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Management Principles and Tactics in Developing International Audiences :
A Case Study of the Comedy Club Bangkok

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้สำรวจหลักการการจัดการที่อยู่เบื้องหลังการตัดสินใจและเชิงกลยุทธ์ที่ใช้ในการพัฒนาผู้ชมต่างประเทศที่ชมรมตลกกรุงเทพฯ การสังเกตบทบาทของนักแสดงตลกที่เล่นในสังคมในการวิจารณ์สังคม การเปลี่ยนแปลง และสะท้อนให้เห็นถึงคุณค่าและจุดของความขัดแย้งของการมีส่วนร่วมในหมู่ผู้ชมตลก เป็นตัวบ่งชี้ที่ไม่ใช่แค่สังคม บรรทัดฐานในสังคม แต่สามารถนำไปใช้กับศิลปะการแสดงให้สังคมมองเห็นภาพรวม ด้วยจำนวนที่เพิ่มขึ้นของชุมชนนานาชาติในโลกยุคโลกาภิวัตน์ วิธีที่ผู้จัดการศิลปะใช้หลักการและทฤษฎีในการมีส่วนร่วมหลากหลายประเภท ซึ่งประกอบด้วย ผู้ชมนานาชาติของการแสดงตลกสามารถให้ข้อมูลเชิงลึกเกี่ยวกับการจัดการความตึงเครียดและแรงจูงใจในการเข้าร่วมศิลปะ การอยู่รอดของศิลปะการแสดงสดในโลกดิจิทัล การสังเกตสมาคมตลกกรุงเทพฯ เป็นกรณีศึกษา การวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพและเชิงปริมาณในช่วงระยะเวลา 3 เดือน สรุปผลการวิจัยที่พิสูจน์หลักการการจัดการ โดยมีศูนย์กลางที่ความสามัคคีของชุมชน การตระหนักรู้ทางวัฒนธรรมของชุมชน แต่ละแห่งในกลุ่มผู้ชมและผู้สนับสนุนศิลปะ และการศึกษาผ่านการประชุมเชิงปฏิบัติการของชุมชน ทำให้ชุมชนที่ผู้คนแสวงหาความสนใจร่วมกันในเรื่องตลกที่ปรับปรุงการเข้าร่วมประชุมของผู้ชมต่างประเทศ แนวโน้มในการพัฒนาผู้ชมในสถานที่เล็ก ๆ นี้สามารถคาดการณ์ถึงทฤษฎีที่มีประสิทธิภาพสำหรับองค์กรที่คล้ายกันที่มีองค์ประกอบผู้ชมที่หลากหลายในเมืองใกล้เคียงที่ต้องการเติบโตและรักษาผู้ชมเข้างานแสดงสด

คำสำคัญ : การพัฒนาผู้ชม; การมีส่วนร่วมของผู้ชม; การชื่นชมศิลปะ

Abstract

This paper explores the management principles behind decision making and strategic tactics used in developing international audiences at The Comedy Club Bangkok. Noting the role that comedy plays in society, facilitating social commentary, change and reflecting the values and points of controversy of the moment – participation among comedy audiences is an indicator not just of social normative in a society

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but can be applied to how the performing arts as a whole is viewed by a society. Given the increasing number of international communities in a globalized world, how arts managers apply principles and theory to engaging the wide variety types that comprise international audiences of comedy can give insight into management practices, content demand and performing arts attendance motivations and patterns – crucial to the survival of live performing arts in a digitized world. Observing the Comedy Club Bangkok as a case study, research over a three month period outlined findings that proved management principles centering on community unity, cultural awareness of individual communities in the audiences and arts advocacy through frequent contact, representation of cultural groups on stage and education via community workshops provided the community that people sought around a shared interest in comedy that improved international audience attendance. Trends in audience development in this small venue can be extrapolated to theorize effective tactics for similar organizations with diverse audience compositions in comparable cities also looking to grow and sustain audience attendance for live performances.

