Social Networks And Online Communication: Attracting Audience To Dance Companies

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Abstract

Introduction

The main objectives of an arts organization, besides its raison d'être which is to make art, are long-term recognition and survival. To maintain relevance, especially in a globalized context and with a variety of entertainment options available, it is necessary to attract new audiences and maintain frequent viewers. These activities are challenges that demand strategies which makes marketing necessary, especially for the arts with less commercial appeals. Dance companies tend to be public ones, created by law, also called official companies; the semi-private and the private, as well as independent companies and artists, among other configurations. The dependency on sponsorship and other issues, such as the lack of public policies for dance, are some of the difficulties companies face just to exist. Some of the difficulties that can be assisted by the practice of marketing and communication are the creation of a relationship with the public and the development of new audiences.

The use of social media allows more penetrative communication, greater relationships, and public and company interaction. Businesses for commercial and lucrative purposes have already incorporated the use of social media in their tools and marketing strategies. Meanwhile, nonprofits linked to the higher arts and less part of the cultural industry, are still hostile to the mention of the word "marketing" because they consider the artwork and artist sacrosanct. (Butler, 2000; Fillis, 2006; Hirschman, 1983; Lee, 2005). Another reason may be due to the small size of most independent companies and artists, and therefore the lack of time and planning to invest in the production of media content. In this context, how can social media contribute to dance companies, and how can these companies and artists use these media to strengthen their art in a social context that undervalues it? The body of study on the use of social media in the arts sector is still scarce but has increased. (Turrini, Soscia & Maulini, 2012, Hausmann & Poellman, 2013, Chung, Marcketti, Fiore, 2014, Walmsley, 2016). However, for the use of social media applied to dance companies, there is no knowledge of articles so far.

The purpose of the study, therefore, will be to investigate how dance organizations can exploit the resources of social media in their marketing activities. In order to achieve these goals, a brief review of marketing in the arts and social media will be presented. Following the methodological path of netnography (Kozinets, 2002), the paper presents an exploratory study, empirically analyzing 4 dance companies activities on Facebook and Instagram from August to November 2017. Finally, the discussions will be presented with propositions for the management of the companies, in addition to suggestions for future research.

Literature Review

Arts Marketing

Performing arts (opera, theater, orchestras, ballets, dance companies, etc.) culturally still appeal to a sociodemographic group of high economic status, a high degree of schooling, and art appreciation that descend from the family (Baumol, 1968; Clopton & Dave, 2006; Huntington, 2007). So should art marketing efforts focus on these specific groups or also seek to reach and educate a public by creating an audience for their artistic products? Arts organizations, including dance companies, tend to position themselves on a continuum, with one extreme being the product focus and the other extreme being the market focus, with a range of possibilities between these two extremes. (Colbert, 2003; Clopton, Stoddard & Dave, 2006). High art, a case of contemporary dance and classical ballet, is product focused, while folk and popular art have a market focus. (Colbert, 1994, 2003, 2017).

Although in view of the precarious system of stimulating art and culture in Brazil, and especially because of this, organizations need to explore competitive alternatives to educate an audience to become more attracted or retain existing viewers (Ruiz-Gutiérrez, Grant & Colbert, 2016). Thus, marketing ceases to be a forbidden word and becomes a form of stimulating demand. (Colbert, 2017). One of the approaches identified as a means of using marketing in the arts is relationship marketing (Lee, 2005). The more a person who attends dance performances goes to the theater and sees spectacles, the more they appreciate the genre, create interest in the styles or specific company that performs them. It is important to build a stronger interaction with the dance viewer so that they can go to more performances and eventually become a sponsor or donor. For the increase of the public, one of the strategies considered is the use of social media. Because of their interactivity, low cost, and wide reach, one can expect the impact to arts organizations to be high. However, creating a site with text pages and profiles on all social networks does not guarantee engagement. The opportunities for the effectiveness of these media as audience-building tools will be explored below.

