

Branded app implementation at the London Symphony Orchestra

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to consider the key findings of a yearlong collaborative research project focusing on the London Symphony Orchestra's development, implementation and testing of a branded smartphone app. This app was designed to primarily sell discounted tickets, engage and inform a student audience.

Design/methodology/approach – A mixed-method approach including an analysis of the technology, focus groups and interviews was used.

Findings – Though the aims of app developers and marketers are often to provide customers with more choice and interactivity, this research suggests that though the app proved a useful mechanism for selling discounted tickets, it indicates that existing customers were mostly enrolled and mobilised via a limited and focused functionality for the app.

Originality/value – This paper is significant as mobile phone use remains comparatively under-researched, in particular there is still a relatively small literature on the growing phenomena of apps, and even less on their use in brand marketing. Also importantly, though this paper offers a consideration of one case, the app has since been expanded to include the ticketing for ten major orchestras in London, and moreover, many of the lessons learnt from this study will be of relevance to other arts organisations.

Keywords Mobile marketing, Apps, Students, Brands, Audiences, Classical music

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper provides an account of the implementation of a ticketing and information smartphone app introduced by the London Symphony Orchestra (LSO) in 2012. Drawing on data from a yearlong collaborative project, working with the orchestra and their app developers (Kodime), the paper provides an overview and evaluation of the app and reflects upon the extent of its appropriation by the student audience of the LSO.

Market research shows that attendance at classical music in the UK has been, for a number of years, in significant decline; a pattern Mintel (2010) attributes to "the sector's relative failure to reach out to younger audiences". It is therefore crucial that the LSO explore new ways to engage, retain and where possible expand their audience. Hence, The

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Student Mobile Project was primarily designed to engage with a student audience in and around London for the LSO, utilising an app for iOS and Android platforms, called Student Pulse. Research has time and time again shown that audiences for classical music events in the UK, as in many other countries, are primarily educated and middle-class; hence, as Kolb (2000, p. 13) argues, “university students are a prime future market segment”.

The paper offers a consideration of the rise and popularity of smartphone apps and “mobile marketing”. We outline the theoretical approach taken towards explaining the innovation journey in question, and the research methods employed. The paper then reflects on the implementation of the app, its appropriation and its effectiveness in engaging its audience.

There is a significant literature on classical music audiences, which includes (but is not limited to) the work of authors such as, Dobson (2010), Kolb (2000, 2005), Pitts (2005), O’Sullivan (2009) and Small (1987). However, this is an area that has still received comparatively less attention than some other genres of music, such as jazz and pop. Smartphone use in this context also remains under-researched, and there is a relatively little literature on the growing phenomena of branded apps.

The rise of mobile telephone apps

The use of apps on mobile devices is not new. Mobile personal data assistants (PDAs), which used applications, emerged in the 1980s. The convergence of the mobile telephone and the PDA in the 1990s led to the first “smartphones”; however, long before this, people were using mobile telephones for much more than just making and receiving calls. However, functionality was usually quite limited. It is suggested that a key turning point in the popularity and scope of apps was the launch of Apple’s iPhone in 2007, and its “App Store” in 2008 (Sharma, 2010).

The iPhone, like many Apple products, was not necessarily ahead of its competitors in terms of its technology or functionality, but Apple’s status and design has a “cool” quality, which often separates its devices from the herd. The previous generation of mobile phones had relied on wireless access protocol (WAP), but a new generation of 2G smartphones in the late 1990s allowed faster connectivity and hence greater scope for loading and surfing the internet. This meant downloading small applications, and using applications that needed internet access, became more feasible. Apple, realising the potential of downloadable apps in 2008, launched the App Store as a “one-stop-shop” for customers to download these programmes.

The success of the App Store has led its competitors to offer similar app marketplaces, such as the (Android platform) Google Play store. Consequently, smartphone apps have become, what Hurley (2012, p. 32) describes as, “the new ‘gold rush’”. Though many of the most successful apps have been games or social networking apps, many businesses have begun to realise the opportunities that might be afforded by using apps to reach and communicate with existing, or potentially new, audiences. As Ryu (2013) suggests, the majority of customers are now comfortable searching for, and even purchasing, products with their phones, and for many, even more so than with their desktop personal computer.