Keywords : Audience development; Audience engagement; Arts appreciation

Introduction & Literature Review

In our world full of injustice, hunger and cruelty; laughter is the balm that therapeutically relieves tension, reveals new points of view and shines healing hope on bleak situations. Comedy allows catharsis – a great value to society and individuals alike – yet comedy is ever precarious in its place in our society. At the heart of the ambivalence is comedy’s subjectivity; one man’s joke is another man’s fighting words or, worse, deep confusion. Perhaps its comedy’s flirtation with tension building – topics of controversy are often at the heart of comedy and comedians often edge perilously close to saying the point of controversy before backing away leaving audiences with the relieve and surprise of something safer or unexpected as the punchline. Who or what will be deemed funny wholly depends on issues of culture, point of view, gender, financial status, sensitivity among myriads of others and varies person to person. Understanding the place of arts as a whole in society is just as valuable, controversial and necessary today as it was centuries ago. It’s well known that the performing arts, not only takes the “temperature of a society” sussing out the norms and expected behavior, but pushes boundaries and challenges ideas and institutions by acting in unpredictable ways – comedy in particular. Managing art forms that provide much needed lubricant for social change, tension relief and exposure to new ideas is vital for the continued health of blended communities in increasingly international cities around the world. Successfully providing artistic outlets for the growing number of people living in foreign lands and reflecting the human condition is a significant challenge but a primary function of art. Successful management tactics based on sound principles can help people around the world not only find a voice to express their experiences but might just help them celebrate their victories and process the many challenges of being an international citizen in a globalized world.

International Audiences of Bangkok

Rapidly growing in seemingly all industries, Bangkok, is a blend of old and new, east meets west, tradition meets modernity with all the scars and innovation to prove it. In less than 20 years, Bangkok has



nearly doubled its population numbers – growing from 6.3 million in 2000 to 10.1 million in 2018. Economic and career opportunities central to the growth, an immense number (approximately 7% of the population living in Bangkok today was born outside the country) of permanent and semi-permanent international citizens have begun to integrate into the culture and space of Bangkok – and that’s to say nothing of the high tourism rate the city enjoys (World Population, 2018). There is also the growing population of Thai citizens that are increasingly educated with international standards/abroad as the upturn in economic opportunities and international business has brought more opportunities and interaction with surrounding countries. Western culture in Bangkok in all genres from music to books makes the demand for live, English-speaking entertainment a small leap to make among all nationalities in Bangkok. The growing English-speaking international audiences reflect the ever-changing face of Bangkok society that is emerging as a result of a myriad reasons. The expanding international audiences – audience reflecting, the societal demographics are the target audience for many institutions in Bangkok. Understanding how these growing international members of the community are consuming and responding to the arts is a of valuable insight not only to the current city conditions but to how it will grow. International audiences have special needs and function differently than homogeneous communities. Given that there are many cultural normative forms, points of reference, religious and educational backgrounds, creating comedic content that drives attendance and appeals to the many people who make up an international audience – locals, migrants, expats, business people, tourists - is massive undertaking for artists and arts managers and requires clear principles and strategic tactics for connecting with these audiences to develop patronage. Testing theory and action, international audiences encourage best practices and innovation in audience development management (Hattingh, 2018).

Audience Development Principles and Tactics

“Audience development is a strategic, dynamic and interactive process of making the arts accessible. It aims to engage individuals and communities in experiencing, enjoying, participating in and valuing the arts through various means including arts marketing.”

