This is the authors' final peer reviewed (post print) version of the item published as:

Available from Deakin Research Online:

Exhibitions as sub-brands: an exploratory study

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the adoption of major exhibitions, often called blockbusters, as a sub-branding strategy for art museums. Focusing the experience around one location but drawing on a wide data set for comparative purposes, the authors examine the blockbuster phenomenon as exhibition packages sourced from international institutions, based on an artist or collection of quality and significance. The authors answer the questions: what drives an art museum to adopt an exhibition sub-brand strategy that sees exhibitions become blockbusters? What are the characteristics of the blockbuster sub-brand?

Design/methodology/approach – Using extant literature, interviews and content analysis in a comparative case study format, this paper has three aims: first, to embed exhibitions within the marketing and branding literature; second, to identify the drivers of a blockbuster strategy; and third, to explore the key characteristics of blockbuster exhibitions.

Findings – The authors present a theoretical model of major exhibitions as a sub-brand. The drivers identified include the entrepreneurial characteristics of pro-activeness, innovation and risk-taking, while the four key characteristics of the blockbuster are celebrity; spectacle; inclusivity; and authenticity.

Practical implications – These exhibitions are used to augment a host art museum's own collection for its stakeholders and differentiate it in the wider cultural marketplace. While art museum curators seek to develop quality exhibitions, sometimes they become blockbusters. While blockbusters are a household word, the terms is contested and the authors know little about them from a marketing perspective.

Social implications – Art museums are non-profit, social organisations that serve the community. Art museums therefore meet the needs of multiple stakeholders in a political environment with competing interests. The study draws on the experiences of a major regional art museum, examining the characteristics of exhibition sub-brands and the paradox of the sub-brand being used to differentiate the art museum. This paper fills a gap in both the arts marketing and broader marketing literature.

Originality/value – The use of the identified characteristics develops theory where the literature has been silent on the blockbuster sub-brand from a marketing perspective. It provides an exemplar for institutional learning on how to initiate and manage quality by popular exhibition strategies.

Introduction

Art museums are an important segment of the non-profit, arts, social and heritage (NASH) arena. The NASH sector comprises art museums, historic and heritage properties, social history and other types of museums (Evans et al., 2012). Art museums may be diverse but they fulfil a public mandate, are accountable to a range of stakeholders, such as governments, boards of trustees, curators (as "keepers" of the objects), the public and their benefactors (Rentschler, 2002) and collect, exhibit and research objects for the enjoyment of the public. Museums are augmenting their traditional in-house curated programming with quality internationally renowned touring exhibitions. We witness an environment where these touring exhibitions are used as points of difference between institutions to attract a diversity of audiences and can be considered sub-brands. We also consider blockbuster exhibitions as a specific type of sub-brand and how it is emerging in the NASH sector.

Branding is a concept well developed in the general marketing literature (Aaker, 1992, 1997; Berner and Kiley, 2005; Keller, 2000). Historical brand research has established the benefits of a strong brand in terms of financial value, creation of equity, image, loyalty, and the Brand Report Card (Aaker, 1992, 1997; Keller, 2000). There is also a growing body of literature that suggests that branding is of value to the museum sector (Evans et al., 2012) A brand is a name, term, design or symbol, or any other feature that identifies services or goods as distinct from another (Bennett, 1988; Kapferer, 1997). Museum names are in essence a recognisable brand and can be used as a decision making heuristic by visitors (Evans et al., 2012), as a cue of quality and guarantee a certain experience. Bendigo Art Gallery, located in regional Victoria, Australia is an exemplar of a brand institution where its strategy evolved from one focused on a reputation built on its permanent art collection to a balance between its own collection and exhibitions derived from external institutions. It has progressed from managing its own museum name as a brand to managing sourced exhibitions as part of their brand strategy. Such international quality exhibitions are in the essence a sub-brand of the host museum brand. Why and how major exhibitions manifest as sub-brands is a critical issue for marketers seeking to build cultural brands. Art museums operate in an increasingly competitive context, where their directors are striving to meet the expectations of multiple stakeholders (Goulding, 2000). Art museum directors seek to reconcile the internal curatorial needs with the external political and competitive environmental needs which have sometimes been summarised as a tension between education and entertainment (McLean, 1994; Rentschler, 2002). Attempts to reconcile these tensions have been identified in the literature as marketing having multiple strategies (Mottner and Ford, 2005). These tensions create a paradox where galleries put on internationally renowned quality exhibitions in order to differentiate themselves from their competition.

Australia, perhaps because of its tyranny of distance has had a strong history of staging quality international exhibitions of famous works that are attended by large crowds since the turn of the last century (Turner, 2011). Australia is an exemplar of an art museum sector characterised by the "tyranny of distance" with little choice but to seek product from beyond their own borders to supplement their own collections. The first exhibition of such quality which received the tag of a blockbuster exhibition in Australia was held in 1975, called Manet to Matisse (Rentschler, 2002) beginning the near 40 year history of the blockbuster phenomenon in the Australian art museum

landscape. By a curious coincidence, 1975 was also the year when the so-called Piggott Report presaged interest in the burgeoning museum and art museum sector in Australia, prompting it to begin three decades of sectoral and institutional change. In the intervening years between 1975 and 1996, when Bendigo Art Gallery started planning its own quality exhibitions, some of which became what could be termed blockbusters, the phenomenon was dominated in Australia by major city galleries, such as those in Sydney and Melbourne (Berryman, 2013).

At the same time as the NASH sector has witnessed a rise in international exhibition programming, we have witnessed a sector wide change in the role of directors and curators (Fowle, 2007; Proctor, 2010), especially in relation to the way exhibitions are now staged. A shift in curatorial thinking is underway that attempts to distance itself from the elitism once associated with art museums, which sees "scholarship […] married to fun" (Coslovich, 2012) or as we would propose less curatorial reverence and more audience relevance. Staging major international exhibitions is part of this changing approach. In earlier decades, the visitor was a secondary consideration for curatorial staff; in a contemporary context the needs of the visitor are the drivers of programming (Lehman, 2009; Schubert, 2000). The relative silence on major toured exhibitions and the status of blockbusters in the marketing and curatorial literature may be due to the tension inherent in galleries themselves where curators are interested in scholarship and quality while the public often requires accessible entry points to an art museum. Recognisable brand names and international credentials often lead to popular appeal. Some curators hark back to the "old days" where quality meant quiet contemplation with few visitors in the art museum. Others embrace the new audience demands for access and relevance and even popularity despite their mixed feelings about the rise in importance. Generally, art museums seek to retain their relevance by expanding their offerings and appealing to broader audiences, thereby building their cultural capital and brand equity for long-term sustainability.

