Operatic flash mob: Consumer arousal, connectedness and emotion

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of an operatic flash mob on consumer behaviour and consumer experience in a public market. A field experiment was conducted to assess the impact of operatic music on consumers' emotions and connectedness in three conditions: spontaneous live music (flash mob), recorded music, and no music. We analyse audience responses to the shopping experience in all three conditions, with particular focus on temporary group formation and felt emotion. Results show that the flash mob enhanced consumer arousal, connectedness and positive emotions, as well as consumer-to-consumer interaction.

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INTRODUCTION

The popularity of flash mobs as a form of group expression and as a marketing tool has grown exponentially over the last eight years. However, very little research has been conducted as to how flash mobs might affect consumer behaviour and emotion. The following study attempts to begin understanding this phenomenon by taking an exploratory look at how flash mobs affect consumer emotion, loyalty and feelings of connectedness, using a field study during which an operatic flash mob was created.

A flash mob is a semi-spontaneous temporary community that forms in a public space for the purpose of performance (Goldstein 2003, Salmond 2010). The community is made of people who may or may not be known to one another prior to the flash mob and who come together to either watch or be involved in the performance (Goldstein 2003). The flash mob performance can be any number of things from a choreographed dance routine to a spontaneous sing-a-long or even a group of individuals staring at a blank wall. Typically, information about the location and performance expectations is spread through social media such as Facebook, Twitter and flashmob.com. Organisers include location, time and performance information.

While the performance element of flash mobs grew out of other historical performance pieces with social aims (protests, raves and agitprop theatre), flash mobs were, in their inception, a simple social experiment. Not the type to miss a beat, savvy marketers are now increasingly using flash mobs as a means of generating consumer interest and to create affinity and loyalty to a product or brand. On 13 November 2009, the first operatic flash mob was recorded in Valencia, Spain. Six classically trained singers seemingly stepped out of their day-to-day lives and suddenly began singing a couple of operatic favourites from Verdi's Opera *La Traviata*. Dressed as vendors, parents, or general passers-by, each singer came forward from the crowd one at a time, adding their voice to the excitement and splendor. By the time the second song had ended, the audience had been whipped into

a frenzy—laughing, dancing and singing along. The Valencia Opera had used this flash mob as a means of increasing interest in a forthcoming performance of *La Traviata*. The video, called *Opera en el Mercado* (Opera in the Market), has nearly 4.5 million hits on YouTube and can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ds8ryWd5aFw>.

The purpose of this paper is to understand what effect a flash mob might have on consumer behaviour and perceived values not associated with the flash mob itself in order to ascertain if feelings of connectedness within the food market between consumers might emerge as a result of this catalysing event. Further, this paper provides theory about the impact of unexpected music on consumer feelings of connectedness and consumer-felt arousal. The paper continues as follows: We begin with a literature review of flash mobs and the relationship between consumer behaviour and music. We then continue with a description of methodology and findings, concluding with a discussion section.

GENESIS OF THE FLASH MOB

In May of 2003, Bill Wasik, senior editor for Harper's Magazine, organised the world's first flash mob as a social experiment to poke fun at hipsters exposing their dedication to non-conformity as in fact status quo (Goldstein 2003). Today, flash mobs are used more commonly as performance art and increasingly as a part of an organisation's guerilla marketing strategy. A flash mob is defined as groups of people who pre-organise, typically on a social media platform, then assemble in a public place, do something performance oriented, and quickly disperse. The purpose of a flash mob is to go against the expectation of the status quo and use the public space in a unique and memorable manner (Salmond 2010).

While weeks or months of preparation and planning are often necessary to conduct a successful flash mob, by definition, the event must appear spontaneous. Gunar Hoydal defines planned spontaneity as an environment from which accidental occurrences can arise (Vuksanovic, 2003). While there are aspects of a flash mob that are planned, the execution, potential audience and response are completely spontaneous and unplanned.

