language of semiotics, which is being employed to create meaning. Its application and interpretation rely on culturally and linguistically embedded connotations of the sign and the original lexeme, *entertainment*, from which it derives. Research currently underway by one of the authors suggests that *tainment* is undergoing a process of reanalysis, in which the semantic elements from the original lexeme, *entertainment*, are transferred to the remaining splinter. Other examples include *docutainment*, *promotainment*, *philanthrotainment* and *edutainment* and reflect the broad-ranging application of the sign and the potential for its application in a wide variety of marketing environments. Of particular relevance to the field of museum marketing, the employment of this neologism, *artertainment*, is significant as it is metaphorically indicative of the reanalysis of the product that the bastion of artistic endeavour—the art gallery—seeks to market to an increasingly sophisticated public. The use of the word is an attempt to change the triadic relationship between the designatum (the object or concept signifies—in this case: the NGV), the sign (the signifier used to represent the object—in this case: the neologism *artertainment*), and the interpretant (the person or people interpreting the sign—in this case the audience). The gallery seeks to invoke perceptions of accessibility and enjoyment in a contemporary setting, recognising that the media savvy public is no longer afraid to transgress linguistic rules, to have an opinion about art or to contribute creatively to the global body of knowledge.

**Conclusions**

This paper argued that museums and galleries are using language to jump on the brandwagon, using the NGV as the primary case study example. Further analysis of marketing material from successful galleries would provide a fascinating further area of study. Successful galleries can be thought of as branding “artertainment”, actively engaged in bringing together the art world and popular culture, as exemplified by the club scene, in a competitive aesthetic arena (Drever 2007), hence bringing new audiences to galleries. This approach demonstrates that democratisation of all forms of cultural edifices is well under way. Galleries around the world are reinvigorating their marketing and their product in the light of the move towards democratisation and participation. Marketing strategies are mirrored linguistically by the language used in promoting contemporary cultural organisations. The gallery is accessible, enjoyable and only incidentally edifying: it’s artertainment (mostly tainment, modified by a little art). The kind of language employed in marketing is a major factor in building up the brand personality, and thus the relationship between the audience and the brand. The gallery is jumping on the brandwagon, bringing in a new “artertainment” audience.
References


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