

## **The Tension Between Artistic and Market Orientation in Visual Art**

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### **Introduction**

For centuries, artists have existed in a world which has been shaped in part by their own attitudes towards art but which also co-exists within the confines of a market structure. Many artists have thrived under the conventional notion of a market with its origins in economics and supply and demand, while others have created a market for their work through their own entrepreneurial endeavours. This chapter will explore the options open to the visual artist and examine how existing marketing theory often fails to explain how and why the artist develops an individualistic form of marketing where the self and the artwork are just as important as the audience and the customer. It builds on previous work which examines the theory and practice of visual arts marketing, noting that there has been little account taken of the philosophical clashes of art for art's sake versus business sake (Fillis 2004a). Market orientation has received a large amount of attention in the marketing literature but product centred marketing has largely been ignored. Visual art has long been a domain where product and artist centred marketing have been practiced successfully and yet relatively little has been written about its critical importance to arts marketing theory. The merits and implications of being prepared to ignore market demand and customer wishes are considered here.

Slater (2007) carries out an investigation into understanding the motivations of visitors to galleries and concludes that, rather than focusing on personal and social factors alone, recognition of the role of psychological factors such as beliefs, values and motivations is also important. This being the case, we should also consider the motivations and orientations of the artist in making art. It may be useful to think of this in terms of creating the market versus following the market. The former orientation can be viewed as innovative and even entrepreneurial while the latter is more to do with fitting in with the mainstream and taking fewer risks.

Falk and Dierking (1992) identified the three main motivations for visiting museums and galleries as social recreation, educational reasons and reverential behaviour towards the artist. Work is now also emerging on the impact of art on the audience, moving beyond the institutional interpretation of art to embrace a more holistic understanding of the meaning of art and the artist by considering social and intrinsic motivational factors (White and Hede 2008; White et al. 2008). Kubacki and Croft (2004; 2006) investigate musical artists' attitudes to marketing, noting that artists both create the product and communicate it to consumers. There is a close correlation between these artists as both product and producer and that found in the visual arts. Art itself is found to have a much stronger impact on shaping artists' attitudes than external factors such as society, culture and the economic environment. Kubacki and Croft find that musical artists tend to exhibit ambivalence towards marketing which may even extend further into antipathy towards the concept of art as business. Although there has been some progress in attempting to understand the relationship

between marketing and art, this movement has been slow at best since the analysis by Thomas and Cutler (1993).

### **The clash between market and product orientation**

Marketing has been described as troubled, irrelevant, over-reliant on rules and formula-based thinking and focused on selling products rather than creating markets (Day and Montgomery 1999; Morris et al 2003). The marketing concept has long been criticized for being too customer focused and stifling innovation (Tauber 1974). Sometimes it is better to shape marketing from within the organisation using innovative techniques (Dew et al. 2008) or to at least acknowledge that market orientation alone is not sufficient in itself to ensure long term profitability (Grinstein 2008). There is also a need for outward technological, product-oriented push (Samli et al. 1987). In relation to the debate on the continued usefulness of the marketing concept, Badot and Cova (2008) evaluate what they term a range of novel marketing panaceas and conclude that, rather than establishing a new way of viewing marketing, much of what is offered is actually an alternative form of marketing myopia. Recent alternatives such as customer relationship marketing have, instead of resulting in heightened satisfaction, resulted in increased customer dissatisfaction (Fournier et al. 1998) and a rise in hostility towards marketing generally (Kozinets and Handelman 2004).

Interest in measuring market orientation has grown since the 1980s (Saxe and Weitz 1982; Narver and Slater 1990; Gebhardt et al. 2006). There is also research into market orientation in small businesses (Blankson et al. 2006; Low et al. 2007) and this has particular resonance for the relationship between the artist and the organisation (Fillis 2004b). Van Raaij and Stoelhorst (2008) review the literature on the

implementation of market orientation and note that it is fragmented, with a conceptual gap between the construct and customer value generation. Exhibiting long term customer orientation may also result in inertia and that ignoring the customer occasionally may prove fruitful. Although market orientation can impact on the success of new product development, firm innovation, competitive strength and environmental forces also have roles to play (Augusto and Coelho 2007). Brown (2007) discusses the alternative stance of creating customer lust over a product, rather than the continued faithfulness to customer orientation. There are certain similarities between the anticipation of the latest version of the I-Pod or the next instalment of a J.K. Rowling book and the creative frenzy surrounding the next Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst exhibition. Though Rowling's book or the electronic product may have shortcomings, these are very often set aside as Brown's customers satisfy their desires. So too is the case in the art world where Emin and Hirst certainly have their critics and yet they continue to outmanoeuvre their peers in the art world.

