

Arts marketing needs to integrate a social impact dimension to satisfy stakeholders

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Summary

The paper looked at how marketing can inform the way that arts organisations respond to changing national policy that impacts upon their objectives and mission. The study was based on interviews with staff at four theatres in the UK. The author recommends that marketing principles and practices be used to affect local policy and decision-making, maintain trust with stakeholders, develop partnerships and collaboration, and develop a rhetoric that is politically savvy and speaks to government policy.

Some historical context

During the 1980s the general trend for increased 'marketisation' of the arts in the UK resulted in greater focus on improved management structures, and a more commercial customer focus. This marketisation trend was succeeded by a set of policies in the 1990s that focused on more social outcomes (like improving health, education and social inclusion). The theatres in the study navigated the changing expectations of government policy through that time.

Government should remain at arms length

Overall the theatres were interested in fulfilling a new social remit, but insisted that the value of art should not be defined by the social, and that they (not the government) should set the agenda. The theatres said it was like 'playing games' in order to ensure they could take advantage of funding and support for social endeavours while staying true to their artistic missions.

Marketing in the service of ‘social orientation’

The author concludes that arts marketing could adopt a social orientation approach in which organisations are focused on producing the greatest social benefit from their work, rather than being market-focused (satisfying consumer demand) or product-focused (selling an artist’s work). This involves getting the public to be invested in the social (as well as artistic) mission of the organisation.

Keywords

theatre **UK** **marketing** **social**

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