Online communication and Social networking services

As several researchers point out, the definition of social is not consensual, and it is not easy to categorize each type of application (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). An attempt at defining says that social networking sites are tools for building virtual communities, or social networks, for people with similar education, lifestyles, interests or activities (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2011). However, there is no discussion about the ease of generating interactivity, communication, and content through social media. The quality of the distribution and promotion of the artistic product, whether it is the spectacle or the company itself as a brand is increased by the possibilities that social media provides. The most popular social networks in Brazil are WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram. In the United States, these are Facebook, Youtube, and Twitter (Statista, 2017). Therefore, we suppose a focus on video production and visual cues that would be run in these media will provide the effectiveness and impact of online marketing.

Using social media is one of the most popular online activities, with 71% of Internet users also users of social networking networks, with 2.07 billion users active on Facebook (Statista, 2017). The relevance of using blogs, content communities, and the social networking sites themselves as voice generators for dance companies is valid. Facebook, the most popular social networking site, as mentioned above, offers many opportunities to share photos, videos, join groups, send instant messages and make live streaming of some rehearsal, for example. Another very popular social network is Instagram, more directed to the sharing of images and videos, besides having the function to show small daily "stories" that disappear within 24 hours, questions in the style poll for greater interaction with the public, among others. Content communities like YouTube or Vimeo prove themselves to be powerful tools in making the experiences of the show more tangible, and emotionally activating the viewer even before they actually watch it. (Hausmann & Poellmann, 2013). The quality of the distribution and promotion of the artistic product, whether it is the show or the company itself as a brand is increased by the possibilities that social media provide.

Use of social media by dance companies

Online strategies in the performing arts have been presented with three main functions: to provide the public with information about programs and activities, to allow transactions such as online ticket purchases or donations, and to promote a two-way interaction between institutions and the public (Saxton, Guo & Brown, 2007). For researchers using social media for museums, their main functions in marketing are building awareness, engaging with

community and networking (Chung, Marcketti & Fiore, 2014). Brand perception is a recurring function cited by social networking site researchers, as well as involvement and brand presence (Bolotaeva & Cata, 2011).
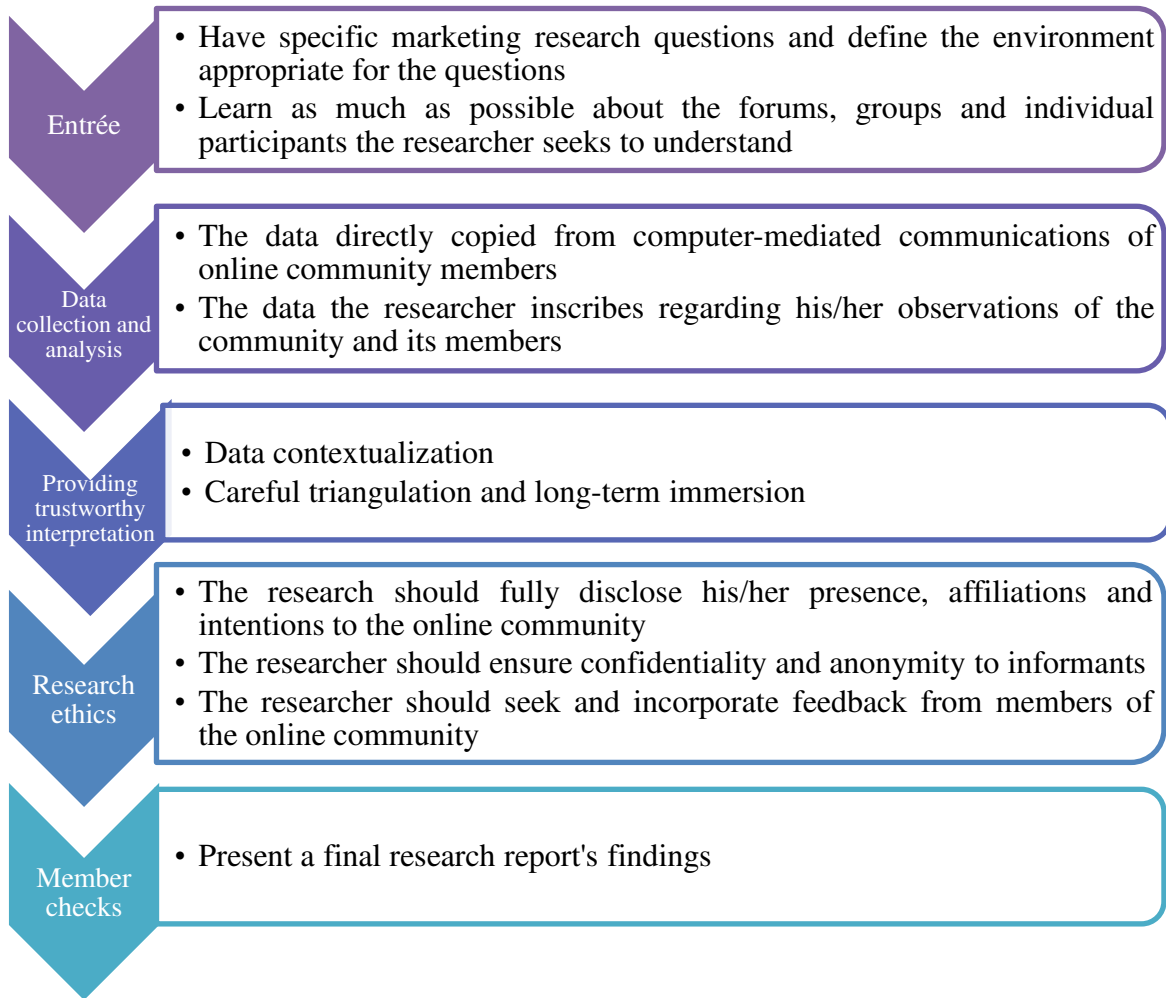
Bringing this notion to dance companies, especially the function of creating a knowledge and perception, should be investigated thoroughly. Very recently, starting in Europe and the United States, symphony orchestras and other institutions have focused on the possibilities of getting their audience involved in the life of institutions, thus forming a stronger relationship with them. (Walmsley, 2016). All these functions can and should be incorporated into dance companies. How are these media being used in order to attract new audiences? How is high art using marketing to stay relevant? Despite the importance of using marketing and communication strategies to arts, research in this field is scarce.