Blockbuster art exhibitions are one type of touring exhibition (Berryman, 2013) held in art museums and can potentially provide hedonic experiences more akin to special events whose primary raison d'être is communication and attraction to a wide public. Bogman (2006) notes that blockbuster exhibitions have necessitated a rethink in the way that art museum communications are undertaken, such as for blockbuster exhibition catalogues. Berryman (2013) provides an understanding of the role and significance of the blockbuster phenomenon within Australia and some lessons learnt. Yet we know little about the characteristics of the touring exhibition as a sub-brand let alone exhibitions such as blockbusters, as sub-brands from a scholarly marketing perspective. The exclusivity of the exhibition and their international standing and broad appeal sometimes means they are termed blockbusters. Yet often blockbusters are packaged shows/exhibitions in standard themes borrowed from international "name" museums. The term blockbuster is a contested one, not well received by all in the NASH context, particularly art museum curators, but lauded by stakeholders including the visiting public. Turner (2011) contends that international "blockbuster" exhibitions led to a rise in professionalism within Australian museums, and "created a paradigm shift in the way museums operate within their communities and public programming".

A great deal has obviously been written about the major exhibition, some given the term "blockbuster", but curiously given their marketing and audience focus, it is predominantly in disciplines other than marketing. Such literature examines blockbuster exhibitions in sociology (DiMaggio, 1985), economics (Skinner, 2006), special events (Axelsen, 2006), art history (Berryman, 2013) and museum studies (Freedberg et al., 1987; Hancocks, 1988). Other literature is based on personal accounts of blockbusters in biographies and autobiographies (Hoving, 1993), or the media (Coslovich, 2012; Ingram, 2012). There is also an emerging literature that critiques "edutainment" in

art exhibitions (Balloffet et al., 2014). Consequently, this review included relevant, cross-disciplinary literature and primary data gathering and analysis that informed our understanding of the role and characteristics of the major exhibition as they achieve blockbuster recognition, as a sub-brand of a museum master brand and its contested nature. The purpose of this paper is to advance debate by analysing such exhibitions using a marketing and specifically branding lens. The research questions answered are:

RQ1. What drives an art museum to adopt a quality sub-brand philosophy that sees exhibitions become blockbusters?

RQ2. What are the characteristics of the blockbuster sub-brand?

Conceptual framework

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) in their brand architecture paper explain that many firms today have to manage complex business strategies and multiple brands simultaneously, termed brand architecture. This expression is recently extending to service institutions (Rahmana and Areni, 2014b) but applied rarely to art museums. Brand architecture when applied to art museums refers to the structure within the art museum for managing the portfolio of brands and the nature of the relationship between the brands. Obviously art museums have a name, which identifies them and they are correctly referred to as their master or parent brand, such as the brand Bendigo Art Gallery or the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV). Their own permanent collection of artworks exists within this master brand and within the permanent collection are artists and artistic works often recognised as brands in their own right, such as the artist Picasso. Sub-brands are brands connected to a master or parent brand (Rahmana and Areni, 2014a, b). Rahmana and Areni (2014b) contend that services not just product oriented firms seek to develop strong sub-brands at the product level. When we apply this lens to museums it refers to the exhibition programme being treated as sub-brand. The exhibition sub-brand extends the appeal of the parent brand to wider and new audiences. Such an exhibition has a name in itself, which differentiates it from other exhibitions but is offered by the museum master brand. Such a sub-brand has potential to influence audience perceptions of the master brand beyond the permanent collection.

Blockbusters is an emergent term for widely successful exhibitions. Financial success, popularity and wide audience appeal due to the selection of topics and approach are some markers of blockbuster status (Berryman, 2013). Attracting diversified audiences who are not normally attracted to the visual arts is an important outcome of a blockbuster. Blockbusters are a classification of exhibition sub-brands based on a similar or characteristic format, which respects big names, with populist appeal which provide a pathway to visual arts for people who may not normally visit art museums but who use the cues of familiar topics and artistic brand names as a gateway to the visual arts (Balloffet et al., 2014; Berryman, 2013). The blockbuster has arisen to provide a useful means of developing audiences and changing perceptions of art museums within a "commercial" framework. Blockbusters are often led by entrepreneurial directors, curated by a team of people, some of whom are curators, but others of whom are set designers from theatre, for example (McDonald, 2004). The visitor becomes central to curatorial decisions regarding art museum programming for blockbuster exhibitions as they seek to extend the reach of the parent brand to new audiences and influence

perceptions of that brand. Moreover, blockbuster sub-brands gain traction through people, products and services by novel associations that provide media attention that attracts wide audiences (c.w. Parmentier and Fischer, 2012). However, blockbusters are not without contention as they are seen as problematic in the art historical canon, not just because definitions prove elusive but for reasons around the authenticity of the art museum purpose (Berryman, 2013). References to blockbuster features including their large scale, high-risk, investment dependent, multi-year exhibition projects, strongly supported and widely promoted indicate that the commitment required by art museums as hosts. Their embeddedness with corporate sponsorship ranks one of their most controversial qualities (Berryman, 2013). Due to their size and investment requirements being dependent on stakeholder support for success. Their deliberate design as a commercial endeavour is also noted by many as cause for reflection and concern in terms of how this relates to the core mission and vision of the art museum.

While international exhibitions as sub-brands have received scant research attention, blockbusters as a sub-brand have been overlooked and are the focus on this paper. Using the literature from brand architecture we suggest that blockbusters are different from other exhibition sub-brands. Often a blockbuster exhibition comes with reference to the origins of the sub-brand. In this way they are a hybrid of the "host" institution brand, combined with the brand name of the "home" institution, for example, V&A London, from where an exhibition may be sourced with Bendigo Art Gallery as the exhibition host in a particular country. The host brand name provides the blockbuster sub-brand and promotion strategy with a brand halo effect (Leuthesser et al., 1995). Together, the home and host brands are combined with the exhibition focus (artist, artists or generic term for a genre of art). The conceptual model (refer Figure 1) illustrates how the blockbuster sub-brand emerges through the combination of three distinct brands to create a sub-brand for a host institution.