Rather than continual adoption of customer orientation, Gummesson (2008) recommends the implementation of balanced centricity involving a trade-off between a number of stakeholders. In addition, marketing as a discipline can be improved by addressing complexity issues through innovative methodologies and the incorporation of novel marketing theory. Gummesson senses that customer orientation is becoming a commodity which everybody seeks, with the result that no real competitive advantage is achieved. There may be no hard evidence that customer centricity works in the long term, but instead incurs costs and generates limited additional revenue.

## **Market and product orientation in the arts**

Although the impact of market orientation and performance in the non profit organisation has been investigated (Balabanis et al. 1997; Gainer and Padanyi 2002; Duque-Zuluaga and Schneider 2008), there is less work examining the impact of product orientation (Voss and Voss 2000; Camarero and Garrido 2008). There is even less discussion of artist-led creativity. Product orientation incorporates an element of creativity in order to help develop new products which subsequently invigorate customer markets (Izquierdo and Samaniego 2007). The arts certainly have high levels of creative innovation, as well as an ability to engage with their various publics. With the broadening of the marketing concept have come attempts at creating art marketing theory and yet much of this has failed to recognize the particular needs of the sector and its powerful underlying philosophical, aesthetic dimensions. Rather than just concerning the philosophical dimension of beauty, art and aesthetics can also refer to the sensing nature of decision making where intuition is just as much a part of the process as rational thinking (Strati 1999). Brown and Patterson (2000) consider the growing impact of art and aesthetics on marketing practice, including analytical inputs of the lives of Edouard Manet, Salvador Dali and James Joyce. These writings promote the re-imagining of the future of marketing management and consumption issues through the interrogation of art, aesthetics and the alternative, avant garde part of society.

Hirschman (1983) suggests that the marketing concept does not match the behaviour and philosophy of the artist because of the personal values and the social norms which impact on the artistic production process. Artists create mainly to express their subjective conceptions of beauty, emotion or other aesthetic ideal (Becker 1978; Holbrook 1981). Aesthetic creativity is the central influence in the process, and is

expressed or experienced purely for its own sake rather than responding to customer demand (Holbrook and Zirlin 1983). Hirschman distinguishes between artistic and commercial creativity, since the values of the individual will ultimately determine creative orientation. These differences can be compared similarly to the philosophies of ‘art for art’s sake’ versus ‘art for business sake’ (Whistler 1888; Wilde 1882). Insight into the clash between market driven art versus self-oriented art is illustrated by Wilde (1881):

A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with the fact that other people want what they want.

In addition, the notion of the producer and consumer as distinctly separate entities does not necessarily hold within the art world. The subjective interpretation of issues relating to value are perhaps much more subtle than in other sectors. The dominant philosophical position of the creator as producer often clashes with classical notions of marketing orientation.

Art for art’s sake philosophy is often positioned alongside the notion of the avant garde (Harrison et al. 1998). Although Theophile Gautier was supposedly the first to adopt the term “L’art pour l’art” as a slogan and Benjamin Constant utilized the phrase in his own work, Victor Cousin is credited with developing the foundations of the doctrine of art for art’s sake which promotes the belief that art must remain independent from utilitarian, religious or political purpose. Derived from the school of progressive modernism, the notion of the avant garde focuses on the ability of those artistic individuals and groups who attempt to change societal thinking through the rejection of tradition by looking towards the future. The avant garde typically utilizes creativity to shape future thinking and practice, while also having a central role in

defining culture (Chartrand 1984). Criticisms of the value of avant garde art are somewhat at odds with the belief that avant garde art challenges convention by creating rather than responding to demand (Fillis 2000a; 2002a; 2002b; 2004b; Fillis and Rentschler 2005). Avant garde status does not necessarily mean that popularity and financial rewards are minimized. In fact, art history is full of examples of one-time avant garde artists who, through their creative marketing activities, attract a following and create success, shaping market demand in the longer term.