Method

This work is characterized as an exploratory study based on precepts of ethnographic data collection, but online. Ethnography is an anthropological method that has gained popularity in sociology, cultural studies, among other social science fields, consisting of the systematic description of human behavior and organizational culture, based on direct observation in the field. (Howard, 2002; Kozinets, 2002). Netnography, or Internet ethnography, is a qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of emerging cultures and communities through online communications. (Kozinets, 2002).

As a method, netnography uses publicly available information on online websites and forums that bring together consumers, such as social networks. The script used in this research followed 5 steps. Entrée, the first step, provides that the researcher has in mind the questions he wants to research and then defines the environment that will suit them. It also requires that you drill down and learn as much as you can about the networks you choose and their participants. After this phase, the data are collected and analyzed, which are the ones copied directly from the networks studied and those derived from the observation of the researcher on these networks. In the third step, aiming at the reliable interpretation of the data, it is important to differentiate between the behavioral acts and the discourse of the members' text. If possible, the researcher should perform a triangulation of methods and contextualize each data in the network. The fourth stage refers to research ethics, which in the online environment causes controversy about whether or not consent is implied by the content being public. To avoid any unethical aspects it is necessary to make the researcher's presence clear, guarantee the anonymity and confidentiality of the members, give feedback to the group and maintain a moderate posture. The last step consists of a feedback the members with the results and if there are any comments to be made about them. (Kozinets, 2002).

Figure 1- Proceedings of netnography

Entrée	• Have specific marketing research questions and define the environment appropriate for the questions • Learn as much as possible about the forums, groups and individual participants the researcher seeks to understand
Data collection and analysis	• The data directly copied from computer-mediated communications of online community members • The data the researcher inscribes regarding his/her observations of the community and its members
Providing trustworthy interpretation	• Data contextualization • Careful triangulation and long-term immersion
Research ethics	• The research should fully disclose his/her presence, affiliations and intentions to the online community • The researcher should ensure confidentiality and anonymity to informants • The researcher should seek and incorporate feedback from members of the online community
Member checks	• Present a final research report's findings

Source: Adapted from Kozinets, R. V. (2002). The Field Behind the Screen: Using Netnography For Marketing Research in Online Communities. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39, 61–72.