What makes blockbusters different from other exhibitions as sub-brands stems from their size and appeal. Bendigo Art Gallery is a successful brand manager, developing, promoting and nurturing the institution or master brand in a regional city. It has both international and local recognisable artistic brands in its exhibitions programme. It is also recognised as successful in hosting blockbusters as sub-brands within in its brand architecture. It sources exhibitions which augment its offerings, expand its audience beyond its regional area and attracts tourists and visitors from afar; drawing the largest crowds of regional galleries in Australia with significant economic and social impact on its region beyond cultural indicators.
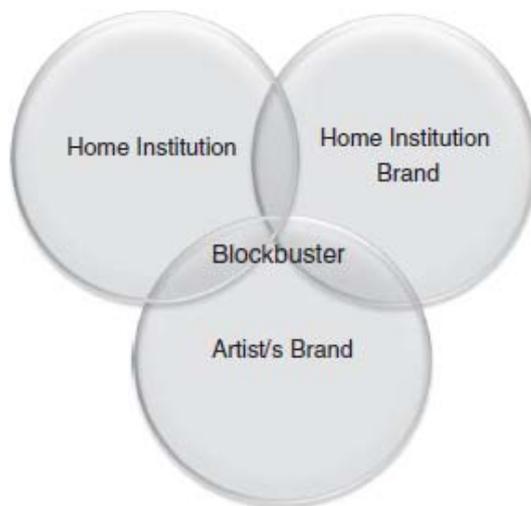

Figure 1.
Blockbuster sub-brand
conceptual model

Extant brand literature suggests that institutions can maximise their return on their branding activities through better organising and managing brands and brand inter-relationships within the existing portfolio (Petromilli et al., 2002). There are two alternatives to brand architecture strategies referred to as a house of brand or a branded house (Aaker and Joachimsthaler, 2000; Petromilli et al., 2002). Within the NASH sector we see evidence of both brand portfolio management structures. Art museums have evolved to establish their name as a brand and they have used this name as an umbrella for their programming. Tate Gallery exemplifies this strategy perfectly: "Tate Modern: Henri Matisse: The Cut-Outs". The parent or master brand is used consistently when communicating the title of each and every exhibition sub-brand. It illustrates Tate's philosophy to brand every exhibition as Tate as it reflects the "Tate" lens on an artist or artistic works. Similarly, Bendigo Art Gallery presents "Modern Love: fashion visionaries from the FIDM Museum LA" combining the host master brand with a home exhibition art museum brand to communicate the origins of the sub-brand exhibition within a branded house structure. In contrast, we see a range of art museums who consider each exhibition as a sub-brand within a house of brands approach, such as the NGV as host to a forthcoming exhibition "The Fashion World of Jean Paul Gaultier: From the Sidewalk to the Catwalk". The NGV ensured exclusivity in hosting the exhibition in Australia but has not dual branded it as the NGV presents. Similarly, the 2013 exhibition of Anish Kapoor was delivered by the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA) epitomising the use of the artist as sub-brand but within a house of brands/exhibitions portfolio structure. A house of brands employs a range of stand-alone sub-brand names without reference to a master brand.

It is clear that brand architecture assists us to explore how art museums currently treat exhibitions as sub-brands and in particular how they treat blockbusters. Blockbusters often emerge through the association of a host, home and artist(s) brands to be a different type of sub-brand. However understanding blockbusters as sub-brands in art museums is yet to emerge.

Profile of Bendigo art gallery

Local government art museums provide a fertile setting in which to explore the entrepreneurial characteristics of blockbuster exhibitions. Here, we find shifts to dynamic funding arrangements, re-allocations of accountability and responsibility, and devolution of power, in a turbulent environment provided levers for entrepreneurial managers and policy makers to create value for people in the social arena (Morris and Jones, 1999; Zerbinati and Souitaris, 2005). Such advocates are willing to invest time and resources to promote a new position for their organisation and its community. The profile of Bendigo Art Gallery and its competitors provide a case in point.

Bendigo the city was part of the gold rush from 1851 to 1954. The city of Bendigo is a major regional city in the state of Victoria and the fourth largest inland city in Australia, with a population of 105,000. It is a one-and-a-half hour train ride from Melbourne, the state capital. Many of the buildings including schools, churches, public buildings, commercial establishments and homes which were a part of Bendigo's history, create a graciousness that people yearn for. Many were built in the gold rush days of the mid-nineteenth century. Bendigo today offers laneways and arcades providing shopping experiences, modern cuisine, cultural events and activities, all amongst the town's long standing traditions and heritage (Rentschler, 2002).

Bendigo Art Gallery has been called 'a gold mine of a gallery. Founded in 1887, it upholds Bendigo's rich heritage through a collection, which tells the story of the city's early history as a gold mining town and of Australia's early pride in its late nineteenth century painters. The art museum shows a

commitment to collecting and presenting contemporary Australian art as well as quality international exhibitions. Bendigo Art Gallery is one of the three largest regional galleries in the state of Victoria, Australia (Rentschler, 2002).

Table I describes the internal and external history of Bendigo Art Gallery. The period from 1996 represents a new and more aggressive phase for the art museum and a watershed in the development of the sub-brand. The art museum was devolved from its institutional links with local government, being spun off as a stand-alone non-profit, allowing it to raise funds in a way that was previously not possible. Despite this change, local government continued to support and fund the gallery, while setting it free to obtain a more diverse range of funds, contributing to its entrepreneurial edge in the art museum marketplace.

In the space of a decade thereafter, the art museum came to dominate the regional exhibition circuit in Victoria. The directors appointed in 1996 and 1999 were fortunate to have supporters on the board and in the community as they could not have achieved their vision alone. Foremost was the chair of the board, and over time the media, the government, the funding bodies and the major event company. John Higgs was chair of the board for 21 years, handing over the reins in 2010 to the new chair Gordon McKern. The "current standing of the art museum owes a lot to his [Higgs] efforts", reflected McKern (Bendigo Art Gallery, 2010/2011, p. 17).

