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## The evolution of branding in the performing arts: A comprehensive conceptual analysis

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### Abstract

This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the evolution of branding in the performing arts, tracing its historical roots and examining contemporary strategies influenced by digital media and technology. The study explores the application of branding theories, such as Aaker's Brand Equity Model and Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity model, to understand how performing arts organizations create and sustain strong brands. Through case studies of successful branding campaigns like the Royal Opera House and "Hamilton," the paper highlights innovative practices and challenges modern branding faces, such as content oversaturation and maintaining artistic integrity. Additionally, a conceptual framework is developed to analyze the impact of cultural, technological, and economic factors on branding evolution. Comparative insights from other industries, including entertainment, fashion, and technology, provide a broader context for understanding branding strategies. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for effective branding in the performing arts, emphasizing the importance of authenticity, digital engagement, and adaptability to technological advancements.

**Keywords:** Performing Arts Branding; Digital Media; Brand Equity; Branding Theories; Cultural Impact

### 1. Introduction

The performing arts industry, encompassing theater, dance, opera, music, and other live performance forms, has been a cornerstone of human culture for centuries. This industry is a source of entertainment and a medium for artistic expression, cultural exchange, and social commentary. Historically, performing arts have played a critical role in society by reflecting and shaping cultural norms, challenging societal issues, and providing a platform for diverse voices and narratives (Canyürek, 2022).

The industry is characterized by its dynamic and multifaceted nature, where creativity and innovation are paramount. The performing arts industry spans a wide range of venues and audiences from grand theaters in major metropolitan areas to small community playhouses. This diversity allows for a broad spectrum of artistic expressions and styles, making the industry rich and varied. However, it also presents unique challenges in terms of audience engagement, financial sustainability, and competition for attention in an increasingly digital world (Bonet & Schargorodsky, 2018).

Branding has emerged as a vital component in the performing arts industry, playing a crucial role in distinguishing individual artists, companies, and productions in a crowded and competitive marketplace. Unlike commercial products, the performing arts offer ephemeral and intangible experiences, making creating a strong, recognizable brand even more essential. Effective branding in the performing arts helps build and maintain an audience, foster loyalty, and enhance performance's perceived value (Kucharska & Mikołajczak, 2018).

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A well-crafted brand conveys the essence of the artistic experience, communicates the unique qualities of a performance, and connects emotionally with the audience. It serves as a promise of quality and consistency, helping to attract new patrons while retaining existing ones. In an era where consumers have numerous entertainment options, a strong brand can make the difference between a sold-out show and an empty theater (Peho, 2020). Moreover, branding extends beyond individual productions to encompass entire institutions and their reputations. Prominent performing arts organizations such as the Royal Shakespeare Company or the New York City Ballet have built powerful brands that symbolize excellence and tradition. These brands not only draw audiences but also attract funding, sponsorships, and media attention, which are critical for the sustainability and growth of the organization (Morrow, 2018).

The primary objective of this analysis is to explore the evolution of branding within the performing arts industry, examining how it has transformed over time and what factors have driven these changes. By providing a comprehensive conceptual analysis, this paper aims to shed light on the historical development, contemporary practices, and theoretical underpinnings of branding in the performing arts. This analysis will cover several key areas. Firstly, it will delve into the historical evolution of branding in the performing arts, tracing its roots from early practices to modern-day strategies. Understanding the historical context is crucial as it highlights how branding practices have adapted in response to changing societal norms, technological advancements, and cultural shifts. Secondly, the analysis will examine contemporary branding strategies within the performing arts. This section will focus on the impact of digital media and technology, which have revolutionized how brands engage with audiences. Case studies of successful branding campaigns will be included to illustrate best practices and innovative approaches. Additionally, the challenges and opportunities that contemporary branding presents will be discussed, providing insights into the industry's current landscape.