Mobile marketing

As Bellman *et al.* (2011) indicate, many businesses have in recent years sought to develop and market “branded apps”. Bellman *et al.* (2011, p. 191) define “branded apps” as “software downloaded to a mobile device which predominantly displays a brand identity [...] throughout the user experience”. However, the use of mobile phones as a medium for marketing is not new. Mort and Drennan (2002) provide an overview of

mobile telephone marketing; or “m-marketing”. Here the kind of m-marketing that Mort and Drennan (2002) are discussing primarily relates to mobile internet or text message communication between marketers and their audience.

Mort and Drennan suggest that this form of marketing has two key advantages. First, it is more convenient, as the customer does not have to seek out information on products – rather this is delivered (or accessible) directly on personal devices. Second, that m-marketing allows a company to develop a stronger relationship with their customer, as (crucially) mobile telephones allow direct interaction between the customer and the company.

However, the possibilities of m-marketing in the early part of the twenty-first century were greatly hampered by the limitations of mobile technologies. Primarily, mobile marketing here relied on sending (most often unsolicited) text messages to existing or potential customers. However, seemingly anonymous mass messages, sent to mobile users, were not a particularly effective way of engaging consumers; for, as Bauer *et al.* (2005, p.181) writes, “the majority of anonymous mass advertising is despised by consumers leading them to reject the messages”.

The nature of mobile marketing changed significantly with the rise in popularity of smartphone apps. One key advantage of apps over text messages is that, usually, the customer has to first choose to download the app, rather than being the (possibly undesired) recipient of an attempted communication. As Bellman *et al.* (2011, p. 192) argues here, the advertising is “pulled” by the customer, rather than “pushed” onto them; “the customer talks to the brand, not the other way around”. Bauer *et al.* (2005) highlight that apps also have two further advantages for advertisers: first, smartphones are popular with young adults, who constitute a key market sector for many advertisers; and second, the smartphone “lends itself to effective mobile marketing [due to its] [...] interactivity” (Bauer *et al.*, 2005, p. 182). App-based marketing is considered to have the advantage of being able to reach an audience who already have enough interest in the product to seek out and download an app, it uses a convenient and personalised technology (the smartphone), which is popular with young people, and does so in a way where communication between the advertiser and customer can be bi-directional. However, there is limited research on branded mobile marketing (Kim and Adler, 2011).

The research

In this paper we enrol thinking from science and technology studies (STS) to help explain the innovation journey of the smartphone app as it travelled from the design room and into the hands of customers. STS approaches afford a view of appropriation as something involving a range of human and non-human actors. Such approaches reject technologically deterministic accounts (Latour, 2005), and conceptualises technology as political and contestable, which has the potential to travel along a variety of routes during its life.

For the purposes of this paper, we will enrol Actor-Network theory (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2005) and particularly, the sociology of translation. The sociology of translation provides an understanding of the trajectory of an innovation, via affording symmetrical agency to both human and non-human actors (Callon, 1986). Accounts of this form detail the inherent processes of translation that occur amongst actors. It is proposed that four moments of translation can assist in understanding such a state of affairs.

A sociology of translation seeks to describe how actors set up a problem area (problematisation), the actions by something or someone attempts to stabilise the definition of other actors (interessement), how they attempt to persuade other actors to share a similar view (enrolment) and seek to have them act to further generate support for the problem area as described (mobilisation).

These moments of translation should not be thought of in a linear relationship and indeed, the achievement of one moment might not lead to the other. The whole process may also be destabilised at any point via dissidence, betrayals and the emergence of controversies. Such moments can co-exist as the innovation journey progresses in different ways with different actors. We shall use this framework to assist in our explanation of the innovation journey of the Student Pulse smartphone app.

This project employed a mixed-method approach. This included an analysis of the first iteration of the app (v.1.0); considering its structure, content and usability, following prior STS informed approaches to the study of networked digital media applications (Light and McGrath, 2010). This was complimented with data from focus groups conducted with a group of student customers and interviews with the LSO marketing team and app developers.

Seven focus groups were held at LSO concerts in rooms in the Barbican Centre in London, between February and June 2012. The focus group participants were primarily self-selecting. Students purchasing discounted tickets were e-mailed and asked if they would be willing to participate and offered a £20 (GBP) incentive for doing so. The number of participants in the focus groups varied from 10 to 13, with a total sample of 81 students.