The history of this regional art museum reflects that it is now more audience centric and embedded within a wide stakeholder environment. Internal developments and external challenges (Table I) impacted the direction of exhibitions. Whilst it has maintained a focus on quality in in-house curated exhibitions, using their stock of nineteenth and twentieth century Australian art, it has developed over time nationally significant exhibitions with international, familiar themes with broad appeal to a wider range of audiences. Some of these exhibitions became regional blockbusters. Table II presents an overview of key recent exhibitions at the Gallery. The offering was motivated by the objective of bringing quality art to regional areas as well as attracting tourists to the region as part of community development.

Methodology

This project used a comparative case study framework to explore the issues under study. We extended the approach taken in (Rentschler et al., 2011). Case studies were conducted with one well known Australian art museum, comparing it to others in the sector (e.g. Art Gallery of Ballarat; NGV). We were interested to know why and how of blockbuster exhibitions developed as sub-brands in the art museum context. Case studies provide an opportunity to gain an in-depth knowledge of dynamics and texture, the ability to deal with a full variety of evidence in a real-life, contemporary context and an explanation of causal links that are too complex for a survey (Eisenhardt, 1989; Mitchell, 1983; Walton, 1972; Yin, 1984). Case study research has been validated as a method that provides great searching ability, enabling researchers to "better understand the subtle institutional processes" (DiMaggio et al., 1978, p. 56). Triangulation ensured goodness of fit for the data (Patton, 2002). We sought to build a robust model that is generalisable analytically and to a theoretical proposition (Yin, 1984).

Organisational history		External challenges		Internal developments	
Established	1887				
Location	Central Victoria, one and a half hour drive or train from Melbourne	Govt. policy changes	1990s	Ellwood appointed director	1996
		State and local government restructuring	1993	Quinlan appointed curator	1996
				Quinlan appointed director	1999
Setting	Regional centre, close capital city	Static govt. funding	1990s	New chair of Trustees	1988
					2010
Collection size	4000	Govt. capital injections	Late 1980s and ongoing	First mission statement	Mid-1980s
Focus collections	Austn., especially C 19th and early C 20th	Cultural tourism links	1993 and ongoing	Organisational restructuring	1996
Budget	$200,000 (1996) $1.5 m (2012)	Major event links	2012	Expanded exhibition programme	From 1990s
Foundations	$100000+pa interest on investments	Competition from leisure and entertainment	From 1990s	Market-focused activities	From 1990s
Project money (renovation/ restoration)	Various	Multiple stakeholders		Renovations/extensions	1960s, 1990s and 2012

Year	Exhibition	Partner
2005-2006	Cecil Beaton Portraits	National Portrait Gallery, London
2006	Designs for a Modern World: Charles Rennie Mackintosh	Partnership with Glasgow Museums, Scotland
2006-2007	The Worlds Most Photographed	National Portrait Gallery, London
2008	Archibald Prize	Art Gallery NSW
2009	Archibald Prize	Art Gallery NSW
2009	The Golden Age of Couture	Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London
2010	McCubbin – Last Impressions 1907-1917	National Gallery of Australia
2011	The White Wedding Dress	Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) London
2012	Grace Kelly: Style Icon	Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), London and Grimaldi Forum, Monaco
2013	Modern Love	FIDM Museum Los Angeles
2014	Genius and Ambition: The Royal Academy of Arts, London 1768-1918	The Royal Academy of Arts, London
2014	The Body Beautiful in Ancient Greece	The British Museum, London
2014	Undressed-350 Years of Fashion in Underwear	Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A)

Table II.
Evolution of Bendigo art gallery exhibitions

Analysis of secondary data supported the approach, including documents such as media reports, annual reports, biographies and autobiographies, trade material and marketing plans (Krippendorff, 1980; Tinker and Niemark, 1987). With a limited amount of research undertaken on blockbuster exhibitions in Australia (or indeed anywhere in the world from a marketing perspective), secondary data analysis provided an opportunity to gain an historical overview of the changes in the cultural context over time.

Data were gathered also from interviews, presentations in public forums and in formal conversations. We interviewed art museum staff and board members as well as stakeholders (n ¼ 20) involved in the strategy, programming and operations of blockbuster exhibitions (refer to Table III). Between 1996 and 2014, we interviewed and surveyed leaders in the institution, volunteers, board members and stakeholders in tourism and events and in funding bodies. These sources provided an appropriate informed cohort in order to discuss blockbusters and the sub-brand.

Interviewees	Number	Positions
Bendigo Art Gallery	7	Board chair, board members (2), curators (2) Gallery director (2)
Other art galleries	6	National and state gallery marketing managers, operations directors and directors
Stakeholders	7	Manager state tourism body, arts journalist, major event manager, managers state and national funding bodies
Total	20	

Table III.
Interview respondent characteristics

Interviews were conducted with the person responsible for blockbuster exhibitions. The semi-structured interviews were between 45 and 90 minutes in duration. Subsequent interviews of a less formal nature included opportunistic, casual, phone and email correspondence which were transcribed, field-noted and coded. Presentations occurred in a variety of settings and were not recorded but transcribed and coded. These latter types of discussions were used to clarify particular aspects of the analysis as they arose. The interview protocol included open-ended interview questions structured around a number of subject areas. The first subject area focused on a general discussion of the art museum sector in regards to leadership, exhibitions and programming, and challenges. The primary subject area included questions on the purpose of blockbusters, attitudes towards them internally within the art museum and externally as well as the drivers and inhibitors for them.