The Australia Council : Australia Street Company (NSW) 2007

Management of the performing arts is still a burgeoning field being defined as recently as a decade ago. Long perpetuated as a labor of love for the creative, a career in the arts is still viewed by many with an air of mysticism and superstition as to what makes a success. Modern business practices and scientific reasoning have only recently been applied to the management of venues with newer still attention being paid to audience behavior. The newness of audience development and audience engagement – theatrical and performance management as business strategy and not happenstance, means that there are many definitions in play when looking at management principles – debate still reigns over what exactly audience development is among researchers and how and if it is different from audience engagement. (Hansen, 2014) These terms must have consistency across the industry but individual institutions must also be able to maintain agency over the specifics for their organizations. Audience development’s current description is broad beyond usefulness with some arts managers registering and measuring every interaction current and potential audiences may have with a brand or institution (Harlow, 2014). Expanding audience development

and/or audience engagement into this realm is too labor intensive for this study when one considers that the two proportionally impact each other no matter how they are defined. Working with the knowledge of the field, this paper defines the terms as such:

- audience development is identified as a separate entity from audience engagement and focuses on largely pre-performance marketing, communications and advertising plans used in the effort to build audience attendance numbers and sustain them. Audience engagement is characteristically defined by receiving audience member feedback during and post -performance, actions of hospitality, education and accommodation that support continued patronage of audience members. Working with these differentiations, audience development is clearly tied to ideological principles and strategic planning based on foundational knowledge,

- whereas audience engagement is more categorized with more tactical – actionable operational activities and functions to further stimulate and satisfy audience members. With these distinctions defined, applications can be made along with methods and strategies for using both in the managerial principles and tactics to build audiences.

Focusing on successful principles and tactics in the field of audience development is the first step in building this growing managerial field in the performing arts. Establishing best practices as they produce successful outcomes is the vanguard movement in moving away from traditional arts superstitions and towards established management practices, industry analysis (and greater social analysis) and standard setting. It is also a step forward in understanding audience behaviors, societal behaviors on the whole and the problems the arts industry in all manifestations faces with its business model and declining support from the public in areas of governmental funding, categorization as non-essential education and low attendance - general poor public perception at its core. Combatting these perceptions and revitalizing business models in the realm of audience development center on successes from a variety of performing arts and cultural arts institutions. Museums have largely paved the way for audience development with multi-institutional collaborations working together to form networks that share information on visitor trends and behavior cross-regions. An example of this is can be seen in the Arts Council of Australia’s annual meeting in Western Sydney. This consortium of cultural institutions gatherings on audience development – focusing on diversity has helped its members share information to start the process of isolating best practices for the ever-urbanizing area with its own members serving as case studies in practice -implementing principles and tactics discussed at its meetings and reporting back after a year of study. We see this professional model of study as a prime example of strategizing for audience development as practices are applied both in theory and in action. Similarly, The Wallace Foundation of the United States tested this same method tracking organizations using grant funding and using their findings to illuminate principles and best practices for audience development in the U.S. markets through case studies of individual institutions across the country. While geographically and artistically different, these leaders in the industry were able to shine some light on basic theoretical principles when building and examining audience development among arts institutions. Through industry collaborations and summit discussions like these, trends in successful management practices start to emerge. While considerations of individual art forms across the industry must continue, an application of successful concepts when engaging arts audiences can be applied



to the general behavior of the entertainment-seeking public that comprises the audience base. Given the specific needs of individual arts forms – case studies examining how a blend of elements in the managerial principles and tactics in audience development trend emerge as the most effective method of study in the development field (Kemp and Poole 2016). However, there is a huge consideration for audience development principle research that needs to be addressed and that is funding. When studying audience development principles, it should be done independently of financial links as much as possible as funding, particularly from outside sources can have major impact and restrictions on how tactics must be implemented and to whom. Additionally, those provided funding to attract a specific audience via grant money for example, must reason and act much differently by requirement of said operational funding.