One-to-one interviews were also conducted with three members of the marketing staff at the LSO, and the CEO of the app development team. All interviews, both one-to-one and focus group, were transcribed and thematically coded. What therefore follows is an analysis and discussion of some of the key findings from this research.

Launching the Student Pulse app

The introduction of the Student Pulse mobile ticketing app by the LSO primarily aimed to easily and simply sell discounted tickets to an existing student audience in a more cost effective way, and to incentivise customers to attend more frequently through the use of an in-app reward scheme. A secondary aim was that it was hoped that by using technologies (smartphones and apps) popular with a wide young demographic (Bauer *et al.*, 2005), this might also help expand the LSO's current audience.

The app replaced an existing mobile text message student discounted ticketing scheme. With the text message system student "ambassadors" were recruited at (certain) university fresher's fairs in and around Greater London by LSO staff. Once recruited, the ambassadors then "sold" concert tickets to fellow students by replying to text message prompts from the LSO about forthcoming concerts. For doing this, the ambassadors received one free concert ticket per transaction.

However, from the perspective of the LSO, there were several problems with this system. First, the ambassadors were often only purchasing one ticket, effectively translating the arrangements into a "buy-one-get-one-free" scheme; second, the mobile telephone companies took a substantial cut of the ticket costs as a surcharge; and third, a text message greatly limits the amount of interaction or information that could be shared between the LSO and their target audience. Hence, the launch of the app was positioned by the LSO as a way to deal with a controversy to be resolved via a shift from traditional text message-based m-marketing to a more "interactive" and multi-featured branded app. The LSO's Digital Marketing Manager sought to problematise the new situation in an interview (4 January 2012):

The overall aim for the [new] student scheme is to remove some of the barriers to attendance for students by discounting tickets, incentivizing coming as a group of friends and increasing

repeat attendance through a structured loyalty scheme [...] The app is aimed at university and college students aged 18 plus, to roughly 25, although we have no upper age limit, based in and around London.

However, the new Student Pulse app was not launched without some initial controversy. Some of the student focus group members were reluctant to become enroled with the replacement of the existing text message system they were familiar with. In particular, some students questioned why the app was being introduced at all? For example, Participant 1 in Focus Group 7 (21 May 2012) stated:

FG7P1: I just think they [the LSO] want an app, cos it's just trendy.

Such a position, indicated early on in the project, suggests that possibly the assumptions made by the LSO regarding the power of a smartphone app, the digital media usage habits of their imagined student audience, and social media-oriented interactivity, were not sufficient interestment devices to secure enrolment and mobilisation. Moreover, those students who chose to become enroled, often experienced initial problems (as did LSO staff).

Upon purchasing the ticket(s) the app displayed a barcode, which the customer could print off or bring along on their mobile screen. The original idea was that these would be scanned by stewards on the doors of the Barbican; however, as the LSO's Digital Marketing Manager explained (4 January 2012):

We weren't able to operate the full system as we had originally conceived it at the Barbican concerts, because the Barbican Centre's auditing rules meant that each ticket buyer had to have a paper ticket for entry into the hall. Instead of scanning the barcodes and showing a verified screen to the stewards for entry, we had to hand each ticket buyer their corresponding official paper ticket after the barcode had been scanned at the designated desk. This added back in a layer of admin.

Hence, at the Barbican Centre students were still issued with paper tickets. Additionally, some other technical issues encountered included: reflective mobile phone screens that meant that sometimes they could not be scanned easily at the event to enable the issuing of a ticket, and also issues relating to a lack of WI-FI or adequate phone signal in the Barbican, which sometimes restricted customers and staff accessing ticket details. However, overall the introduction of the app was reported to have gone well. As Kodime's CEO stated in interview (5 August 2012):

[There were the] normal level[s] of technical fine-tuning, but surprisingly few real issues. For a prototype I think this was good.

The launch of the app did not follow a traditional "Diffusion of Innovation" model, which typically sees a new technology embraced by "early adopters", followed by a majority, and then later "laggards" (Rogers, 2003). Here the new technology was introduced by the LSO to replace an existing ticket purchasing process. Hence, existing customers of the text message system were largely forced by the LSO to engage with the app or else lose the ability to purchase discounted tickets via their smartphones. As stated by one participant in Focus Group 3 (15 March 2012):

FG3P3: You did [not] really get much choice did you? [laughs]. They took away the old text messaging [ticketing system]. It was use this or nothing [...] it [the app] is good though, it does what it's meant to and it is better than the text messaging [...] but you've got to use it really.