Findings

What drives an art museum to adopt a quality sub-brand philosophy that sees exhibitions become blockbusters? In regard to Question 1, the findings suggest that art museums, and Bendigo Art Gallery in particular, can be considered to have adopted a quality sub-brand philosophy that sees exhibitions become blockbusters to some degree. For example, the history of Bendigo Art Gallery and its development provide the data to illustrate what drove the art museum board, director and stakeholders to develop a quality sub-brand philosophy that saw its exhibitions become blockbusters. As director Karen Quinlan stated in the Annual Report (2011/2012: pp. 5-6), the art museum delivered a "successful and record-breaking year", with the "momentum" created becoming a "strategic focus" after its Grade Kelly exhibition success, with new media used on Facebook and Twitter to reach new audiences. Similarly, at the Art Gallery of Ballarat, "strategic alliances" led in 2012 to an "extraordinary exhibition" called Capturing Flora with "tremendous national interest and critical acclaim and outstanding attendances" (Annual Report 2013, p. 8). The pro-activeness, innovation and risk-taking of new exhibition types, such as the Grace Kelly exhibition, adorned the cover of the Annual Report and its interior illustrations. The annual reports and strategic plans obtained from other art museums supported the assertion that art museums are developing quality sub-brand philosophies that saw exhibitions become blockbusters. Strategies were crafted around sub-brands, with respondents viewing the changes as "difficult". We were told: "I had to change as a curator. The gallery had to change". These sometimes conflicting elements are examined further in the next sections.

Pro-activeness

External change has led to internal pro-active behaviour in strategy, structure and operations. Pro-activeness entails doing what is necessary to bring an entrepreneurial concept to fruition (Morris and Jones, 1999), including exhibition types and audiences targeted which change the demographics of visitors. The landscape within which art museums operate has become more competitive as they strove to achieve their own ambitions and meet the expectations of multiple stakeholders (Rentschler and Geursen, 1999). Planning occurred to differentiate art museums from others by putting on quality but popular exhibitions. Popular offerings were not without their critics (Balloffet et al., 2014). At Bendigo Gallery, the sub-brand philosophy was based on the claim that fashion, film and photographs were different from any other exhibition programmes offered in regional Australia, particularly when sourced from known established art museums. This is not new. However, it is new for regional galleries in Australia to seek to attract large audiences from other destinations to small, regional cities, using the arts as the vehicle. These three elements coalesced to distinguish the art museum's exhibition programme. The concept of recurring and recognisable aesthetics suggest that meaning and identity were not invented by the art museum's leadership. Nevertheless, in a series of statements on the principle, director Quinlan states that her background in fashion allowed her to develop a powerful psychological and hermeneutic duality that appealed to the audiences' emotions unifying form and content. Such statements are supported by the marketing director for the NGV, who considers that art museum exhibitions allow audiences to "see life in another light", which contributes to the brand (Rentschler, 2008).

At the same time as exhibition changes were occurring in art museums, structural changes supported changes in sub-brand philosophy. Bendigo Gallerys became a business unit of the municipal city council in the early 1990s. The initiative for change came from the chair of the board, whose dominant vision is evident in successive annual reports from the late 1980s to the 1990s.

Director from 1996, Tony Ellwood, brought a new vision to the art museum: "There is the perception that scholarship is downgraded and it's either the world of the MBA or the world of the art historian. Really it's the best facilitator that can marry the two areas" (Ellwood, 1997). Both directors and board chairs were pro-active in seeking to change the art museum structure and its sub-brand strategies in order to position it for the future. The difference in the degree to which art museums have embraced a sub-brand philosophy was evident in comments as well as scanning annual reports, where report design and images used varied from institution to institution.

Innovation

Innovation refers to seeking unusual or novel solutions to problems in processes, products and services (Morris and Jones, 1999). Layers of meaning through the leitmotif can communicate visual and verbal messages of the sub-brand in the innovative changes undertaken. Leading and managing the change is attributed to a supportive and strategic board, and entrepreneurial directors providing leadership to a dedicated team. The art museum has undergone an extensive building and renovation programme equipping it with a new entrance onto the cultural precinct, contemporary wing, art museum shop and café, backing on to a spacious park.

The art museum has positioned itself to put on quality exhibitions that became popular. As director, Karen Quinlan said: "we don't operate as a regional art museum". Quinlan sees that she had "educated the public" to visit regional Bendigo by "finding something that they want to see, making a day or weekend of it and building the regional economy as well as developing a perception that the art museum contributes to making Bendigo liveable for people seeking to relocate".

The innovative approach provides levels of interpretation, emotional signposts and meaning associated with textual and visual cues. The effect of their repetition through numerous similar types of exhibitions is a study in difference with familiarity that the audience responds to. Arbiters of taste in the art museum profession are by-passed by appeals directly to the audience, encouraging them to respond to the exhibition rather than be side-tracked by peer criticism. However, the contested space within which galleries operate sees their success as a double edged sword, where some of their profession do not support their wide appeal.

Risk-taking

Risk-taking refers to the willingness to commit resources to new ventures that have a significant chance of failure, even though the risk has been calculated (Morris and Jones, 1999). Director Karen Quinlan (2011Quinlan () states as her mantra that "nothing is impossible", thus setting the scene for the reformative change that she has led, in partnership with her board. She is a risk-taker, as is her board and particularly the two chairs that have stood by her in driving change in the art museum. As Director Quinlan told us:

No one was going to the art museum. The [local government] council stepped in and worked with the art museum and the board to restructure the place. We also redeveloped the art museum in stages over successive years. We don't work in a silo. We don't work in isolation. It wasn't always like that. It has changed. I have changed.

Over the last five years, Bendigo has presented a number of quality exhibitions, mostly on fashion, photography and design, sourced from international museums and galleries, as travelling packages

or blockbuster sub-brands. Quinlan "has curatorial expertise in design". In 2009, Bendigo presented the golden Age of Couture from the V&A. In 2011 the Art museum presented The White Wedding Dress: 200 Years of Wedding Fashion, sourced from the V&A, and Made in Hollywood, photographs from Santa Barbara Museum of Art. In 2012, it exhibited Grace Kelly: Style Icon, sourced from the V&A, London, and Grimaldi Forum, Monaco. The Kelly exhibition "surpassed economic expectations, injecting $17 million into Bendigo's economy" (Alebakis, 2012). More than 152,000 visitors saw the exhibition, not bad for a mid-sized regional city. In 2013, the art museum presented Modern Love, sourced from FIDM Museum Los Angeles, an exhibition on international fashion designers from the past 40 years. Design, photography and fashion pinpoint Bendigo's exhibition focus with "[…] many of the Bendigo loan exhibitions hav[ing] traversed a space around design, style, media, popularity and glamour" (Peers, 2011, p. 96).