It is the aim of this paper to make strides in the understanding of the most effective principles and tactics used in developing international audiences of comedy as evidenced by findings in a case study at the Comedy Club Bangkok by identifying the ideas of successful management practices outlined in this literature and measuring their impact. Observing previous studies in similar international communities, several principles emerged as audience development cornerstones for international audiences that have implications for comedy as an artform in urban areas. Studying these ideological principles with their seemingly linked actionable marketing and audience engagement tactics, the emerging best practices for building international audience attendance in growing areas of urban development are the bases of this case study. The principles and practices that have seemingly, the most relevance cross industry and local in the field of audience development are the following :

- IDENTIFICATION/ Segmented Targeting (due to the subjective nature of comedy) (NSW, 2007)
- ACCESSIBILITY/ Communication avenues (Harlow, 2014)
- AWARENESS/ Representation in content (NSW, 2007)
- ADVOCACY/ Education (Kemp and Poole , 2016)

By studying applying these popularized audience development principles and tactics, this study aims to gain insight to the most useful tactics and principles needed to grow comedic audience development among international communities in Bangkok, Thailand.

Research Questions

Given the non-conforming nature of arts institutions and their corresponding audiences, this paper will attempt to reduce the impacting variables on the research topic of audience development by studying the principles and tactics of a single organization via case study – the Comedy Club Bangkok – and extrapolating the findings into broader performing arts trends and behavioral patterns of audiences in similar demographical and geographical locations.

Better understanding of audience development in principle through active tactics with the aim of developing audience attendance is the focus of the study. Considering the literature review background and environmental context, it is assumed that the principles that most influence the audience attendance rates at the Comedy Club Bangkok will be four-fold:

- 1) distinction of the different English-speaking groups within the Bangkok community : IDENTIFICATION

2) familiarization with cultural backgrounds in the English-speaking diaspora and incorporation of cultures in content : AWARENESS

3) ease of access in communication – clarity, accessibility and convenience on the part of the audience member : ACCESSIBILITY

4) appreciation building through self-promotion; clear expression and evangelization on the value of comedic arts in society : ADVOCACY

Supporting all of these four principles through actionable tactics in each event will bolster audience participation among international communities as they will be able to see themselves, their culture within the arts community both on and off-stage. Developing this sense of community culturally and socially will raise repeat attendance while continued patronage will cultivate and further stimulate appreciation for the arts among international audiences.

Research Methodology

To research the management principles used for generating audiences at the Comedy Club Bangkok, qualitative and quantitative research was performed using surveys to understand audience development perspectives from both the managerial side and audience side of audience attendance. Qualitative surveys were distributed among the Comedy Club Bangkok managing team to understand the reasoning and logic behind principles implemented in audience development. Concerns of finances, particularly grant-based funding were omitted in the management interviews in efforts to assess ideological principles originating within the institution as opposed to fiscally-motivated and morally responsible principles that generate from other institutions with a social mission that could diverge from artistic vision. Quantitative surveys were provided to English-speaking adult members of the Bangkok community to gain demographical information, assess awareness of comedy as a performance artform and attendance rates to the Comedy Club Bangkok of both existing audience members (in house surveys) and potential audience members (general surveys completed away from the performance venue or via online correspondence). Survey respondents identifying information was excluded from the study as it was deemed unnecessarily personal and possibly pre-judicial. Indirect qualitative data was gathered as well via the conversations with general audience members assessing their overall perceptions and opinions in tactics used to encourage their attendance. The research of this project was completed in tandem with the academic study period and Comedy Club Bangkok autumn performance season spanning September 1st, 2018 – November 30th, 2018. The research period at the club spans a quarter of the year and covers a variety of performances and workshops offered by the venue to serve as an effective sample of the variety of events, performance styles, holidays and varied audience targets to be representative of the venue as a whole and the average rates of attendance and effectiveness of principles and corresponding tactics when managing audience development practices.

Case Study Of Comedy Club Bangkok : A Brief History of the Comedy Club Bangkok

In 2014, after observing as a casual talent and enthusiast of the Bangkok arts and comedy scene for English-speakers, improviser, Drew McCreadie and stand-up comic/venue manager, Chris Wegoda, decided to join forces and bring some much-needed organization and stability to the Bangkok performing arts scene.