Thirdly, the paper will explore theoretical perspectives on branding within the performing arts. By applying established branding theories and developing a conceptual framework, this section will provide a deeper understanding of the mechanisms and dynamics at play in the evolution of branding. Comparative analysis with branding practices in other industries will also be conducted to identify unique characteristics and potential cross-industry learnings. The final section will offer a conclusion and recommendations, summarizing the key findings of the analysis and proposing actionable strategies for practitioners and scholars. The goal is to provide practical insights that can help enhance branding efforts in the performing arts, ensuring they remain relevant and effective in an ever-changing environment. This analysis aims to contribute to the academic discourse on branding in the performing arts by offering a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of its evolution. By doing so, it seeks to support the industry's efforts to engage audiences, sustain growth, and continue its vital role in cultural and artistic expression.

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## **2. Historical Evolution of Branding in the Performing Arts**

### **2.1. Early Practices and Traditional Approaches**

The concept of branding in the performing arts can be traced back to ancient civilizations, where performances were integral to cultural and religious ceremonies. In Ancient Greece, for example, theatrical performances were major events held in honor of the gods, particularly Dionysus. These early forms of branding were closely tied to the cultural and religious significance of the performances (Winkler & Zeitlin, 2020). Theatrical troupes and playwrights, such as Sophocles and Euripides, became known for their distinctive styles and thematic focus, effectively branding themselves through their artistic contributions (Brown & Dissanayake, 2018).

During the medieval period in Europe, mystery plays and morality plays performed by guilds and traveling troupes began to emerge. These performances were often associated with specific religious festivals and patron saints, embedding the branding within the religious and community context. The reputation of a troupe was built on word of mouth and the quality of their performances, which became their de facto brand. The use of recognizable symbols and emblems by these guilds also served as early branding tools, signifying the origin and quality of the performance (Van Pelt, 2019) s.

The Renaissance era marked a significant shift with the rise of professional theater companies, particularly in England. Companies such as the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which later became the King's Men under the patronage of King James I, established more formalized branding practices. The association with royal patronage not only conferred prestige but also served as a powerful branding tool. The works of playwrights like William Shakespeare were central to the company's brand, and the Globe Theatre itself became an iconic symbol of theatrical excellence (Chernaik, 2020).

## 2.2. Key Milestones and Transformations

The 19th century brought about substantial transformations in the branding of performing arts. The industrial revolution and the rise of the middle class created new opportunities for theatrical productions to reach broader audiences. The advent of mass media, such as newspapers and posters, allowed for more sophisticated marketing and branding efforts. The era saw the emergence of star performers whose names alone could draw large audiences. Actors like Sarah Bernhardt and Edwin Booth became household names, their personas carefully cultivated through strategic branding efforts (Debosier, 2021).

In the 20th century, technological advancements and the proliferation of media further revolutionized branding in the performing arts. The introduction of radio, television, and eventually the internet provided new platforms for promoting performances and reaching audiences. Broadway in New York and the West End in London became synonymous with high-quality theatrical productions, their brands built on a legacy of excellence and innovation. Major productions like "The Phantom of the Opera" and "Les Misérables" utilized elaborate marketing campaigns, including cast recordings and merchandise, to build and sustain their brands (Bádue & Schorsch, 2021).

The late 20th and early 21st centuries saw the rise of branding as a strategic imperative for performing arts organizations. The integration of digital marketing, social media, and data analytics allowed for more targeted and interactive branding efforts. Organizations such as the Royal Opera House and the American Ballet Theatre developed comprehensive branding strategies encompassing their performances, educational programs, community outreach, and digital content. These efforts aimed to create a cohesive and compelling brand experience that extended beyond the theater walls (Kaiser, 2018).

## 2.3. Impact of Cultural and Societal Changes on Branding

Cultural and societal changes have profoundly influenced the evolution of branding in the performing arts. The shift towards more inclusive and diverse representations on stage has impacted branding strategies. Contemporary audiences demand authenticity and representation, prompting performing arts organizations to align their brands with these values. Productions that tackle social issues and highlight underrepresented voices have become significant components of branding, appealing to audiences seeking meaningful and socially conscious entertainment (Walmsley, 2019).