The focus groups indicated that the vast majority engaging with the app had previously used the text message system, and had moved to the new system. There was evidence of a small number of new customers, who had most commonly been introduced to the app via friends who were customers who had transferred from the text message system. Hence, there was relatively little evidence of “diffusion” here.

Overall, the Student Pulse app was successful at increasing sales. Data generated by the app indicates that during the launch period and up to August 2012, it had 265 registered customers, and of the 390 discounted tickets that were promoted to students over the four concerts (between March and July 2012), 318 (82 per cent) were sold. This compares with 175 ambassadors and sales of 67 per cent of available discounted tickets in the six-month period prior the launch of the app. The LSO and Kodime were very happy with the introduction and use of the app; in spite of some initial technical issues. However, this study was not longitudinal; therefore we cannot report if after our research period the app was picked up by any significant number of other student attendees at the LSO.

This shape of the sales data compared well with the shift in tone in respect of the app as it matured with the network. Though objections to the introduction of the app were quite vocal at first, in subsequent focus groups, the number of objections was considerably lower. As the students became familiar with the app overall, the mood shifted to one of general endorsement. The important point to make here is the idea of a general not complete endorsement. The students became enrolled, but only so far, as we shall explore further.

Welcome to Student Pulse

The app is downloadable from the App Store or Google Play. These continue to be the most popular channels for app delivery and this further acts as an interestment device in seeking to ease access to the new system, particularly for existing customers moving platforms, but also for newcomers. The icon for the app has a black background featuring a contrasting red image of a sound wave, clearly signifying the association with sound or music. The contrasting of red and black colours is used throughout the app, in an aim for clarity and consistency. The shade of red used was chosen to match the brand colour of the LSO (Pantone 200/RGB 204-0-51). This then conforms to the definition of a branded app as set out by Bellman *et al.* (2011, p. 191), as it “predominantly displays a brand identity [...] throughout the user experience”. In getting a customer to download and then use an app, the power and pull of a brand is very important (Kim and Adler, 2011). Colour here is used as an interestment device, in that it seeks to enrol existing ambassadors and other students on the basis of a continuation of a link with a brand they already identify with.

Once installed and opened the customer accesses the initial “Welcome” page (Figure 1). The Welcome page, as with the rest of the app, offers large and clear buttons, and enrolls the red colour theme of the LSO against a contrasting black background. All of the pages on the app use minimal text, adhering to the “golden rule” of app design of “when considering text for mobile usage [...] keep it as short as possible” (Boiano *et al.*, 2012, p. 3). This seemed popular with the students who participated in focus groups, as most stated that they were keen on the app remaining simple and not containing too much information or too many options. As a participant in Focus Group 4 (5 April 2012) suggested:

FG4P6: [...] I think the more options you have on the app the more liable it is to [...] just not work anymore. I'd rather have something that's minimally functional, reliable than something that has tons of options [...].

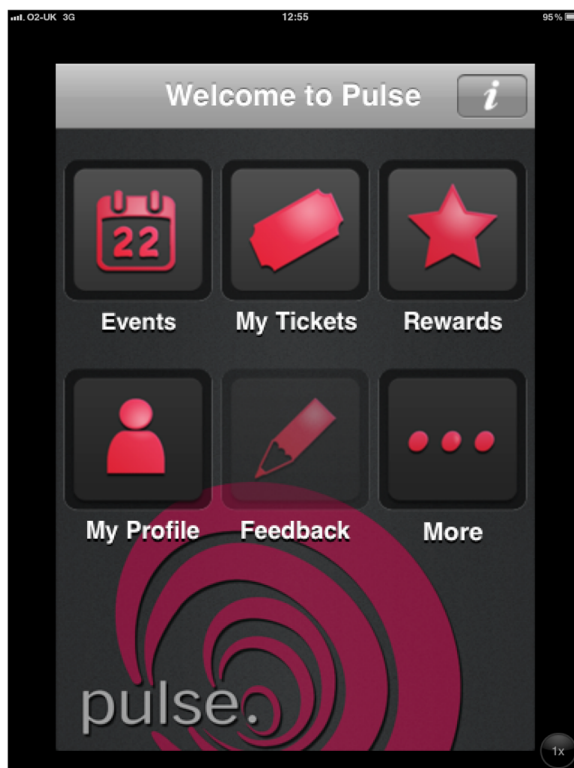


Figure 1.
Welcome page

The top right of the Welcome page features an “i” button (for information), which takes the customer through to a terms and conditions page; however, as has been shown with other studies (Wilson, 2007), none of our 81 focus group participants indicated that they had read the terms and conditions of the app. From the Welcome page the customer can select to create a profile. The profile is an obligatory passage point of the app as it mediates the ability to purchase tickets and earn reward points, and indeed, engage with any of the other functions.