Meyer and Even (1998:273-274) suggest that product-centred entrepreneurial creativity is really what occurs in the process of art for art's sake marketing:

...the artist does not find products for the customer, but seeks customers for his products...art becomes a traded good once it is brought to the marketplace which, however, may not be the objective during the process of creation...

Botti (2000) believes that marketing only becomes involved in the process once the artwork has been produced. However, marketing really begins with the initial construction of the creative idea. The artist can be viewed as the owner/manager of the art product, where marketing processes concerned with idea generation and product development have been involved long before the artwork has been produced. Creative marketing behaviour is ultimately driven by a set of competencies linked to the personality of the individual artist. Previous research has identified artists who have successfully followed the art for art's sake approach and, by exploiting their inner creative entrepreneurial marketing competencies, development of consumer interest and market development will follow naturally (Fillis 2000b; 2003). Product centred marketing, then, can create demand and profitability over time. Within this framework, it is also important to understand how the inner personality of the artist affects the process of artistic creation (Evrard 1991).

### **Artists who create demand rather than respond to it**

Tracing the development of modern art, Collings (1999) constructs a critique of how commercially aware artists such as Tracey Emin and Damien Hirst eagerly embrace individualized marketing practices once they create demand for their work. Hirst's early success followed a strategy of creative annoyance with his fish tank animals in formaldehyde solution. This art form satisfied the demand for artistic counter culture which was also so successfully followed by Andy Warhol (Warhol 1975; Hirst 1997). This philosophy also helped him win the 1995 Turner Prize. A decade later and these artists have turned marketing on its head through their construction of an alternative artist-centred form of marketing. As curator of two groundbreaking exhibitions (Freeze in 1988 and Modern Medicine in 1990), Hirst eagerly exploited publicity in his early shows of art meeting popular culture. Widening his product portfolio since then, Hirst has also made films, commercial music videos and opened a restaurant among other entrepreneurial ventures. In order to partially control the market for his work, Hirst uses his company, Other Criteria, to license his imagery, develop new products and sell them on the Internet. Almost in a similar vein to Andy Warhol Enterprises, Science Ltd serves as an umbrella organisation which looks after his studios, employees and other business interests.

He is one of the most prominent members of the original Young British Arts, or YBAs as they have become known. Initially courted by the art collector Charles Saatchi, Hirst recently attempted to take control of the market for his art by setting up his own auction at Sotheby's in September 2008 called 'Beautiful inside my head forever.' He raised £111m by bypassing the gallery as he targeted the collector directly, thus avoiding their large commission rates. Sales of his artwork now make



him one of the most expensive living artists. Hirst held an exhibition in 2007 at the White Cube gallery in London which included 'For the love of God', a human skull made of platinum and encrusted in diamonds worth £15m. Another piece that year, Lullaby Spring, sold for \$19.2m to the Emir of Qatar. Sales of Hirst's work now outpace that of Picasso by a tenfold amount.

Hirst has faced criticisms regarding the use of studio assistants in the production of his work but, much like the studios of the classical artists of the past, this is nothing new. The initial creative idea is spawned by Hirst and, once executed by his assistants, he adds the finishing touches. In a way, the process Hirst follows can be compared to that of the director of a film and the actors as they perform under instruction. The art critic Robert Hughes has described Hirst as functioning like a commercial brand, standing for innovation, popular and clear ideas. This is not exactly a new phenomenon as Dali and Picasso long precede him in this practice. The real point of interest here is that the brand is artist created, rather than company created. As well as being an artist, Hirst is now moving into curatorial work and also has personal collections of work by artists such as Francis Bacon, Jeff Koons and Andy Warhol.

Tracey Emin is also a well known YBA, born in Croydon in 1963 of Turkish Cypriot origin. Townsend and Merck (2001:7) describe her as the most famous living artist in Britain, helped in part by her use of mass media to promote her work. Once she has created her own brand of art, she also uses modern technology to communicate what she does:

In electing to work in media such as video, to model fashion and appear in advertisements, she has gone with the grain of mass celebrity, reaching a status previously unimaginable for a contemporary British artist.