The globalization of culture has also impacted branding in the performing arts. With performances now accessible to international audiences through digital platforms, brands must cater to diverse cultural sensibilities and preferences. This globalization has led to cross-cultural collaborations and the blending of artistic styles, enriching the branding narratives of performing arts organizations. The success of productions like "Hamilton," which incorporates diverse casting and contemporary music styles, exemplifies how embracing cultural shifts can enhance brand appeal and reach (Alexander, 2020).

Economic factors have also played a crucial role in shaping branding strategies. The reliance on funding from donors, sponsors, and government grants has necessitated a more business-oriented approach to branding. Performing arts organizations must articulate their value proposition not only to audiences but also to potential funders. This has led to the adoption of branding practices from the corporate world, including brand storytelling, stakeholder engagement, and brand differentiation (Hassen & Giovanardi, 2018).

Technological advancements continue to influence branding in the performing arts. The rise of social media platforms has transformed how brands engage with audiences, creating opportunities for real-time interaction and community building. Virtual performances and digital content have expanded the reach of brands, allowing them to connect with global audiences and maintain visibility even during periods when live performances are not possible, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic (Jiménez-Sánchez, Margalina, & Vayas-Ruiz, 2020).

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## 3. Contemporary Branding Strategies in the Performing Arts

### 3.1. Role of Digital Media and Technology

In today's digital age, the role of digital media and technology in branding the performing arts cannot be overstated. Digital platforms have transformed how performing arts organizations and individual artists connect with their audiences, offering unprecedented opportunities for engagement and visibility (Psomadaki, Matsiola, Dimoulas, & Kalliris, 2022). Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok are now integral to branding strategies, providing a space for sharing behind-the-scenes content, live updates, interactive posts, and promotional

materials. These platforms enable real-time interaction with fans, fostering a sense of community and loyalty (Baym, 2018).

Moreover, the advent of streaming services has revolutionized the way performances are consumed and branded. Services like BroadwayHD, the Metropolitan Opera's Met Opera on Demand, and the National Theatre's NT at Home have made high-quality performances accessible to a global audience. This accessibility not only expands the reach of performing arts brands but also allows them to engage with audiences who may not have the opportunity to attend live performances. The ability to watch performances on-demand offers a level of convenience that aligns with contemporary consumer expectations.

Additionally, digital marketing techniques such as search engine optimization (SEO), pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, and email marketing have become essential tools for branding. These techniques help performing arts organizations to target specific demographics, track engagement metrics, and refine their strategies based on data-driven insights (Anshari, Almunawar, Lim, & Al-Mudimigh, 2019). Analytics tools allow for a deeper understanding of audience behavior and preferences, enabling more personalized and effective branding efforts (Gupta, Leszkiewicz, Kumar, Bijmolt, & Potapov, 2020).

Virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies are also being explored to enhance the branding of performing arts. These technologies offer immersive experiences, such as virtual backstage tours or interactive performances, that can bring audiences closer to the artistic process. By leveraging VR and AR, performing arts brands can create unique and memorable experiences that differentiate them in a competitive market (Han, Weber, Bastiaansen, Mitas, & Lub, 2019).

### **3.2. Case Studies of Successful Branding Campaigns**

Several performing arts organizations have successfully utilized contemporary branding strategies to enhance their visibility and engagement. One notable example is the Royal Opera House in London. The organization has embraced digital media to create a robust online presence, using platforms like YouTube to share full-length performances, behind-the-scenes documentaries, and interviews with artists. Their #OurHouseToYourHouse campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic offered free streamed performances, reaching millions of viewers worldwide and reinforcing their brand as accessible and community-focused (Annunziata & Annunziata, 2021).

Another exemplary case is the Broadway musical "Hamilton." The show's branding strategy was multifaceted, leveraging social media, merchandise, and strategic partnerships. Lin-Manuel Miranda, the creator of "Hamilton," actively engaged with fans on social media, sharing content and updates that generated buzz and anticipation. The musical's official Twitter and Instagram accounts frequently posted exclusive content, including rehearsal footage and historical facts related to the show's themes. Additionally, "Hamilton" partnered with streaming platforms to release the original cast recording, which helped to build a global fanbase even before the show expanded to other cities (Landis, 2022).