Noticing the opportunities for a more regular schedule and designated performance space, they negotiated a deal with A Royal Oak Pub and established the Comedy Club Bangkok. Their goal was to produce professional English-language comedy shows for the locally based internationally community for entertainment and to help find and nurture local amateur talent in the areas of stand-up comedy, improvisational comedy, films, and game shows through open mic nights and troupe rehearsals. With additional hopes of attracting international talents to perform at the comedy venue and developing the local scene through workshops and community collaborations, the co-founders believed that comedy could serve the English-speaking community of Bangkok providing skills for aspiring talents while sustaining performance space for existing artists. Partnering to produce comedic productions at local and professional levels and attracting international talent to reflect the international community it serves; the Canadian and British-Thai co-founders aim to connect local audiences with each other as community members and international citizens. The Comedy Club Bangkok presents comedic performances with regularity every Friday night at the rented space above The Royal Oak Pub on Sukhumvit Soi 33/1. The busy and centrally located area is closely located near public transportation and bus routes providing ease of access for many audience groups. Partnering with The Royal Oak Pub, the Comedy Club Bangkok has a not only a secure space but has negotiated drink and food specials to make the viewing experience more enjoyable for audiences.

With high hopes and few competitors in the market, the Comedy Club Bangkok was uniquely poised as the comedic entity for over three years but even with successes both with local productions and in presenting well-known comedic talents; stable audience numbers remain elusive. Despite having presented large name shows and events the average comedy show attendance for the bi-monthly improv performances hovers around 48 of a 120-seat house and the average bi-monthly stand-up show attendance featuring local talents coasts near 60 of a 120-seat house at co-founder estimations.

Frustrations further compound when considering the cache of experience and vast network of performance professionals known to the co-founders as a pair and individually. Networking from his hometown of London, England, Wegoda, performed across the UK as a stand-up comedian for open mic nights at renowned venue, The Londoner, prior to expatriating to Bangkok. Hailing from Toronto, Canada, McCreadie, with 25 years of professional improvised and sketch comedy experience across stage, film and even cruise ships – the Canada’s Best Improviser winner, comedy writer and long-time Thailand expat, brings his skills and immense professional connections to the partnership. Performing and teaching, McCreadie heads the advocacy and appreciation building side of the business teaching, the public about comedy when not performing. While maintaining the lion’s share of the live comedy market the Comedy Club Bangkok has still struggled to take root with the international communities of Bangkok.

Audience Development Principles and Tactics in Action – By Performance

The following is data collected from the performances in the observation period of September 2018 – November 2018. Observations to the style of comedy, and special tactics used or principles of thought are described and the audience attendance numbers are included on an individual basis. Attendance numbers and corresponding principles and tactics used in developing audiences is described in the chart for each event:

Event/ Performance: <i>Improv Comedy Deathmatch!</i>	
Date: September 7 th , 2018	Audience Number: 43
Principle and Tactics: (McCreadie) Guiding principle of advocacy using tactic of education . This show was produced as a result of a 9-month long workshop with hopes of developing local talent that would become an in-house comedy troupe able to regularly perform. Sub-principle of raising community networking by using local talent to increase word of mouth marketing/ connecting through personal channels can also be seen.	
Event/ Performance: <i>The Comedy Club Bangkok 4th Anniversary</i>	
Date: September 14 th , 2018	Audience Number: 75
Principle and Tactics: (Wegoda and McCreadie) Producing a large combination event to celebrate the anniversary of the club, the pair focused on branding this event as a unique happening offering special discounts and promotions in hopes of making it more accessible to more people. Use of a multi-media blitz was used with advertisements, collaborations and communications in addition to special promotions not normally offered.	
Event/ Performance: <i>Stand-Up Comedy Workshop Weekend</i>	
Date: September 15 th & 16 th , 2018	Audience Number: 3
Principle and Tactics: (Wegoda) In tandem with the anniversary celebration, a two-day educational workshop for those looking to build skills or develop for better understanding & appreciation for comedic arts and its valuable role in society under the principle of advocacy .	
Event/ Performance: <i>Stand-Up Open Mic!</i>	
Date: September 21 st , 2018	Audience Number: 29
Principle and Tactics: (Wegoda) In efforts to build support in the local diaspora, the stage is open to all members of the community – allowing them to represent themselves and voice their experiences. This serves not only as awareness of local communities and people in Bangkok but as a self-taught training ground for new artists educating them on skills needed.	
Event/ Performance: <i>Shakespearean Improv Workshop</i>	
Date: September 22 nd , 2018	Audience Number: 9
Principle and Tactics: (McCreadie) Advocacy; appreciation building of improvised comedy through education/ community-building and connection of individuals through a shared interested based on comedy – subset of Shakespeare – British cultural awareness through identification of a famed figure in the culture.	