Considering the objectives and the research question proposed in this article, some categories of analysis should be taken into consideration for data analysis. The first category would be to explore whether companies are using the media and how. In order to do so, the aim is to evaluate whether companies have a profile on the social networks Facebook and Instagram, what tools they use in networks, how often they post and what type of content is being published. The second category concerns user engagement and feedback. In order to analyze this aspect, it was decided to observe the number of "likes" and followers in each network, and the comments in the companies' posts.

Figure 2- Categories of analysis

Category	Units
Use of networks	1) to have a profile on Instagram and Facebook 2) which tools are most used: video, photo, polls, etc. 3) frequency and type of content
Awareness and Comprehension	1) posts in different formats that inform and deepen the knowledge about dance

Engagement and Feedback	1) number of followers and fans 2) posts that promote conversation

Source: prepared by the authors.

We chose to use in this study companies considered of great prestige, worldwide or in Brazil. Another criterion was, for nationals, being a publicly subsidized company and a semi-private company. They are, in Brazil: Grupo Corpo and São Paulo Companhia de Dança. And abroad, Alvin Ailey and New York City Ballet.

Results and analysis

It was verified that all the companies have profiles in the two social networks considered in this study. All posts on Facebook and Instagram of the companies were observed in the second half of 2017, from August 1 to November 30 of that year, comprising 122 calendar days. Table 2 shows the number of posts by social network and by the company during the period.

Figure 3-Number of posts by social network and company

Company	# of posts Facebook	# posts Instagram
Grupo Corpo	63	59
São Paulo Cia de Dança	93	45
Alvin Ailey	215	133
New York City Ballet	111	126

Source: prepared by the authors.

Grupo Corpo, founded in 1975 in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, is a national and international reference in dance, carrying in its work the authentic and genuinely Brazilian dance nickname. The São Paulo Dance Company founded in 2008 by the State of São Paulo, is a repertoire company, that is, of shows considered of artistic excellence. Alvin Ailey is known for radicalizing modern dance in the United States, mostly composed of African-American dancers and using the junction of modern dance, ballet, jazz and other techniques to express African-American culture. The New York City Ballet is the largest dance organization in the United States with approximately 100 dancers, founded with the help of George Balanchine and with an active repertoire of 150 works.

According to the categories of analysis previously proposed, we can make an analysis of the use of social networks of companies according to the most used tools, with regard to photos, videos and others, the frequency of posting and the type of content served in them. All companies have Facebook and Instagram, but they use them for different purposes. As Facebook's posting frequency is higher, information is provided for upcoming events such as dates, times and ticket sales. This also involves links to reviews and other appearances on external websites. Studio photos, pictures of the performances, and teaser videos for the season are available as well. One company only makes use of storytelling on both networks: on Facebook, a video encourages the viewer to donate to the company. And on Instagram, a series of three photos, visually more organized in the application, tells little stories or biographies of the cast of the ballet.

Figure 4-NYCB Instagram account example

Source: Instagram, NYCB, 2017.

In the awareness and comprehension category, the goal is to make the person who is interested in seeing the company or a performance or dance, in general, increase their knowledge and understanding of dance and the purposes of the company in order to strengthen the relationship between the viewer and the company. The use of different post formats and integration between social networks helps to increase comprehension. It was verified that the only companies that use more curiosities, post about special topics, make the public know the cast and tell stories behind the images are the two American companies.