What are the characteristics of the blockbuster sub-brand? In regard to RQ2, the findings suggest that the art museum uses four characteristics to position its sub-brand. They are discussed below.

Celebrity

A dominant theme that emerged from the data, is that one of the three contributors to the blockbuster sub-brand is the artist(s). Interlinked with the artist brand is the phenomenon of celebrity elevating the exhibition beyond the branding of the host art museum or home art museum. It has become a leitmotif within the other leitmotifs of fashion, film and photography. As Director Quinlan told us:

Some may not agree with what I've done as director. But it goes back to what we put in place years ago. Fashion came to me one day. I could do fashion. It was logical because I had the experience and people were interested in it. I spoke to the board about it. Then I needed to fund it.

The promotion of the Grace Kelly: Style Icon exhibition focused heavily on Kelly as a celebrity and utilised her princess status to position her "life [as] a dance between image and reality, PR confections and real-life fairytales" (Miller, 2012, p. 21). Interestingly, another marketing strategy used was to create linkages between Kelly and other celebrities. As an actress, Kelly was linked to Alfred Hitchcock, the director of many of her Hollywood films. Citing Hitchcock's autobiography, Kelly's profile is boosted by talking about "The subtly of Grace's sexuality – her elegant sexiness" (Hitchcock in Miller, 2012, p. 21). Similarly, as a princess, Kelly was linked to the style of the British Duchess of Cambridge. "The Duchess of Cambridge last year paid homage to

Kelly's frock with her own wedding dress […]" (Kissane, 2012, p. 13). The notion of celebrity is used to attract audiences from a wide range of backgrounds, especially people who do not usually attend exhibitions. The promotion of blockbuster exhibitions emphasises the fame of the artist or subject, in their art work or in their life. This is evident in the promotion for the Grace Kelly: Style Icon exhibition as it was for the Napoleon: Revolution to Empire exhibition held at the NGV in 2012. Promotional material for this exhibition resembled that of popular magazines read by the general public rather than high art journals for the cognoscenti. Qantas Magazine described the exhibition as "[acknowledging] and [celebrating] the glamour

of one of the world's most enduring celebrity couples[…]" (Baum, 2012, p. 54). There

are similarities in the words used across articles, such as "glamour", "power couple", "never to be seen before" or "never to be seen again", focusing on the artist or subject's life. Quinlan advises that her challenges is sustainability:

One of the biggest challenges I face is sustainability. How do I sustain the momentum of the blockbuster year after year?

Such views were supported by other art museum directors who echoed these views, expressing the "pressures" under which the search for audience growth and popular themes placed them. In this way, the art museum context is linked to the notion of celebrity while maintaining integrity.

Spectacle

In the tradition of the blockbuster exhibition, Grace Kelly: Style Icon was presented as more of an event or spectacle shrouded in theatrics rather than a traditional art exhibition (Balloffet et al., 2014). In regard to the research question, it supports the contentions of Schroeder (2005) that the artist has become a brand. In the case of Bendigo's blockbuster exhibitions, it is not only the artist, but also the film star, couturier and the fairytale and fable surrounding the exhibition topic, be it the emotion of love, the glamour of a princess or the passion for Hollywood. Sometimes more than one of these elements coalesces with Grace Kelly being a Hollywood star, a princess and a "style icon", as the exhibition promoted her, with a fairytale life style. Other art museums have followed the model with the NGV holding an exhibition of Napoleon and Josephine "the power couple, famous, stylish and feared" (McColl, 2011, p. 15).

The sub-brand focus on spectacle for Grace Kelly, for example, created public interest, driving the art museum to create ticketed viewing sessions for audiences. The exhibition held an elaborate opening with a celebrity appearance by Princess Charlene of Monaco. This royal celebrity appearance contributed to the exclusiveness that the art museum intended for the exhibition. The media positioned the exhibition as if it were a royal occasion. In an article promoting the exhibition The Age quoted the art museum director as saying: "This extraordinary exhibition is of great importance to the royal family and Princess Charlene's attendance at the opening is testament to this" (Quinn, 2011, p. 6).

Content analysis for other exhibitions reinforced this view. Princess Charlene appeared on the front cover of the Annual Report (2012). The promotion for the Picasso: Masterpieces from the Musée National Picasso, Paris exhibition held at the Art Gallery of NSW relied heavily on presenting "[a] spectacular, all embracing show of Picasso" (Capon cited in Streak, 2010, p. 32). The media spoke of the exhibition as if it were a theatrical event, writing "Picasso treasures go on show here" and "Picasso goes touring". Once more, the intent is to attract attention from the general public who would not be interested in an art exhibition. "The idea is to put on something with such scale and impact that it rises above the noise of the media and the competing claims of other forms of entertainment, and draws crowds – especially new crowds – into museums and galleries" (Allen, 2012, p. 12).

While many people flocked to these exhibitions, not all punters were happy with the approach. Critics voiced concerns such as: "When am I going to get my art museum back?" others saw fashion and photography as froth rather than "a serious form of design" (McColl, 2013). These people did not respond to the emotive "excitement", "giantism" or "huge numbers" that the spectacle of blockbusters engaged. They were appalled at the "obsession with size" that "padded out shows with inferior works" (Allen, 2013, p. 10) while the audiences were in an "uncomfortable crush" (Vaughan cited in Gill, 2012). Still others saw these comments as "snotty" by those who are elitist rather than open to letting in a broader public. In other words, the spectacle broadens the audience for the

exhibition, in line with brand architecture literature, with institutional documents revealing that the sub-brand stories were a typical starting point for blockbuster exhibitions. Nonetheless, the contested nature of blockbusters in galleries is illustrated by the negative comments of some commentators.

Inclusivity

The blockbuster sub-brand focus was manifested in the approach to activities and practices that support the exhibition that is inclusive rather than exclusive. Blockbuster exhibitions are a means for developing new, broader audiences rather than maintaining audience loyalty through art lovers. This typifies Aaker and Joachimsthaler's (2000) contention that brand architecture explains the relationship between master brand and its sub-brand. Blockbuster sub-brands are offered to build new relationships and engender different perceptions for a new audience. Blockbusters appeal to wider audiences through the media rather than the cognoscenti, hence creating the tension in the art world between quality and blockbuster. Exhibition success creates pride in the city, especially important for a regional area. As one stakeholder told us:

I work for Bendigo Bank. I see the source of pride that people feel in the town for the Bendigo Art Gallery.