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Flash mobs can look very similar to performance art, as it also attempts to organise spontaneity. Therefore, understanding the difference between flash mobs and performance art is important to understanding the nature of flash mobs. Performance art has been in existence for centuries as a means of societal questioning (Sawyer, 2000). It is defined as a public performance where the creative process is the main focus of the artist (Sawyer, 2000). The flash mob distinguishes itself from performance art through the motivation of the organisers. In other words, the top priority of the flash mob artist lies on the message first and the creative process second.

Durkheim (1895) defined *collective conscience* as the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society that forms a determinate system with a life of its own. At 100+ years, it may appear to be an outdated definition; however, it seems to lack improvement. More recently, Miller (1981) defined the group identification as a perceived self-location within a particular social stratum, along with a psychological feeling of belonging to that particular group. Targeting the non-conformists, at its creation, it seems that Wasik (2006) must have understood the appeal of the flash mob as an opportunity for the social iconoclast to be heard. Hence, the attraction to the art form was the intrinsic shock value and challenge that the event made to the status quo and not the art of the event itself. For the purposes of this study, the flash mob is an arena where we hope to observe the collective conscience; therefore, the inherent surprise element as a motivator remains the main ingredient to the definition and success of the flash mob.

While the underlying purpose does not significantly vary amongst flash mobs, the type of flash mob does. The decision to choose opera as a platform for this field event seemed ideal, as it presented an opportunity to challenge the audience and protract emotion, and it remained consistent with Bill Wasik's original intention for flash mobs (2003), which is to challenge the status quo, due to the elitist nature of the operatic art form (Kenyon, 1993). Several contributing factors for this label are the rich clientele, the European origins, the high production costs funded by corporations or the rich, and the scarcity of vocalists endowed with the talent to be opera singers (Berger, 2005). The enjoyment of one striking aria does not guarantee the survival of an art form long regarded as over-elitist, over-recondite and over-priced (Kenyon, 1993).

One relevant and key aspect to this paper is the idea that during the performance, a temporary group can form between audience members and performers. In organisations, temporary groups by definition have a finite lifespan (ranging from a few minutes to 15 minutes) and a relatively specific purpose or goal, and the participants do not have a shared history or familiarity (Meyerson *et al.*, 1996, Terrion *et al.*, 2002). Studies have shown that in a number of conditions, trust and feelings of connectedness do form (Terrion *et al.*). However, in order for temporary groups to develop similar characteristics to a longer standing group, they must develop 'swift trust' between participants, enabling cohesion and connectedness (Meyerson *et al.*, 1996).

By understanding the definition of the flash mob, which is, to say, a group of people who formulate a temporary public performance, execute, and then quickly disperse, and that we chose an operatic flash mob for its pre-supposed ability to invoke emotion, it is possible to understand the following behavioural and contextual study of the collective conscious as it pertains to flash mobs.

MUSIC AND MARKETING

Clynes (1977) stated that appropriately structured music acts on the nervous system by activating brain processes with corresponding emotional responses. The aesthetic quality of music has the ability to alter our emotions as well as our state of mind. Lowis (2010) noted that music has the ability to create a broad spectrum of emotional responses. Alpert and Alpert (1990) found that music can affect the favourableness of people's feelings and moods. More simply put, music can give us joy and delight and take us outside of ourselves (Roche & McConkey 1990, Lowis 2003). Similarly, music can enhance somber mood, melancholy and despair (Krumhansl 2002, Lowis 2010). Many believe that the primary motivation for music consumption is its emotional effect on individuals (Krumhansl 2002). Undoubtedly, as Gordon Bruner (1990) reported, music can act as a powerful stimulus for affecting moods.

Similarly, the effect of music on consumer behaviour has been studied a great deal. North *et al.* (2003) found that exposure to background classical music led subjects to a higher willingness to pay in the restaurant environment. Further, researchers found that music has the ability to create a positive influence on pleasure and arousal, which may also impact a customer's willingness to engage in a buyer-seller interaction and further strengthen consumer bonds to products or brands (Dube *et al.*, 1995). Willingness to engage in buyer-seller interaction was correlated with the increased pleasure and arousal felt by consumers (Dube *et al.*, 1995). 1996North and Hargreaves (1996) reported that when students liked the music in the student cafeteria, there was an increased willingness to return to the cafeteria and an increased willingness to interact with others in the cafeteria. Finally, Chebat, *et al.* (2001) reported that background music helps consumers access deep thoughts that contribute to and interfuse their perception of the retail experience and store environment. Zhu and Meyers-Levy (2005) found that background music should align with the targeted audience, as individuals respond differently to background music.