Figure 5-Use of social networks by the companies

Facebook				
	Grupo Corpo	*SPCD*	*Alvin Ailey*	*NYCB*
Most used tools	Pictures	Pictures and YouTube links	Pictures, videos, and links to other sites	Pictures, videos, and links to other sites
Frequency	Three times a week with current hiatus	Daily, once a day	Daily, more than once a day	Daily, more than once a day
Type of content	Agenda info, promo pictures	Agenda info	Agenda info, promo pictures and video, show pictures, links to other websites, small parts of rehearsal and shows, links to tickets with discount	Agenda info, links to other websites, curiosities, promo pictures and videos of the season, storytelling videos to encourage donors, small videos of the shows
Instagram				
Most used tools	Pictures, videos, and *stories*	Pictures and videos	Pictures, videos, and *stories*	Pictures, usually in a series

Frequency	2 times a week with hiatus	1-2 times a week, with hiatus	3 times a week, average	2 times a week, average, with more than one picture on the same theme
Type of content	Show pictures, agenda info, rehearsal videos, backstage, casting, press media reproductions	Agenda info, rehearsal videos, pictures of community activity	Show pictures, agenda info, rehearsal videos, curiosities, backstage, casting with a mini bio	Show pictures, agenda info, curiosities, backstage, special topics, casting with mini bio and storytelling

Source: prepared by the authors

The most used features are visual, which is a stronger characteristic of Instagram, in this case. The American companies post with a higher frequency having little or no hiatus, compared to the Brazilian ones. This lack of posting in a certain period can cause damage to the managerial objectives of the companies.

In the category of engagement and feedback, the number of followers and fans is analyzed, and also if the companies use posts that promote some kind of conversation with the audience. It turned out that none of the companies generate content that encourages conversation, only answer doubts that people comment on the networks.

Table 1-Number of Followers and Fans

	Grupo Corpo	*SPCD*	*Alvin Ailey*	*NYCB*
Facebook	117.086	70.645	652.050	783.250
Instagram	25.700	6.863	124.000	212.000
Generate Conv.?	No	No	No	No

Source: prepared by the authors.

Final considerations

It is possible to infer some conclusions from the cases presented in this article. The use of social networks by many companies is still incipient since in the cases we take as an example from Brazil, the two companies are among the largest and most prestigious of the country and yet do not make full use of the social network's capacity. Considering that the reality of dance companies consists mostly of independent companies and artists, thus not having the same scope and possibilities as the cases used in this work, we can conclude that the use of social networks in these other configurations of organizations is even less structured. The role of the internet and social networks in any type of organization has been established as essential. From the results, we can infer that there are at least two aspects that can be worked through social media: the awareness and recognition of companies by the public and the engagement with the community. The activities on the social media are still too focused on mere online presence, which does not fully integrate the objectives of engagement and comprehension with the audience. If not used to the full potential, social media not only does not help achieve these goals but expresses an idea of poor organization, like lack of information. According to results,

there can be observed that, especially for the Brazilian companies, there is not much evidence of the social networks are being used with awareness and engagement purposes. Despite that, arguably in the American companies' pages, there is higher engagement with visual cues, educational and personal contents, as well as frequency and posts that request a prominent involvement with the followers and fans. Thus, there is evidence that engagement and awareness increase with the use of visual cues and content that requires higher participation with the consumers.

Implications for Management

Some ideas on how to best use social networks, not just those mentioned in this article, but in general will be presented next. It is necessary to put oneself on the viewer's dance shoes, to think of someone who has never seen ballet in life but may be interested. Spreading where, when, and what time a performance is on is no longer enough. To encourage the public to invest time and money in that ballet, it is important that they feel as they understand a little about it. To do so, companies can use stories behind the images, small educational trailers, photos that serve as a preview of the performance, or even a small explanation without technical terms. In order to improve audience engagement, it is necessary to use conversational posts, questioning, creating photo or video contests, sharing "hashtags" in network photos, etc. Simple actions that will make the public have a sense of community and relationship with companies. It is also advised to maintain a certain frequency of posts on every social network. According to each objective the companies may hold to Facebook pages, Instagram or other media, online presence and reminder keeps the brand alive for the current public and prospects new ones.

The netnography method, although rich and flexible, may present limitations on the generalization of the data. It is also necessary to take into account the subjectivity of the interpretation due to the nature of the data. Other limitations of this study are the number of cases chosen, the specificity of their geographical location and the number of social networks chosen. As possible future studies, interviews with those responsible for communication in the companies can provide more details on the use of the social network sites. Finally, social networks present themselves as an important tool for creating relationships, audience development, engagement, and interaction. Using them in a way that harnesses all the resources to the maximum according to each goal of the organization is vital.

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