Part of the inclusivity is about the team approach to governance and the art museum. The heritage of Bendigo is one of its assets, Quinlan tells us. The Chair appointed in 1988 had a vision for the art museum, seeing it as an asset. But so is its bank, its hospital and its university. Together, they make Bendigo "a liveable city", Quinlan says, helping people make the decision to relocate there. As another stakeholder told us:

When you unpack it, it is about the governance structure that enabled Bendigo Art Gallery to be successful. Trust is a key dimension. The board believe in the director.

The director provides another point of view on the need for relevance, inclusivity and linking programming to governance and the organisational structures:

It wasn't always easy. I have had to change. We have a great board. We all work together. But it wasn't an easy transition to what we have today. Nonetheless, the separation between the [local government] Council and the art museum allowed it to blossom. The board took us there.

In other words, blockbusters are part of the package, but "governance facilitates the innovation", as a stakeholder told us. This is not to say that everyone is supportive of the path taken. The art museum's success with blockbusters has led to it being called pejoratively "the frock gallery". Such comments increase the pressure to bring people into the tent. In short, not everyone is convinced about the efficacy of blockbusters. Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, director, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, where some of the largest and most successful blockbusters have been presented, such as Annie Leibovitz, tells how "very weary" she is of blockbusters: "We have to be very careful if you rely on blockbusters, the public's always fickle in some ways; they will go to the next, latest thing somewhere else" (Macgregor cited in Neill, 2012, p. 8). In other words, there are nuanced views about blockbusters, their value for the public, for tourism, for government investors and for the curators.

As there is "no profit in blockbusters" but rather "audience development" and "liveability of the city", narratives seek to feed into that story. The demographics of the audience at blockbusters

differ from that at other exhibitions. "You attract a different audience", says Quinlan. Nonetheless, for fashion exhibitions, there are more women than men and "they hunted in packs", said one stakeholder. Attracting a wider audience through blockbusters is argued to encourage more people to experience what art museums have to offer the general public. Another director and former director of Bendigo echoes Quinlan's views:

Blockbusters are all about audience engagement, and the art museum of the 21st century is about finding links with our global community […] [The] evidence is in our attendances.

(Ellwood cited in McColl, 2013, p.17).

We argue that the Grace Kelly: Style Icon exhibition was the most inclusive of the blockbusters that the art museum has mounted, due to a confluence of influences such as stakeholder support, audience support, wide publicity and political positioning. It utilised the well-known name of movie star and then princess "Grace Kelly" to attract attention from those who are fascinated by the concept of "celebrity" or "royalty". Media coverage such as "it seems princesses are back in vogue" (Quinn, 2011, p. 6) and "what are today's royals other than über celebrities" (Strickland, 2012, p. 58) create the impression that the exhibition will allow audiences to look inside the world of the celebrity. Similarly, the Picasso: Masterpieces from the Musee National Picasso, Paris exhibition held at the Art Gallery of NSW utilised the well-known name of "Pablo Picasso" to attract attention from a diverse audience. This particular exhibition focused heavily on the private life of Picasso, comparing his life to that of a soap opera series. In an article promoting the exhibition, The Sydney Morning Herald wrote "[…] [Picasso's] private life has the power to fascinate. The famous friends, the illegitimate children, the family feuds and, of course, the women" (Schwartzkoff, 2011, p. 8). From the political perspective, the Arts Minister told us that: "Bendigo has put regional galleries on the map. It shows regional galleries can do it. I want others to follow suit". While another regional tourism stakeholder advised that in order to ensure ongoing financial support from government you need to "play the game":

We are playing in bigger stakes now. We press the flesh now at the political level. You have to keep in their face.

Quinlan shared with us one of the reasons for choosing Kelly:

It is much harder in a regional centre. You have to get the people there. You need to educate them. Today we launched the art series hotel. This is fabulous for Bendigo. It will make getting people there so much easier.

Authenticity

There is a tension in blockbusters between authenticity and selling out, seen in some of the snide comments in the media. Authenticity is provided in the Napoleon and Josephine exhibition at the NGV by the quality of original objects. At Bendigo, Quinlan expresses this tension as "staying relevant rather than only seeking large audiences". What drives an art museum to develop the sub-brand in blockbuster exhibitions, is the need to build a bridge between curatorial and commercial foci. This is an important motivator for establishing such a sub-brand, providing authenticity with stakeholders who may be museum professionals or punters.

Blockbusters are criticised for prioritising economic gain and attendance numbers over the exhibition quality. Authenticity was questioned in a newspaper article titled

Blockbusted: "[…]the focus on ever-larger attendance numbers and international brand-name blockbusters is distorting the wider role and purpose of our state-funded collecting institutions" (McColl, 2013, p. 17). Blockbuster exhibitions such as Grace Kelly: Style Icon has placed Bendigo Art Gallery in a category of galleries that are developing blockbusters and "art-world" sacrifices associated with them. "[…]Bendigo, Ballarat, Shepparton and Geelong—now trade enthusiastically on words once considered suspect by art-world elitists: "consumer", "entertainment", "marketing", and even "blockbuster" (Paisley cited in Stephens, 2013a, p. 24).

Authenticity is provided by the motives of the design team. For example, fashion exhibitions have been criticised for lacking quality. The NGV exhibition of Vanity Fair photographer Edward Steichen and Art Deco Fashion focused a lot of its promotion on fashion brands such as Chanel and celebrity, which raised concerns about its authenticity. Paola Di Trocchio, NGV's Fashion Curator has argued that this exhibition shows the "rich heritage of fashion" where "clothing is treated as another art work" (cited in Stephens, 2013b, p. 12). She argues further that "clothing and fashion, certainly can be transformative, and exhibitions can posit interesting ideas about their multiple meanings" (cited in Stephens, 2013b, p. 12). Nonetheless, these comments illustrate this aspect of the blockbuster is also not without its critics.