The Events page

The “Events” page suggests upcoming concerts that students can buy discounted tickets for. Each event has basic information listed: the date, the name of the performance, the orchestra, the venue, a small thumbnail picture of the key performer, and the logo of the LSO. Again here the presence of the LSO logo reinforces the branded nature and authenticity of the app. By clicking on each event more information is provided on a new “Events Details” page (Figure 2).

Information on the Event Details pages is kept simple. These pages again confirm the title of the event, its date, location, but here seek to enrol customers via a few lines of text about the event, the price of the event, the number of reward points that can be earned by purchasing a ticket. At this stage the app also seeks to enrol customers by offering them the opportunity to listen to a short sound clip (of less than a minute) of a sample piece of music from the forthcoming concert. However, most of those

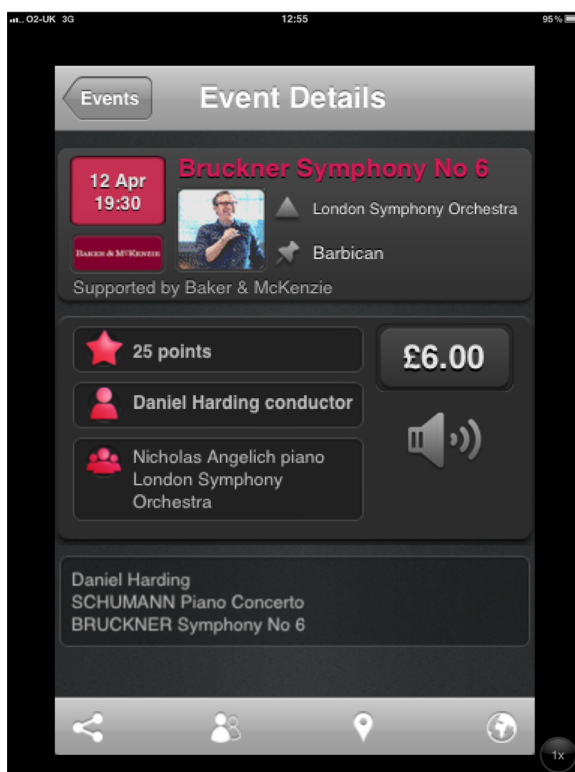


Figure 2.
Event Details page

interviewed had not listened to the sound clips, and mostly the participants were sceptical of the value of the sound clips; often suggesting you could not get a real sense of a piece of music from such a short excerpt. Hence, though audio may be popular in some apps with some audiences (Boiano *et al.*, 2012), this may not necessarily be the case with all audiences. Particularly, where it is felt that a short sound clip cannot adequately express the complexities of the wider piece of music.

Also on the Event Details page are links that lead the customer through to a number of other corresponding pages. These pages are aligned with LSOs problematisation of the situation; in that a smartphone app is perceived to offer a more informative and interactive experience to customers than text message-based approaches. Here, a link connects customers with information on the orchestra, similarly, another provides links to information on the venue, and another offers a referral to an in-app map that highlights the location of the venue. The other link on this page leads the customer to a number of “social networking” links: Facebook, Twitter and e-mail. Again, such a function is aligned with the LSO’s definition of how the problem of increasing audiences should be addressed via the enrolment of social media.

Social networking and audience interactivity

This link from the Events page (enroling the widely used symbol of three dots linked by two converging lines – see bottom left and corner of Figure 2) offers the customer the ability to construct an e-mail or publish a message to Facebook or Twitter in order

to publicise their activity with the app, and the associated event to a broader audience. It's aim is therefore to act as an instrument of mobilisation.

LSO marketing staff indicated that they were particularly optimistic about the ability to link the app with social networking sites. As LSO Marketing Manager stated:

What I'm most excited about is that because the app will be the link to Facebook and Twitter and you can send out information by email straight away from the app so the close connection with social network could be a huge potential (4 January 2012).

