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Redefining rural marketing:

Insights from touring theatre

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Redefining rural marketing: Insights from touring theatre

Abstract

There remains little academic consensus on a definition of rural marketing, and as a concept, rural marketing has therefore struggled to establish its own vocabulary and ideas. Modi (2009) argues that rural marketing should be defined in terms of the impact it has on the developmental of rural people. This paper builds on this developmental concept of rural marketing by exploring the touring theatre sector and illustrating how theatre spaces and audiences differ fundamentally in urban and rural communities.

The paper reviews the literature on rural touring theatre and applies it to rural marketing. It also analyses the results of audience questionnaires and a series of audience interviews carried out with rural theatre-goers in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. The paper illustrates how the definition of rural marketing can be further developed by analysing audience reactions to rural theatre and reviewing case studies of best practice for marketing touring theatre productions. This primary and secondary research reveals the tangible benefits of authentic rural marketing and confirms Modi's (2009) contention that successful rural marketing should have a positive impact on rural people.

The paper concludes that touring arts organizations and rural marketers working in other sectors should adjust their marketing strategies and activities to communicate more authentically and effectively with rural audiences. Finally, it uses the insights gained from touring theatre to propose a new definition of rural marketing.

Keywords

rural marketing; rural touring; arts marketing; theatre; audiences.

Introduction

As a concept, rural marketing has failed to establish its own vocabulary and ideas (Modi 2009). This is partly because many marketers and theorists have tended to apply the same theory and frameworks as mainstream marketing; and partly because a widely accepted definition of rural marketing has remained elusive. Jha (1988) visualized rural marketing as the flow of goods between rural and urban areas, while Kotler et al. (2007) define rural marketing as any marketing activity in which one dominant participant is from a rural area. Modi (2009: 100) argues that rural marketing should be defined in terms of the impact it has on the developmental of rural people, not merely as the flow of goods towards them, and proposes the following definition: ‘any marketing activity whose net developmental impact on rural people is positive’.

The primary aim of this paper is to explore how marketing touring theatre productions to rural communities differs from traditional venue-based marketing and to use the findings of this research to redefine rural marketing. The paper will therefore review the literature on rural marketing and touring theatre and use examples of best practice from rural touring theatre to develop the theory, frameworks and concepts of rural marketing. It will then analyse some primary research carried out with rural audiences in the Scottish Highlands and Islands and compare the findings of this against the secondary research. Its ultimate objective is to revisit the extant definitions of rural marketing and propose a new and workable definition, which will be meaningful not just for academics, but for rural consumers and audiences and the myriad companies that seek to engage with them all over the world.

Methodology

The paper will provide a critical review of the literature on rural arts and touring theatre and apply it to the emerging field of rural marketing. Desk research of grey literature and a

comprehensive literature review highlighted key authors, reports and case studies in the area of rural touring theatre, and the study therefore made use of a diverse body of literature ranging from books and journal articles to seminar proceedings, research reports and provocation papers.

The primary research methods employed comprised a combination of different quantitative and qualitative techniques, including audience questionnaires, responsive interviews (Rubin and Rubin 2005) and participant observation. The observation involved the author observing National Theatre of Scotland's live performances of Brian Friel's *Molly Sweeney* and Nicola McCartney's adaptation of S.R. Harris's children's novel *A Sheep Called Skye* in Dervaig Village Hall on the island of Mull in November 2007. In total, 20 audience questionnaires were analysed from performances at Craignish Village Hall and 18 short interviews were conducted with audience members at Dervaig Village Hall immediately after the performances. Participants comprised eight women, three men and seven children. The paper ultimately draws on these audience responses to inform and progress the existing theory, concept and definition of rural marketing.

Engaging with rural audiences

The theatre Studies literature presents some rich insights into the benefits of authentic rural marketing. Experimental and politically motivated theatre companies such as France's Théâtre du Soleil and Scotland's 7:84 have led the way in engaging with rural communities and taken issues of class struggle and rurality into the heart of their respective missions. As the founder of 7:84 put it: 'One of the great services theatre can perform for the people of any country or region or town or village is to be the instrument of authentic democracy, or at the very least to push the community as near to authentic democracy as has yet been achieved' (McGrath 2002: 133). Emphasising the duty of theatre to engage with all audiences, McGrath goes on to assert that 'theatre must use all possible means to reach every citizen in the demos,

and not itself act as an excluding agency, whether by the price of its tickets [...] its location or its impenetrability' (p. 138). There are significant implications here for rural marketers regarding the challenges of authenticity and accessibility, and these will be explored in due course through an analysis of the impact of rural touring on the four key elements of the marketing mix.