The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater offers another compelling example. Known for its commitment to celebrating African-American cultural expression and modern dance, the company has effectively used branding to highlight its mission and values. Their marketing campaigns often emphasize diversity, empowerment, and cultural heritage themes. Alvin Ailey has established a strong and distinctive identity in the performing arts world by consistently aligning their branding with these core values. Their vibrant imagery and compelling narratives in digital and print media further enhance their brand's impact (Hawk, 2021).

### **3.3. Challenges and Opportunities in Modern Branding**

Despite the many opportunities that digital media and technology provide, contemporary branding in the performing arts also faces significant challenges. One major challenge is the oversaturation of content online. With countless entertainment options available at the click of a button, performing arts organizations must find ways to stand out and capture audience attention. This requires innovative and creative approaches to branding and a deep understanding of target audiences.

Another challenge is the balancing act between maintaining artistic integrity and commercial appeal. While strong branding can attract audiences and funding, there is a risk of compromising artistic vision in favor of marketability. Performing arts organizations must navigate this tension carefully, ensuring that their branding efforts authentically reflect their artistic mission and values (Carnegie & Drencheva, 2019).

Financial constraints also pose a challenge, particularly for smaller organizations and independent artists. Developing and maintaining a comprehensive branding strategy can be resource-intensive, requiring investment in marketing, technology, and talent. However, digital platforms can also level the playing field to some extent, offering cost-effective tools for branding and audience engagement (Khlystova, Kalyuzhnova, & Belitski, 2022).

Opportunities in modern branding for the performing arts are abundant. The increasing importance of social responsibility and ethical branding presents an opportunity for organizations to differentiate themselves by aligning their brands with social causes and community engagement. For example, initiatives that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion can enhance a brand's reputation and resonate with contemporary audiences. Furthermore, the global reach of digital platforms allows performing arts brands to expand their audiences beyond geographic limitations. International collaborations and partnerships can enhance brand visibility and create new avenues for artistic exchange. Additionally, the rise of digital content consumption provides opportunities for monetization through subscription services, virtual performances, and exclusive online content (Ulin, 2019).

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## **4. Theoretical Perspectives on Branding in the Performing Arts**

### **4.1. Application of Branding Theories**

Branding in the performing arts can be examined through various theoretical lenses that have been developed in marketing and consumer behavior studies. One such theory is Aaker's Brand Equity Model, which posits that brand equity is built on brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, brand associations, and other proprietary assets. In the context of performing arts, brand loyalty can be seen in the repeat attendance and ongoing support from patrons who develop a deep emotional connection with a theater company, a dance troupe, or an orchestra. Brand awareness is crucial for performing arts organizations to attract new audiences, and it can be enhanced through consistent and compelling marketing efforts.

Another relevant theory is Keller's Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model, which emphasizes the importance of building a brand that resonates with customers deeply and psychologically. Keller's model highlights the stages of brand development, from brand identity and meaning to brand responses and relationships. In the performing arts, creating a strong brand identity involves defining the organization's unique artistic vision and values (Pourazad, 2018). Brand meaning can be cultivated through the quality of performances and the emotional experiences they provide. Brand responses are reflected in audience reactions, reviews, and word-of-mouth recommendations, while brand relationships are built through sustained engagement and loyalty programs (Purani & Jeesha, 2022).

The concept of brand personality, introduced by Jennifer Aaker, is also applicable to the performing arts. This theory suggests that brands can be imbued with human-like characteristics, such as sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. Performing arts organizations can develop a brand personality that aligns with their artistic style and mission. For instance, a contemporary dance company might project an image of excitement and innovation, while a classical orchestra might emphasize sophistication and competence (Denissov, 2020).

### **4.2. Conceptual Framework for Understanding Branding Evolution**

To understand the evolution of branding in the performing arts, it is useful to develop a conceptual framework that incorporates multiple dimensions. This framework can include elements such as historical context, technological advancements, cultural shifts, and economic factors. Historically, branding in the performing arts has evolved from informal, community-based associations to highly strategic, professionalized practices. This evolution can be segmented into distinct phases, each characterized by different branding approaches. The early phase involved personal branding of individual artists and troupes, largely reliant on word-of-mouth and local reputation. The industrial era introduced mass media, allowing for broader reach and more sophisticated marketing techniques. The digital age has brought about a transformation in how brands are built and maintained, with an emphasis on digital engagement and global accessibility (Steenkamp, 2020).