The effect of music towards consumer behaviour is largely measured by background music and, accordingly, must be studied separately from foreground music. Yalch and Spangenberg (1993) define background music as musicians playing instrumental music. Conversely, they define foreground music as original music and lyrics by original artist. Garland and Kuhn (1995) warn against lumping foreground and background music together, as foreground classical music brings the complicating variable of verbal communication into the equation. Foreground music commands more attention than background music

and generally has a stronger ability to alter the mood of the listener (Yalch and Spangenberg 1993). Young shoppers were found to spend more time shopping when exposed to background music whereas older shoppers spent more time shopping when exposed to foreground music (Yalch and Spangenberg 1993). Furthermore, research has shown that all consumers rated the foreground music as more desirable than the background music (Yalch and Spangenberg 1993).

Music tempo has been shown to have a significant effect on behaviour. Caldwell and Hibbert (1999) studied the effect of music on consumer capital expenditure in a restaurant environment; specifically, experiments were conducted charting personal expenditure on food, drinks and total spent. Analysis of these data revealed that slow music increased consumer expenditure in all three categories. Similarly, Milliman's (1986) study showed that fast music persuaded diners to eat more quickly while slow music led to slower eating. Slower food consumption also led to more drinks being ordered from the bar (Milliman 1986).

Other studies have also indicated a relationship between musical tempo and the speed of the consumer shopping behaviour. Milliman (1982) reported that fast music incited shoppers to move around the supermarket faster than did slow music. It extends that there was a correlation between the pace at which the shopper walked and the amount of money spent (Milliman 1982). Specifically, research indicated that shoppers who were exposed to fast music spent more money than those who were exposed to slow music in a grocery store environment. Yalch and Spangenberg (1993) also support this claim, reporting that some restaurants use fast-tempo music to encourage rapid turnover during times when the demand for tables is high and slow music to encourage customers to spend more time in the establishment to consume high margin items such as alcoholic drinks and desserts.

Current research indicates that classical music can increase customer spending in certain restaurant conditions (North *et al.*, 2003). North *et al.* (2003) conducted a field experiment over 18 evenings in a British restaurant. The customers were exposed to pop music, classical music and no music. The average bill per head was calculated for appetisers, entrees, desserts, coffee, bar drinks, wine, overall drink bill, overall food bill and total bill (North *et al.*, 2003). Analysis revealed higher actual spending from those exposed to background classical than those who were exposed to no music or pop music (North *et al.*, 2003).

North and Hargreaves measured the effects of different musical styles on the perceived characteristics of the dining environment. Classical music was associated with the subjects being prepared to pay the most for food items and was found to have more potential to increase sales than easy listening or silence. This study replicated findings by Yalch and Spangenberg (1993), who found that consumer spending is greater after exposure to classical music versus country and western music.

The foregoing research reports that music has the ability to increase sales and profit; however, managers and business owners must intelligently seek music that properly fits their product, service approach and environment. Areni and Kim

(1993) conducted a field experiment in a wine cellar that exposed the consumer to both classical and Top-40 music. From this experiment, they found that exposure to classical music led to customers buying more expensive wine. Conversely, Alpert and Alpert (1990) reported that sad music led to higher purchase intention for greeting cards than did happy music because the fit seemed more appropriate.