Theatre has been described as a sociological public event that begins and ends with the spectator (Bennett 1997; Elam 1980). Like marketing, it is ideally a two way process of interactive communication, and audience focussed companies are increasingly involving spectators in the creative process, their equivalent of product development. Exceptional companies such as Théâtre du Soleil have been doing this for decades, and the company's particular use of rural communities provides some valuable insights into the benefits of effective rural marketing. One of the benefits of developing productions in rural communities has been described as improving 'the clarity of their improvisations in front of peasants, a non-theatre-going group. [...] Through this practice the creators [...] learn from direct experience what is wanted by the audience rather than impose what they think the audience needs or enjoys' (Webb 1980: 213). This process could partly be described as simple method acting to facilitate an authentic performance, since 'the audience must recognize and accept the emotional and social veracity of what is happening on stage' (McGrath 2002: 138). But the benefits run much deeper than this, because the target market plays a role in developing the end product and is therefore pre-engaged in the ensuing production, making it both more attractive and more authentic.

There has been a revived interest in recent years on the concept of authenticity, both in the Cultural Studies literature and in the field of consumer behaviour. For example, in their qualitative study of museum visitors negotiating replica artefacts, Hede and Thyne (2010) call on cultural organizations to consider the role of authenticity in consumption situations to

mitigate against consumer dissonance. They advocate the use of scene setting to authenticate the consumer experience and suggest that this can be enhanced through freedom and imagination. In a similar vein, Pine and Gilmore (2008) urge marketers to create authentic brands and places, where consumers can anticipate and experience products as they actually are. The work of companies such as 7:84 and Théâtre du Soleil highlight the tangible benefits of authentic engagement with audiences and indicate that rural touring and marketing generate some unique opportunities to circumvent the dissonance often experienced by urban audiences in alien venues presenting unfamiliar companies exploring inauthentic themes and ideas.

Arts marketing and artistic creation have traditionally been conceived as independent tasks (Boorsma and Chiaravalloti 2010), but audience engagement initiatives of this nature highlight how reductive this false separation can be and indicate the need for a more integrated approach to rural marketing and product creation. As Boorsma (2006) points out, in the post-modern, relational view of the arts, audiences are increasingly considered as co-producers rather than passive consumers, and marketing clearly has a key role to play in redefining the value of the arts experience to audiences, partly by articulating and optimizing their role as co-creators. As we have seen, this is particularly true in rural communities, where co-creation techniques have provided fresh insights into product and audience development. Co-creation is a trend that could translate well into other industries who market to rural markets, so rural marketers working in other sectors should therefore consider carefully what lessons they could learn from arts organizations regarding deeper engagement with their markets.

Adding value

From a pure marketing perspective, the practice of co-creation fulfils the function of maximising consumer satisfaction and consumer value (Drucker 1958). The process of developing a play in situ can stoke audiences' anticipation and assist their decoding process, which in turn can heighten the play's impact: 'The spectator comes to the theatre as a member of an already constituted interpretive community and also brings a horizon of expectations shaped by the pre-performance elements' (Bennett 1997: 139). But it is not just the pre-performance elements that constitute the marketing process. As Matarasso (2004b: 10-11) points out, there is something fundamentally different about a rural performance itself, which makes it more intimate, communal and social, and ultimately therefore a more powerful and authentic experience for performers and audiences alike:

'Rural touring is not a poor substitute for the kind of experience offered by urban arts venues. It is qualitatively different in several respects. The facilities may not be as good, but the intimacy of the space, the opportunity to meet the performers, the fact that most of the audience know each other – these and other factors give a village hall show a unique power. [...] Both artists and audiences consistently feel that such shows are exciting, memorable and have a quality which is distinctly valuable.'

So rural touring impacts on all the elements of the marketing mix, with rural performances themselves becoming powerful marketing tools for subsequent events. Again, there are clearly lessons to be learned here for rural marketers working in non arts-based sectors.