The enthusiasm of the LSO manager appears to be based upon their problematisation of the situation, which incorporated an assumption that young audiences want greater levels of "interactivity", whether digitally mediated or otherwise. This resonates with other research. For instance, Kolb (2000) suggests that younger people expect greater levels of interaction and stimulation from the cultural events they attend, be that either pop concerts, or even traditionally more sedate activities, such as going to museums.

However, this was not necessarily the case with the LSO audience members involved in our research. Only one of the participants indicated that they had engaged with the links to social networking sites, and the majority suggested that they would probably never use them. The main reason given centred on the exclusivity of knowledge and expertise required of classical music consumption. Several participants problematised classical music as something they would normally only discuss with those who shared their knowledge and interest in classical music; which was usually a small sub-grouping of their friends. A comment by a participant Focus Group 1 (9 February 2012) illustrates such a problematisation:

FG1P6: I think it would be quite difficult to talk about music to someone [...] it's uh so complex that I don't know what you would really talk about to someone who has no understanding of classical music. You would have nowhere really to start to talk about a particular piece or anything so it would be quite difficult.

Though Bennett *et al.* (2009, p. 92) suggest that "classical music remains important to elite groups for providing appropriate connections", it seems that these connections are here in-group (bonding) rather than outward facing (bridging) (see Putnam, 1995). And certainly in these focus groups there was evidence of exclusivity around discussing classical music.

Mobile technologies can be defined as inherently and necessarily social tools. As Mosavi and Kenarehfar (2013) suggest, online social networks are commonly used by communities to support and foster new membership. However, this did not appear to be so in this research. The majority of respondents were not interested in sharing their enthusiasm beyond an already existing in-group of classical music aficionados, and hence, social networking was not a feature most found useful or even desirable in this app (see Crawford *et al.*, 2014a). Thus, a controversy emerges between the problematisation of the situation as defined by the staff of the LSO, and that as defined by the customers in our study. This controversy somewhat destabilises the process of translation and limits the form and extent of mobilisation possible.

The focus groups also explored the idea that the app might be used to provide greater in-concert information and interactivity, such as providing notes on the music being played, performers, the ability to post messages during the concert or similar features. Once more, though many may assume that young people generally expect greater levels of interaction in their cultural experiences, this audience was strongly against the presence and enrolment of such features and functions. Again, the reasons

commonly given related to the culture of classical music attendance. Such as comments Focus Group 4 (5 April 2012):

FG4P1: you actually need to be able to concentrate for an extended period of time [...].

And also from a different participant in the same focus group:

FG5P4: I really don't think we should be encouraging people to mess about with their phones in concerts [...] *please* [...].

Small (1987) compares attending classical music to a Catholic mass, which requires attendees and performers alike to follow specific learnt and time-honoured patterns of behaviour. Small suggests that attending a classical music concert operates at two levels: the first being the surface level of the musical experience; but second, at a more fundamental level, where it plays out and reaffirms class cultures and boundaries. Though dress conventions may have relaxed within recent years, audiences are still expected to go through well established and culturally structured obligatory passage points, what Small (1987, p. 10) refers to as, patterns of "formal" and "muted" behaviour. The use of a smartphone during a performance was positioned as controversial in relation to extant culture and expected behaviour in respect of classical music audiences.

Generally the consensus was that most customers wanted a simple app, without too many features. Hence, the real benefits of the Student Pulse app may be simply in selling discounted tickets, rather than attempting to introduce too many new and interactive features. As was commented in Focus Group 1 (9 February 2012):

FG1P7: One of the biggest things is that you don't [normally] get this quality at this kind of tickets price.

And as Ahanonu *et al.* (2013) argues, smartphone apps do provided a useful and popular way of disseminating coupons, deals and discounts.

Rewarding loyalty

Returning to the Welcome page, from here the customer can also select "My Tickets", which takes them to the tickets they have already purchased for forthcoming concerts. The "Contact" page provides links to allow the customer to contact the app developers for technical support. Finally, the "Rewards" button links through to a list of rewards (Figure 3) that can be claimed by purchasing tickets to concerts.