Event/ Performance: <i>Whose Line? Improv Comedy?</i>	
Date: September 28 th , 2018	Audience Number: 16
Principle and Tactics: (McCreadie) Branding the show with a comedy style/ cultural product (Whose Line is it Anyway, tv show) from the U.S. that audiences might already be aware of; this performance seeks to connect with North American community members of the diaspora through representation.	
Event/ Performance: <i>Dwayne Perkins!</i>	
Date: October 5 th , 2018	Audience Number: 80
Principle and Tactics: (Wegoda) Working with a known comedian and building on the awareness of his brand by Americans in the diaspora, a further subset of interested parties was targeted in the cultural identification of bringing a black comedian to the stage.	
Event/ Performance: <i>The Early Late Show & Epic Gameshow!</i>	
Date: October 12 th , 2018	Audience Number: 17
Principle and Tactics: (McCreadie) Branding the show with a comedy style/ cultural product (Late Night Talk Show, tv show) from the U.S./ Canada that audiences might already be aware of; this performance seeks to connect with North American community members of the diaspora through representation .	
Event/ Performance: <i>Halloween Improv Comedy Special!</i>	
Date: October 19 th , 2018	Audience Number: 22
Principle and Tactics: (McCreadie) Producing an event to celebrate a Western holiday the branding of this event offered special discounts and promotions in hopes of making it more accessible to more people and allow people a place or event to celebrate culture familiar to them and represent its tenets. Attempting a multi-media blitz was used with adverts, collaborations and communications used in greater capacity with additional promotions on offer for this special cultural performance.	
Event/ Performance: <i>Stand-Up Comedy Open Mic!</i>	
Date: October 26 th , 2018	Audience Number: 21
Principle and Tactics: (Wegoda) In efforts to build support in the local diaspora, the stage is open to all members of the community – allowing them to represent themselves and voice their experiences. This serves not only as awareness of local communities and people in Bangkok as a self-taught training ground for new artists; educating them on skills needed.	
Event/ Performance: <i>Whose Line? Improv Comedy!</i>	
Date: November 2 nd , 2018	Audience Number: 14
Principle and Tactics: (McCreadie) Branding the show with a comedy style/ cultural product from the U.S. that audiences might already be aware of; this performance seeks to connect with North American community members of the diaspora through representation .	