In the early days of her artistic career, Emin was the partner of one of the founding members of the Stuckist art movement Art, Billy Childish (Alberge 1999). Constantly challenging the art establishment through public demonstrations of distaste against the annual Turner Prize, they launched an alternative art manifesto promoting traditional forms of art. Emin then rebelled against this notion, instead revelling in mass media exposure and at one time dismissing the concept of traditional painting as a valid art form (Kent and Brown 1998). She became a Turner prize nominee in 1999, with her artwork moving from the avant garde to the mainstream as her popularity grew. She had a somewhat traditional art education, attending the Royal College of Art. Some of her early influences included the artists Edvard Munch and Egon Schiele.

Much of her work could be described as confessional, autobiographical art as it displays a very personal narrative around a range of sensitive issues, from relationships to abortion and rape. Her first solo exhibition was at the White Cube gallery in London. Her tent installation, *Everyone I have Ever Slept With 1963-1995* was the ultimate confessional form, as it contained the names of all those people she had shared a bed with, from childhood onwards. Purchased by Charles Saatchi to form part of his Sensation exhibition, this served to raise Emin's artistic reputation further. The highlight of her career so far has been the selection of her work for the Venice Biennale 2007, with Emin only the second British female artist to be chosen for a solo show. This was also accompanied by her adoption as a Royal Academician, placing her among the upper echelons of the mainstream British art establishment. Fanthome (2006) believes that Emin's success is partly due to her ability to convey

the unspeakable and push the boundaries of conventional representation. Her confessional art form also sits alongside the growth in popular culture television programmes such as Big Brother and I'm a Celebrity Get Me Out of Here which concentrate on 'incessant performance of identity structured through first-person media speaking about feelings, sentiment and, most powerfully, intimate relationships' (Dovey 2001). It could also be argued that art in general has always contained an element of confession and unveiling of truth but that it is only in recent times that mass media has assisted in its communication. Although this format has risen in popularity, confession has a long history since the Middle Ages. Emin has successfully helped to create the contemporary demand for this art form which Foucault (1990) sees as a key ritual which we use for the production of truth.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Conventional arts marketing theory continues to draw heavily on mainstream marketing frameworks. However, there is still a wide theory versus practice gap which fails to account for the art for art's sake philosophy which is often at odds with the art for business sake thrust of marketing orientation. Many artists view their art as an extension of the self, with marketing beginning from the initial conception of the idea to the construction of a market for the product. Historically, the marketing concept did fit easily within the structure of the art market with rich patrons commissioning the artist on their terms but today artists are also seen as consumers of the art work as they produce art on their own terms. In fact, some artists have become master marketers and self promoters, using their celebrity status to further shape demand for their work. Consumption of art differs from many other products, with aesthetic pleasure playing a large part of the process. Art is seen as a communication

carrier of a variety of qualitative, intangible messages which conventional marketing frameworks cannot interpret. Another differentiating factor between the visual arts and other market sectors is that art as a product has little or no functional or utilitarian value. Some commentators frame the development of the art market in economic terms and differentiate between the pecuniary, or monetary, benefits of being an artist, with reputation, fame and image sometimes seen as more important than financial returns. There is also a close link between artistic practice and entrepreneurial thinking, with links between art making and intuitive vision. The artist can also be viewed as a risk taking entrepreneurial owner/manager.

It is important to realize that art continually impacts on society and changes the way in which we think. There is still a lack of research on art marketing, and a severe lack of critical research which seeks to construct alternative ways of understanding. New visual art marketing theory needs to be built around the realisation that the artist and the artwork are just as much the focus of consumption as the consumer. A variety of internal, qualitative, intangible exchange relationships occur within the persona of the artist as creator and marketer. These factors cannot be interpreted using conventional marketing research techniques. Future art marketing research should focus on the product centred nature of entrepreneurial creativity where the personality, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour of the artist as owner/manager are central to practicing visual arts marketing. The philosophical clash of 'art for arts sake' versus 'art for business sake' should not be viewed as an inhibitor of visual arts marketing progress, but rather as a catalyst for creative change. Instead of perceiving philosophical clashes as problematical, they should instead be viewed as opportunities for developing new solutions, feeding into a more appropriate theory, while also mirroring the contemporary practice of visual arts marketing.

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