The reward scheme was one of the most popular features on the app and most focus group participants welcomed this new reward system. As stated by one participant in Focus Group 3 (15 March 2012):

FG3P3: I thought the rewards were really good. The fact that you can get 8GB iPod Nano if you save up enough or [...] then I've already got a 100 points and I've only been to three concerts, so it's [...] you get quite a lot for the amount of concerts you attend. And so £60 Amazon vouchers is pretty much the same price of the tickets in things that you can spend on useful, so it's pretty much free going to all these concerts if you make use of the rewards the right way.

As Mosavi and Kenarehfar (2013, p. 75) suggest "one of the main aims of building and enhancing brand communities is to make customers loyal to the brand". Pitts *et al.* (2013) in their research on the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO) noted

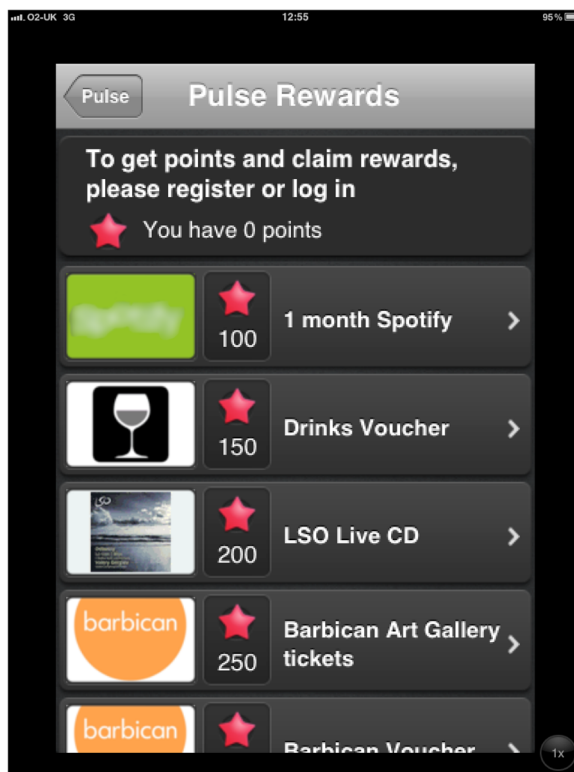


Figure 3.
Reward page

a high level of local audience loyalty. As with Pitts' work on other regional orchestras (such as, Pitts, 2005), the audience at the CBSO are likely to be primarily drawn from the local area, and therefore may feel a greater sense of loyalty to what is their local orchestra. However, in our research nearly half of the participants indicated that they did not normally live in Greater London outside of university term time. Along with the much wider range of orchestral music and other cultural events available in London, a student profile that is likely to have a good proportion of transient members, means that the LSO has to do much more to ensure "brand loyalty" than many regional orchestras. In an increasingly time-pressured world, where consumers have a multitude of places and events to spend their precious time and money, an app like this provides customers with easily and readily accessible events information. Also the app-based reward scheme enroled customers in more frequent concert attendance and through their engagement with the app, mobilised them to generate and maintain customer loyalty.

Engaging new audiences

Kolb (2005) suggests that cultural events need to engage with two potentially new types of audience, which she refers to as "cultural consumers" and "cultural tourists". Kolb (2005, p. 42) argues that cultural life has become less hierarchical and more of a "cultural buffet"; where audiences have a much wider choice of what to spend their (increasingly precious and limited) leisure time doing. The cultural consumer, Kolb

suggests, wants instant gratification. They want access to leisure activities that they can dip into, which will engage them, entertain them, and preferably those they can do with friends and family. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this app was, or could be, an effective way of engaging with a new (“cultural consumer”) audience for classical music.

Of those in our focus groups, only three out of 81 suggested that they had previously not been to a concert at the LSO, and only one of these had never attended a live classical music concert before. Significantly, none of these first time attendees suggested that the app played any role in them attending this time. The first time attendees reported that they already had an interest in listening to (recorded) classical music and had been encouraged to come the LSO by a friend who already attended concerts there. When asked if they felt the app might encourage a new audience, most were very sceptical of this. As comments by Participant 10 in Focus Group 2 (9 February 2012) reflect:

FG2P10: I don't think you have much chance of [...] interesting people [...] into coming to concerts who aren't already interested in [classical] music, because I think that interest comes from a much younger age.

Again, and as discussed elsewhere in more detail (Crawford *et al.*, 2014b), social patterns shaping classical music audienceship restrict the potential to translate this interest of others.