Event/ Performance: <i>Improv Games Night Meetup</i>	
Date: November 5 th , 2018	Audience Number: 12
Principle and Tactics: (McCreadie) Advocacy ; appreciation building of improvised comedy through education / community-building and connection of individuals through a shared interested based on comedy.	
Event/ Performance: <i>Barry Hilton!</i>	
Date: November 9 th , 2018	Audience Number: 71
Principle and Tactics: (Wegoda) Targeting the South African- identified expat and tourist groups; popular areas, prominent figures and promotional materials featured the performer's ties to his cultural and regional heritage.	
Event/ Performance: <i>Low Phone Battery – Improv Comedy Show!</i>	
Date: November 16 th , 2018	Audience Number: 26
Principle and Tactics: (McCreadie) Working to engage millennials and youth- identified , technologically savvy segment of the English-speaking diaspora of Bangkok with its title, theme, and online purchasing promotion.	
Event/ Performance: <i>L.A. Stand-Up Comedy – Rick Wood!</i>	
Date: November 23 rd , 2018	Audience Number: 41
Principle and Tactics: (Wegoda) Branding the show with L.A. (Los Angeles) as a comedic type or style that attendees would be able to easily recognize and identify . Playing to the segmented audience groups that are familiar with or part of the American and L.A. comedy scene also speaks to cultural awareness by producing a comedian that would have content that represents the American way of life and comedic sensibilities.	
Event/ Performance: <i>Tinder Hell! Improv Comedy</i>	
Date: November 30 th , 2018	Audience Number: 86
Principle and Tactics: (McCreadie) Identifying the large number of people single people/ daters on Tinder and engaging them through segmented targeting by theming the show in a socially relevant and relatable topic.	

Conclusion And Discussion

Upon conclusion of the three-month case observation, analysis of the data completed the study. It was noted that use of the theorized hypothesis principles and tactics were clearly used on multiple occasions but to different levels of attendance affectation and that though the co-founders struggle with audience development, on the whole their perceptions of their audiences and behavior are accurate. Through this research, a clear link to effective tactics in international audience development managerial principles was



sought but the data yielded shows that no isolated principle or tactic seemed to work best but rather a combination proved most effective. Many times, a variety of principles and tactics were used within the marketing and audience engagement of an event making a direct link difficult to find.

Audience Attendance

Improv performance attendance average = 37 out of 120

Stand-up performance attendance average = 53 out of 120

On par with the perceptions of management staff at the Comedy Club Bangkok, there were higher attendance at the stand-up comedy shows. This indicates and is supported by survey data that shows that audiences are more familiar with and better appreciate – evaluate successfully – stand-up comedy. Factoring in that the stand-up genre also benefits from professional, international talents with whom audiences may already be familiar with, understanding the attendance difference begins to become clear. We do however see that despite being more foreign to audience members, more members of community participate in improv-style workshops and social events. Given the community, the survey suggests that a large representation of attendees is migratory – tourists, vacationers, students that will attend and perhaps have a satisfactory experience but who are not in a position to attend again. This group is followed by the comedic arts enthusiasts or members of the community that have found fellowship or social connection with others via the comedy club who therefore return regularly.

Workshops

Improv workshop attendance average =11 out of 25

Stand-up workshop attendance average = 3 out of 25

Low numbers of the education and outreach elements of the comedy club's advocacy provide some insight into why return audience numbers are high but new audience numbers stagnate. Providing the necessary context for comedy and the skills for analysis is critical for continued development and inclusion in new/ existing communities. More efforts must be made in this area. Interestingly, there is a disparity between stand-up and improv when it comes to workshops as more people attend improv workshops despite the survey data that says the style is less known than stand-up. However, assessing the style types, there is the element of teamwork and group-bonding that exists in improv that makes it more accessible and less intimidating than the singularity of public speaking involved in stand-up comedy. Oddly, participating in either style gives appreciative insight into the other – all the more reason upping audience attendance at any kind of workshop provides cross-style support. As a valuable part in the enduring viability of the comedy club this would be the primary area in which energy should be focused. Building community – a valuable motivation for attendance – and skills to appreciate the artform are the central sustaining element. Audience attendance numbers overall were higher in September and November – when the club offered workshops.

Communication Methods – Audience Development

Social media – specifically Facebook is the most effective communication avenue with almost half of all surveyed respondents citing this medium as how they found out about the show. Word of mouth is close second, followed by flyers/ posters. More than half of the respondents stated they have never seen live comedy before and almost two-thirds were unfamiliar with improv but almost all knew of stand-up or a stand-up comedian.