The impact of background music on consumer behaviour has been studied and is well documented. At the birth of this research field, many savvy marketers began using background music so much that it has become a common marketing technique. As we stand at the dawn of flash mobs as a marketing technique and as marketers slowly begin to incorporate flash mobs and live music into mainstream marketing techniques, it becomes clear that more research on the topic is necessary. Fifteen of the top flash mobs from around the world can be viewed online at <http://mashable.com/2010/06/20/flash-mob-videos/>. Each of these events was intended to pull attention, distract and bewilder. Accordingly, corporate markets and vendors alike need to better understand how the flash mob affects consumer behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

While a great deal of research has been conducted as to the effects of music on consumer behaviour, no research has been conducted as to the effect of flash mobs on consumer behaviour. To acquire an exploratory understanding of the relationship between operatic flash mobs and consumer behaviour, a field experiment (operatic flash mob) was designed and conducted at the food court of a public market—Vancouver Canada's Granville Island Market. Granville Island Market is more than a traditional shopping centre. While clearly a hub for epicurean pleasure (there are 73 places to buy fresh or prepared food on the Island), it does not represent mainstream commercialisation. Fifty-seven shops, or roughly 40 per cent of business on the Island, are arts and culture related.

Specifically, the field experiment was set up with three conditions where observation was the mode of data collection. The environmental manipulation was used as a mechanism to see if in fact the flash mob could create a sense of community connectedness. The qualitative interviews and observation were employed to better understand consumer emotion and group formation. Eighteen observers and six singers were employed to create the field experiment. Observers were instructed to observe the way in which consumers interacted with each other as well as the Granville Island environment. Additionally, observers were asked to circulate with demographic surveys. Also, video interviews were recorded and later coded. Finally, observers were asked to record behaviour on handheld mobile phones. These recordings included not only the flash mob but consumer reaction as well. As very little research has been conducted as to the effect of flash mobs on emotional behaviour, a qualitative method was proposed as a means of exploration. Moreover, the

spontaneous/unexpected nature of flash mobs rendered a traditional control environment impossible.

FIELD EXPERIMENT

To acquire a distinguishable and representative understanding of the relationship between operatic flash mobs and consumer affective behaviour, a field experiment (operatic flash mob) was conducted in the food court of Vancouver's Granville Island Market on 13 June, between 12:30 PM and 4:30 PM. The field experiment employed a three-level design: no music, recorded music and live music. A survey was distributed at the end of each exposure (see Methodology). In the first condition, no music, observers were asked to circulate throughout the food court to see how consumers interacted with each other and with vendors. In the second condition, a recording of the third act quartet from Verdi's *Rigoletto* followed by Luigi Denza's *Funiculi, Funicula* was played throughout the food court. The music was played out of the same corner that would later hold the flash mob. Again, observers were asked to circulate throughout the food court and watch how consumers interacted with vendors as well as with each other. Finally, in the third condition, live music, the same two musical selections from the second conditions were performed, and observers were once again asked to circulate throughout the food court and observe consumers. When the experiment was over, formal interviews were conducted and performers were asked to stay and speak with audience members. Further, observers, performers and audience members were asked to give reflections on the event. Qualitative data from these interviews and observations were then coded for themes.

PARTICIPANTS

A brief demographic survey was included when observers spoke with customers. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 81. Fifty-four participants self-identified as male, while 73 identified as female (1 individual chose not to identify his/her gender). As the flash mob included interaction between performers and visitors to the market, we include their demographic information as well. There were also 18 observers and 6 performers included in the field experiment. The 18 observers were all graduate students at Simon Fraser University. Three students were PhD students while 15 were completing a master's degree. The performers were hired by researchers to conduct the flash mob; they are all classically trained opera singers who had worked together prior to the flash mob. There were three female performers and three male performers.

RESULTS

As previously mentioned, both the surveyors and the singers collected data related to the audience's emotional reaction in an attempt to find contextual results from the effect of the flash mob on shoppers' moods. This was achieved through in-depth unstructured interviews and observations.

The findings have been broken down into four major themes: consumer arousal during the flash mob, consumer desirability to be part of the group, consumer connectedness during the flash mob and increased consumer-felt emotion during the flash mob. The results are presented by theme and then broken down by behaviour and interview.