Kolb (2005) also suggests that it is important that cultural organisations are aware of the potential of marketing events to “cultural tourists”. Too often cultural organisations only consider their local market, while Kolb highlights, that visitors to a region or country often have a number of reasons for wanting to attend local cultural events, such as to experience local cultures or to simply occupy their time. This seems particularly applicable to our participants, as stated above, nearly half of our participants suggested that they did not normally live in Greater London.

Our experience whilst conducting the study, is that the LSO has been very successful in attracting students not permanently based in London. However, it is important to bear in mind that many non-local students will, upon completing their studies, leave the area. Hence, they are unlikely (individually) to become long-term attendees, but this is an audience that is likely to replenish itself with each year's intake of new university students.

However, if a cultural organisation is catering to a sizable “cultural tourist” audience, as at the LSO, there are further practical implications to consider, particularly if many of those “tourists” are international visitors. For example, from some of the international students there were concerns about the requirement to create a new UK PayPal and (for those using iPhones) App Store accounts to download the app and purchase tickets.

Usually only one App Store account can be actively engaged with via a particular device at any one time; hence, if customers set up a new UK App Store account to access the app, they then run the risk that they may not be able to use older apps they purchased in their home country. Hence, the need to enrol the UK versions of the App Store and PayPal did destabilise the translation process somewhat for some international students.

Recommendations for managers: successes and limitations of the app

In its primary aim the Student Pulse app has been successful. It allows customers to purchase discounted tickets in an easy and efficient manner. The app also provides useful information, which customers can access and navigate with the app. For time-pressured

customers, having this information (literally) to hand, and the ability to simply and easily purchase discounted tickets was highly appealing. For the orchestra, the app allowed them to sell tickets directly to customers, remove intermediaries and their added costs, and implement a reward scheme. The reward scheme particularly seeks to generate brand loyalty – which is important in the very overcrowded cultural market place of central London. And, since this research was conducted, the app has now been expanded to incorporate student discount ticketing for ten orchestras across Greater London.

However, many of the features that the app developers and the LSO thought that students might want, were not necessarily of interest to these customers. For example, very few participants stated that they had listened to the sound clips, or used the social networking links. Though previous research would seem to suggest that younger audiences want greater levels of “interactivity” in their cultural experiences, it is important to recognise that not all audiences are the same.

From this research there is also little evidence that the app could be used to engage with a wider audience beyond the LSO’s existing profile and demographics. All the participants in the focus groups already had an interest in classical music, and in most cases, already regularly attended to LSO. This is important, as an app aimed at serving both an existing audience as well as being a mechanism for expanding it, may be conflictual, and reduce the usefulness of the app to both markets. While new audiences might want added levels of information, guides and links into a supportive community, this research suggests, at least in this case, that most existing customers did not value or necessarily want these features.

This case also suggests that app developers and cultural organisations need to be more aware of the practicalities of introducing a new mobile ticketing system. The app, though largely successful, did encounter some simple stumbling blocks; such as, difficulty scanning the screen, the lack of WI-FI in the concert venue, and international visitors having to use a different PayPal or App Store account. It is also important that all parties involved are aware of the implications of what they are doing. For example, in this case, the concert venue was not willing to allow the orchestra to implement its plans to stop issuing paper tickets.

Conclusion

Smartphone ownership in the UK is at almost saturation point, and the rise and popularity of apps since the launch of the Apple App Store and Google Play has been phenomenal. In particular, for marketing purposes, apps appear to have several key advantages, as they are largely pulled by the customer, rather than pushed onto them. Apps also appear to be popular with a younger and affluent demographic and allow organisations greater levels of engagement with audiences. However, there is still relatively little research on the role of apps in mobile marketing, and particularly in respect of arts and cultural organisations. This research is significant as, drawing on the sociology of translation, it elaborates upon the innovation journey of a branded app, produced for the audience of a major British cultural institution, the LSO. From research conducted with over 80 participants, it is clear that this app has proved an overall success. Since the introduction of the app more student customers have been mobilised to sign up to the scheme and buy tickets than in the six months prior to the apps launch. However, though it seems that apps are the new “gold rush” for many companies, it is important to account for a diversity of requirements. Different customers may want different things from sometimes similar technologies. In this case, it is not multiple features, greater interactivity or detailed information, but simply the ability to buy cheap tickets.

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Further reading

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