Reflecting the prominence of internet in our digital age, research finds that having a good understanding of where target audiences are online is as good as if not better as knowing where they are in the city. Most users stated that their first awareness of the club was digital – Facebook followed by Twitter leading the way. The social element of the performance – pre and post-performance is a notable takeaway. Audience members on the aptly named social media will engage with the other community members, club staff and in some cases with the comedian him/herself – building strong ties that prompt them to tend the performance (and in some case workshops). Given that word of mouth is the next realm in which people accumulate information, having a stronger presence amongst social groups in the community would go a long way to improving audience attendance numbers as group dynamics also motivate those who would not attend on their own to go with friends/ family to be social.

Demographics

Women aged 30 – 39 attend more than any other demographic. U.S. Americans, then Canadians, then British citizens are the most attending nationalities.

This is surprising due to the low number of women that perform comedy across genres. The finding implies that comedy venues could improve their attendance numbers using the principle of cultural awareness through the tactic of representation by actively booking more female artists.

North Americans are the highest attending nationality which is of little surprise as it is the birthplace and home of advancement for comedic arts in the forms that we see today. Speaking with respondents from countries that value conformity and with a history of censorship or authoritarian rule (examples include China, Thailand, Japan from the respondent group) they seemed to know the least about comedy styles and types most often citing they had never seen live comedy, didn't know any comedians and had never heard of the Comedy Club Bangkok. Using the same cultural awareness principles as with women, more efforts should be made to represent these nationalities in comedy to help grow attendance.

Highest attended performances in observation period : Tinder Hell, Barry Hilton, Dwayne Perkins

Conclusions from the top ticket sellers on the style that is most popular indicates stand-up comedy. Assessing further, it is of note that the two performances of stand-up comedy featured well-known professional comedians and the third event, an improv comedy show features a well-known element of modern society – Tinder. It is no coincidence that name-recognition or branding for the audience development of the shows played a part in the success of audience attendance. We can surmise that audiences are more likely to respond to people, items and styles they are familiar with. Additionally, the management styles for all three of these performances centered on identifying specific community targets – people that would have some connection with the performance and pursuing this target segment. This is the most effective



technique for marketing but in each case, it was coupled with a cultural awareness and representation of that culture on stage (Barry Hilton – well known South African comedian performed material specific to Africa, Dwayne Perkins – well known African American comedian performed material specific to American and the experience of African Americans and the Tinder Hell show depicted dates relevant to daters. Accessibility seemed to rank lowest in audience yielding principle and communicative tactic suggesting that people will go further, pay more and seek out communication if the product is of value – i.e. – culturally aware, relevant to their specific identity and of appreciable measure. Expectedly, some variation of all management principles and tactics were used throughout the observational period to develop audiences and sustain audience engagement. There was a smaller amount of crossover in the principles and tactics used when developing and audience plan than originally anticipated. An argument could be made that in order to increase audience numbers, all principles and tactics must be used to develop a well-rounded plan for audience development on every event. Surprisingly, the English-speaking communities of Bangkok are small but still highly segmented and in order to elicit attendance, arts managers must by connecting with some identifiable element.

Application for the Study

The findings in this study show that an important part of any audience development strategy imposed by arts managers needs to include a targeted segmentation and interest in a cultural awareness point to begin building rapport among the many groups of an audience and understanding of their online social media movements. Audiences attended at a higher rate when educational/social elements were also offered at the club. This seems crucial to building audiences as the social element along with improved understanding of what kind of performance will be seen not only improves audience attendance but provides attendees more authority to spread word throughout her communities. This study serves as a resource for similar arts institutions looking to better understand audience behavior and principles to form strategies for developing audiences. This study was limited to one venue over a period of three months but multi-organizational studies across arts institutions and in different parts of a city with a longer research period could provide more in-depth information about how organizations can build audiences for comedy and the performing arts as a whole in international cities.

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