In the no music condition, consumers seemed to keep to themselves. If they interacted with others, they were individuals whom they had come in with or who they seemed to know prior to their trip to the market. Numerous observers expressed frustration, finding it extraordinarily difficult to convince shoppers to speak with them. The market was abuzz with hundreds of simultaneous conversations. People seemed to move around continuously, eating quickly and returning to other parts of the market. One observer recalled the following interaction with consumers at the market:

'Two men said they were busy and didn't want to speak with me.'

After the flash mob, participants approached the observer directly to speak about their feelings, but prior to the flash mob, the observer found it awkward to speak with shoppers:

'... I was a bit apologetic, not wanting to disturb people during their lunch.'

Another observed,

'Prior to the flash mob I was nervous even approaching people. Everyone seemed to keep to themselves and I felt bad intruding their space. During the flash mob it was different; people were approaching me, wanting to help and speak to anyone involved with the planning.'

'I found the first two hours really frustrating. It was hard to convince people to speak with me. Everyone seemed to keep to themselves and a few were annoyed when we asked them to speak with us.'

In the second condition, recorded music, much of the behaviour of the shoppers stayed the same. Similar to the no music condition, shoppers also kept to themselves or people they previously knew. In the second condition, observers and researchers received numerous complaints about the recorded music. Numerous individuals said they did not like opera while others complained about the location and the volume. Once again, observers complained that it was very difficult to convince shoppers to speak with them. One observer who has engaged in conversation with a family was turned away when the music began because they were so irritated by the opera. One observer said,

'Everyone was complaining about the music. They said it was loud and that they didn't like the music. I actually had to go speak with a manager at a coffee shop to calm down her employees (who were complaining about the music).'

'A LOT of people complained about the recorded music, the volume was the biggest complaint.'

In the final condition, live music (the flash mob), much of the behaviour in the market changed. Observers actually had shoppers asking to speak with them about the flash mob and the market. A crowd of approximately 300 people gathered around the performance. Shoppers were swaying, dancing and even singing along with the performers. Numerous shoppers took out their phones to take videos of the flash mob while others sat silently mesmerised by the event. Vendors stopped conducting business, and numerous employees of the food stands came to join in. Numerous shoppers were moved to tears by the live performance and stayed after to thank the performers and researchers for the event.

AROUSAL

Participants reported extreme excitement during and after the flash mob. These beliefs were conveyed to the singers, observers and between consumers. Participants in the field experiment were highly involved during the flash mob. People were shouting praise, singing and dancing along with the other shoppers. Numerous individuals waited after the performance to speak with researchers and performers to convey their sheer excitement at the event. One shopper said,

‘There was a definite buzz about the place for the next hour, as people who had witnessed the opera scene talked about it, and the food court area of the market was vibrant!’

The live interaction of the event added a level of arousal for audience members. Another participant who had seen similar events on the Internet before said,

‘Really enjoyed it. I’ve seen similar things on the Internet, but I’ve never been part of something like that before, so it’s really exciting and I was glad to be here when it happened.’

The ‘buzz’ at Granville Island remained for about an hour after the performance, but it certainly swelled while the performance was still going on. Word spread rapidly during the performance and people came from all over the market to be a part of the performance; as the population of observers swelled, the excitement in the room did too.

‘I actually came to get something for dinner, and when we came around, and heard. . . [singing and] I said, “Where is this voice coming from? Where is this voice? Let’s follow the voice.” So we just came down and it did move us to tears. There’s no doubt about it; it’s fantastic and I hope it was impromptu and that you startled everyone here, because what an experience they had. It was lovely, it was wonderful.’

The energy of the market completely shifted during the flash mob. One observer stated,

‘I can’t describe the feeling except to say the feeling was electric. People were so excited to be there.’

The electric atmosphere and evidence of consumer arousal lead us to the following proposition:

P1: Live unexpected music in a market can lead to heightened consumer-felt arousal.

HEIGHTENED EMOTION

One of the major themes we observed and later heard about from shoppers at the market was the heightened emotion they felt watching and being a part of the flash mob. Numerous people were moved to tears during the performance as well as immediately after it. One performer reported,

‘Upstairs there was a woman in absolute tears. She couldn’t speak much but did say she was deeply moved.’