Technological advancements have played a critical role in shaping branding strategies. The rise of digital platforms and social media has democratized access to branding tools, enabling even small organizations to reach large audiences. Streaming services and virtual reality offer new ways to experience and promote performances, expanding the possibilities for brand engagement. Cultural shifts, such as the increasing emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and social responsibility, have also impacted branding in the performing arts. Audiences today are more socially conscious and expect brands to reflect their values. Performing arts organizations that embrace these cultural changes and integrate them into their branding strategies can build stronger connections with their audiences (Byrnes, 2022).

Economic factors, including funding sources and market competition, influence branding decisions. Organizations must balance the need for financial sustainability with their artistic integrity. Effective branding can attract audiences, sponsors, donors, and grant opportunities, providing the financial support necessary to sustain artistic endeavors (Carlucci, 2018).

### 4.3. Comparative Analysis with Other Industries

Comparing branding in the performing arts with other industries can provide valuable insights into best practices and potential areas for innovation. The entertainment industry, particularly film and music, shares several similarities with the performing arts in terms of audience engagement and content promotion. Successful branding in film and music often involves a strong narrative, star power, and multimedia campaigns. Performing arts organizations can adopt similar strategies, leveraging storytelling, star performers, and cross-platform promotion to enhance their brand visibility.

The fashion industry offers another interesting comparison. Both fashion and performing arts rely on creativity, aesthetics, and public perception. Fashion brands often use high-profile events, collaborations, and influencer marketing to build their brands. Performing arts organizations can draw inspiration from these tactics by hosting special events, partnering with popular artists, and engaging influencers to reach wider audiences.

The technology sector, known for its rapid innovation and user-centric approach, provides lessons in branding adaptability and customer engagement. Tech companies often focus on creating a seamless user experience and building strong brand communities. Performing arts organizations can apply these principles by enhancing the audience experience, both online and offline, and fostering a sense of community through loyalty programs and interactive content.

In contrast, the non-profit sector, which shares the performing arts' focus on mission-driven branding, emphasizes transparency, impact storytelling, and donor engagement. Non-profits effectively use their brand to communicate their mission and mobilize support. Performing arts organizations, particularly those with educational or community outreach components, can adopt these branding strategies to highlight their societal contributions and attract philanthropic support.

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## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The exploration of branding in the performing arts reveals a rich and dynamic landscape where historical practices, contemporary strategies, and theoretical perspectives converge. The evolution of branding in this sector has transitioned from traditional, community-based approaches to sophisticated, technology-driven strategies. Digital media and technological advancements have significantly expanded performing arts organizations' reach and engagement capabilities. Successful case studies, such as the Royal Opera House and the musical "Hamilton," illustrate the power of innovative branding in building strong, resonant brands. However, challenges such as content oversaturation and maintaining artistic integrity remain significant.

For practitioners, the findings underscore the necessity of embracing digital platforms and technologies to remain competitive and relevant. The use of social media, streaming services, and immersive technologies like virtual and augmented reality can enhance audience engagement and brand loyalty. Scholars can delve deeper into the impact of these technologies on audience behavior and brand perception, contributing to a nuanced understanding of modern branding dynamics in the performing arts. The interplay between artistic integrity and commercial viability presents an ongoing area of interest, with potential studies exploring how organizations balance these sometimes conflicting priorities.

Future research could investigate the long-term effects of digital branding strategies on audience retention and financial sustainability in the performing arts. Additionally, comparative studies between different cultural contexts could offer insights into how branding strategies are adapted to diverse markets. Another promising area of research is the impact of social responsibility and ethical branding on audience engagement and brand reputation. Understanding these dynamics will be crucial for practitioners and academics as cultural shifts continue to influence consumer expectations.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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