Contribution to theory and limitations

Our contribution to theory is twofold. First, we embed the art museum blockbuster within the literature of brand architecture and have developed characteristics for blockbuster sub-brand exhibitions in a regional art museum. Little attention has been paid to blockbusters and or sub-brands in galleries. Yet galleries are becoming more audience focused and reliant on the tourist dollar that blockbuster sub-brands bring in to the art museum. With other sources of funding static or declining, the blockbuster is one way to satisfy not only audiences but also fractious government funders within a formal brand architecture approach to prudent management. They also provide an opportunity for sponsors who see an educated target market ripe for the picking. Existing institutional tensions in galleries have not been examined in this way before. Second, we identified the entrepreneurial spirit that underpins the development of the blockbuster sub-brand. Few studies have identified and systematically investigated public sector entrepreneurs in local government, especially outside the USA. Key leaders, from the board chair to the director but also stakeholder support, saw the benefits of affiliating the art museum with high-profile figures who have mainstream media exposure or who are poised to obtain it. Their actions entailed pro-activeness, innovation, risk-taking, leadership and creativity (Zerbinati and Souitaris, 2005), bringing in new organisational models, new infrastructure and services to the local community, new processes, new funds as well as new exhibition types and new audiences to the gallery and the community.

Hence, big names alone were not seen as sufficient for exhibition success. Exhibitions also need authenticity in the "product". It is the confluence of elements that provide for a blockbuster, reaching beyond the cognoscenti to people who do not know about art but who respond to spectacle. Reaching a wide audience is one of the intentions of blockbuster exhibitions, aided by providing intriguing stories as media fodder (Parmentier and Fischer, 2012). Thus celebrity is linked to spectacle, inclusivity and authenticity, but it is not without its tensions (Rentschler and Gilmore, 2002) with cultural industry peer groups the last to come on board. The strong commercial orientation, need for long-term planning, professional leadership and influx of funds from new sources provide a platform for further investigation of these complex social and aesthetic phenomena.

This paper intentionally chose to investigate research questions around an art museum in regional Australia. We accept that the results cannot be generalised. This may be a limitation. Nonetheless, it provides an example of the ubiquitousness of the blockbuster exhibition: it has infiltrated regional galleries, 50 years after being launched by Thomas Hoving at the Met in New York (Hoving, 1993), then the cultural capital. Our exploratory study provides a foundation for future blockbuster research, either extending our understanding of sub-branding or of the blockbuster phenomenon itself. Both would provide valuable insights to marketers.

Conclusions

This paper addressed a gap in the literature on both the rise of exhibitions as sub-brands of the master art museum brand and of a particular category of sub-brands that has emerged: blockbusters. There is a growing body of work on branding and brand architecture with an emerging scholarship on it in arts marketing. However, there has been silence on blockbuster exhibitions as sub-brands. Extant research on branding has discussed brand architecture and the strategic management of brands but has yet to explore the context of NASH, while research on blockbusters has been limited to exposés and art history examinations, with marketers ignoring the topic until now. This is curious given that blockbusters are developed from an audience perspective, which is central to marketing and branding.

In designing blockbusters, galleries are using the sub-brand as a compass for decision making to guide four brand characteristics in blockbuster exhibitions: celebrity; spectacle; authenticity; and inclusiveness. There is considerable co-branding as a result of the partnerships with international galleries and celebrity identities, creating unique sub-brands. Sub-branding permits galleries to disseminate emotional identity and image to their audiences by borrowing from more recognisable brands and using them in association with their exhibition programme. In sub-branding, focus has shifted from objects in a collection to a direct emotional connection to the audience through the exhibition sub-brand.

The findings reveal that the blockbuster sub-brand operates at a philosophical level, as part of entrepreneurial leadership and as a leitmotif underpinning decision-making. We argue that the three elements of entrepreneurship and the four characteristics of blockbusters underpin the behaviours of the professionals who conceptualise and deliver blockbuster exhibitions.

It is evident that in an art museum context the elements are used in a different way from the brand of the art museum. First, celebrity, spectacle, inclusivity and authenticity are the focus of the blockbuster sub-brand, making the exhibitions stand out in a crowded brandscape. The sub-brand is identifiable by notoriety, name, profession, artistic talent or a combination of these indicators in fashion, film and photography. It is not an identifiable logo, symbol or word related to the host or lending art museum. Far from it. The leitmotif is crucial in the blockbuster experience. Second, as is common with other uses of brand, an art museum uses the sub-brand as a means of satisfying its audiences (Park et al., 1986). This aspect of brand communicates to the audience that the hedonic experience and inclusivity of the exhibition will appeal to them. Curatorial peer review is irrelevant and bypassed. Third, blockbuster exhibitions use the sub-brand as a means of augmenting the exhibition experience with additional services, events, seminars, themed café food and late night openings. There is a focus on the total immersive experience of the blockbuster exhibition. Augmented activities provide investments in the future by signalling to the audience that the art museum is displaying a quality product. This is in line with DiMaggio (1985) who states that galleries

are non-profit institutions but not non-market institutions, and need to respond to the need for spectacle in blockbusters that deliver quality experiences. Finally, these three matters present a paradox in that galleries exhibit packaged exhibitions from abroad to present blockbusters that define them as distinctive and different from their neighbours. Bendigo is using packaged exhibitions to define itself and make itself distinctive: fashion, film and photography known internationally but with little relation to Australia's cultural distinctiveness. Some of the criticisms of blockbusters and of the art museum hark to the paradox of distinctiveness being carved out by packaged international exhibitions in a regional Australian city.

The blockbuster sub-brand presents more than the art museum it represents, seeking to provide a unique experience to the audience. Future researchers may wish to answer the questions: Who is the blockbuster audience? What value do they see in blockbuster exhibitions? How does the promotion of the sub-brand whet their appetite? Curiously, it is the experience that is unique in blockbuster exhibitions not the exhibition package itself. It resonates with the public seeking to escape the hurly-burly of negative experiences in the media day to day. They do not see the sub-brand as part of their lives (which is the case with the brand experience) so much as apart from their lives: blockbusters provide a means of living the fairytale. This is a form of sub-brand symbolism that creates a personal connection between the art museum and the audience, helping to establish it as an iconic cultural institution.

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