Another singer reported,

‘The man at the bottom of the stairs who, when I came down, took my hands in his, kissed them, then looked up with tears in his eyes and said “you’re beautiful, THIS was beautiful. Thank you.”’

One observer reported,

‘People were very emotional watching the performance and after. There were numerous people in tears, some quietly reflecting.’

Emotion can manifest in a physical manner as observers and performers noted after the conclusion of the flash mob. Numerous studies have shown that music has the power to magnify emotional experience (Alpert and Alpert 1990, Lewis 2010). Emotional response is often the goal in marketing, leading to increased identification and loyalty (Yu and Dean 2001). The authors acknowledge that consumer loyalty was not tested in our study. The nature and duration of the field study did not allow for in-depth study of consumer loyalty; however, numerous articles support the idea that heightened emotional response towards a product or a service increase consumer loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). One area for future research would be to look at specific changes to consumer-felt loyalty in the flash mob arena. Our findings, supported by past studies, led to the formation of the following propositions:

P2A: Flash mobs can elicit a heightened emotional response in consumers.

P2B: The heightened emotional response felt by consumers can lead to long-term consumer loyalty.

CONNECTEDNESS

During the flash mob, there was a heightened sense of connectedness amongst shoppers as well as between the shoppers and performers. What was more surprising was that the shoppers who were attempting to speak about the experience transferred their feelings of connectedness with the observers. In the first two conditions, observers stated that convincing people to speak with them was like pulling teeth. After the flash mob, numerous audience members wanted to speak with researchers as well as the performers.

There was a feeling that people wanted to document their involvement in the flash mob:

‘... A lot of people took out their camera[s] and started filming [the flash mob], and taking pictures and it wasn’t any of the [researchers].’

During the flash mob, shoppers were interacting with one another in a way that they had not done in either of the previous conditions. Numerous participants were swaying along together, singing to Figaro. Numerous participants took photos with the singers and even each other. While there were numerous cell phones filming the event, one unknown person even posted his video on YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7T4dgkUH88Y>).

The feeling of connectedness extended beyond performers and audience members and even to observers. One observer noted,

‘I felt like I was a part of the group and that I shared something very special with a bunch of complete strangers. I was really proud to be there and a small part of the event.’

The establishment of a temporary group was supported by the data. The existence of group formation has strong implications to marketing. Group identification is strongly linked with consumer loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). The temporary group formation leads to the following propositions:

P3A: Flash mobs can create a temporary group and sense of connectedness between audience members and performers.

P3B: Temporary groups may turn into feelings of identification, which in turn could lead to increased consumer loyalty.

It is unlikely that words can fully describe the energy and dynamism of the event or the impact that the operatic flash mob had on the unsuspecting audience. These responses speak to the captivating ability and the effectiveness of the surprise element of the flash mob. Clearly, the mood of the audience was heightened, and the impact of the flash mob was significant.

LIMITATIONS

This field study measured the effect of an operatic flash mob on the emotion engendered by unsuspecting shoppers. This experience would remove the consumer from the typical shopping experience, resulting in a heightened level of arousal, emotion and connectedness. The operatic flash mob does not conform to the definition of classical background music. Therefore, it is worth clarifying that all of the secondary research presented in this paper parrots research collected from non-vocal classical music. According to Garland and Kuhn (1995), music research should be separated into verbal and non-verbal forms of research. Their research describes music as a non-verbal form of communication associated with emotion and feeling, which listeners

process in the left hemisphere of their brain. Conversely, speech, which originates in the right brain, communicates facts and ideas. Therefore, they argue that to investigate the effects of music, classical vocal repertoire should be avoided, as they add the complicating variable of verbal communication to the equation. Since there is not enough data on the difference between vocal and non-vocal classical music, there is potential for more research.

As with all field studies, there are a few limitations to our study. First, our study was context specific, and as such, findings are not generalisable without further data collection in numerous and varied conditions. Second, at the time of the event, the participants were already in Granville Island and therefore do not make up a random sample. Finally, as with all qualitative research, potential researcher bias may exist.

DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Of late, the popularity of flash mobs as a marketing tool has grown exponentially. However, questions still remain as to the effectiveness of the flash mob. Examples of companies that have used flash mobs as a marketing tool have included T-Mobile (London), Kadaver (Denmark) and Air Canada. For example, on 21 December 2010, Air Canada sponsored a holiday flash mob at Vancouver’s YVR airport. Over 60 dancers and 5 musicians were hired to sing and dance to Christmas carols. Numerous passengers videotaped the event, and over 300,000 people viewed separate and unique amateur videos on YouTube. Further, numerous news organisations such as CTV (Canada), the *Huffington Post* (US), and *Vancouver Sun* (Canada) amongst others (cf. the *Huffington Post*, 21 December 2010) reported the event in newsfeed. From a managerial perspective, the cost expenditure for this event was very low relative to the exposure that Air Canada received.

While this new field offers many implications, the authors present three major points that managers can take away from this field study. First, consumer involvement is an important area for managers to consider. In an age where consumers are becoming increasingly savvy to options within the marketplace and are less easily persuaded by traditional marketing tactics, a firm’s ability to set itself aside from competition is becoming increasingly important. The high level of interaction between producers and consumers in a flash mob helps companies distinguish themselves from others and gives consumers an avenue for creative expression and interaction. It is widely accepted that consumers do not trust marketers’ motives, nor do they want to feel manipulated by advertisers. Producing a flash mob makes the producer’s motivation to create a heightened existential experience transparent, and when combined with the astuteness of the consumer, it has the potential to create a trust between the consumer and the company, which may result in a ‘buzz’ about the company, or event on social media platforms. Second, social networks have become a strong indicator of consumer identity (Schau and Gilly, 2003). The ease with which an individual could share information about a flash mob or perhaps a video of the flash

mob could increase ties to the company that sponsored the flash mob. Finally, the live nature of the flash mob was shown to heighten consumer-felt emotion and arousal. Existing research demonstrates that consumers tend to feel stronger ties of connectedness in situations where companies can increase arousal and emotion towards a product or service. From a marketing perspective, the unorthodox nature of the flash mob may allow companies to stand apart from the competition and capture significant mental real estate in the mind of the consumer.

CONCLUSION

As flash mobs continue to increase in popularity, marketers, organisers, protestors and artists alike will look to take advantage of the flash mob forum. This paper has endeavoured to analyse audience response and understand temporary group formation and consumer-felt emotion as it pertains to the operatic flash mob. As hypothesised, it was observed that the operatic flash mob experience enhanced consumer arousal, connectedness and positive emotion, as well as consumer-to-consumer interaction. However, this is simply a modest beginning for a fascinating new field. Further research needs to be done to discover the empirical statistical impact of flash mobs on consumer purchasing behaviour, willingness to pay, and flash mobs as a marketing tool in terms of raising brand awareness and loyalty.

This paper provides an exploratory study of the effect that foreground music has on the consumer. It differentiates itself from the current literature from both a live music and vocal music perspective. While much has been written about the effect of background music on consumers, the current literature does not delve into flash mobs, live music, or vocal music. Since all three of these areas have recently been creeping into mainstream marketing techniques, more research on the topic is necessary.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Philip Stanley Grant, MBA, is a first year PhD student at KTH Royal Institute of Technology (Sweden). In 2004 Philip co-founded The Canadian Tenors and in 2006 subsequently began serving as the Executive Director of Romanza Entertainment. In addition to his administrative duties he has since performed and produced over 300 professional operatic performances around the world. His current research area focuses on the influence and impact of flash mobs and music in the offline and online commercial spaces. While pursuing his doctoral studies he maintains a busy operatic career both on the stage and behind the scenes.

Anjali Bal, MBA, BA, is a third year PhD candidate in marketing at the Beedie School of Business, Simon Fraser University. Anjali's research interests are in consumer behaviour, with specific focus on fine art and consumer affect. Prior to her return to academia, Anjali worked extensively in the Southern California theatre and as a financial advisor for Morgan Stanley.

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