The distinctive nature of rural marketing

It has been argued that rural marketing needs to develop its own theory, concepts and frameworks (Modi 2009). The experience of rural touring theatre companies indicates that

rural marketing is indeed a fundamentally different process. In his introduction to his seminal play, *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*, McGrath (1974: xxi) provides a clear insight into the idiosyncrasies of rural marketing: ‘Small audiences in Stromness and Kirkwall, the two main towns. On our third, and last night, in Orphir, a small village in between, suddenly hundreds. Apparently nobody in Orkney goes to anything until someone else has gone and reported on it. A curious sensation at the box-office, waiting for a whole island full of people who are all waiting for each other.’ This reflection exemplifies the difference between hype and buzz, which have been defined as follows: “Hype is intended to promote, whereas buzz often is truthful [...] and therefore higher in credibility. And while hype takes time, effort, and expense to circulate, buzz can move like wildfire through a community” (Sayre 2008: 233). The example also testifies to the power of word of mouth marketing in rural communities, which can clearly make or break a performance. But as Fraser (2004) points out, despite clear evidence that word of mouth marketing can be invaluable for experiential products, it is woefully neglected in the marketing literature. There is an opportunity here for rural marketing to push word of mouth marketing back up the agenda, especially considering the rise of social media marketing.

In urban venues, marketing functions in a fundamentally different way. Arts marketing manuals counsel marketers to say the right things to the right people in the right way to encourage them to experience the artistic product by buying a ticket, which itself is not simply a receipt for money exchanged but an important ‘proxy-product’ (Diggle 1994: 50). Diggle goes on to describe the role of the box office as converting potential audiences from passive customers to active buyers, by providing customer services such as information on the production and the relationship between the ticket price and the available seating options. Urban venues need to segment their target audiences, and design and implement an integrated communications campaign to promote each specific production (Sayre 2008). To achieve this, they can draw on a diverse range of tactics, ranging from personal selling via their

increasingly sophisticated CRM systems to social media marketing and even mass advertising.

In the rural venue, things are very different. The “box office” is generally set up in the porch of a village hall half an hour before the production begins, so there is no CRM system and no time or space for conversion or advanced selling. The ‘proxy-product’ is generally either non-existent or at best maybe a raffle ticket; and the “seating options” usually comprise hard wooden chairs towards the front, middle or back of a rectangular hall and distributed on a first-come-first served basis. Personal selling can be extremely effective, but it will usually involve a voluntary promoter or two knocking on doors to tell their neighbours about the show. Social media marketing is unlikely to work effectively due to poor broadband connections and the ageing populations in many rural communities; and mass advertising in a village of a few hundred people often takes the form of a handful of posters.

The literature on rural touring provides some useful insights into promotion. Hamilton and Scullion’s research (2004) revealed the significance of the poster in selling a show in a rural location, with some promoters claiming that posters accounted for up to 90% of ticket sales. A related finding was that the style and content of posters were also significant and that posters that worked in urban venues did not necessarily work in rural settings. An example provided by a promoter was a poster for a Glasgow based theatre company’s production of a play called *Circus*. When the local promoters realised that everyone thought it was a circus show, they had to stick banners over the posters saying ‘This is theatre!’ (Hamilton and Scullion 2004: 55). Another variance seemed to be that rural audiences objected more strongly to ‘offensive’ images and copy than their urban counterparts (*ibid.*).

However, Hamilton and Scullion’s survey reported conflicting evidence on the relative effectiveness of different promotional tools, with a promoter from Dumfries and Galloway

indicating that 82% of audiences were influenced by the local paper, followed by 21% for word of mouth, with posters, flyers and radio coverage being the least effective tools (Hamilton and Scullion 2004). Press releases formed another area of variance between urban and rural marketing, with local promoters complaining that city-based companies are not trained to write copy for rural audiences, focussing for example too much on the company and the creative team and not enough on local stories and whether or not audiences will 'enjoy it' (Hamilton and Scullion 2004: 55). Given that most rural touring is undertaken by urban organizations, this is a significant problem, and the implications for rural marketers in general are that promotional tactics need to be tailored specifically to meet the needs and expectations of rural markets

Theatre was defined earlier as a sociological public event that begins and ends with the spectator, and the nature and context of this event is another significant differentiator between rural and urban venues. Hamilton and Scullion (2004: 58) claim that 'arts events take place within a social and economic network' and that 'the position of any individual in the community will, therefore, have an impact on their attitude towards attending events'. Their findings indicate that issues here might include an audience member's relationship with the promoter or with other members of the community who are likely to attend. They might be concerned whether they will 'fit in' and whether they will be able to see and hear properly in their poorly equipped village hall. There are clearly significant implications here for personal selling in rural markets. The motivations of rural audiences to attend a theatre production also varied from those of urban audiences. Research carried out with local audiences in Dumfries and Galloway revealed that the primary motivators for attendance were entertainment and a social night out, while focus groups credited theatre with the ability to contribute to the quality of village life (Morris Hargreaves McIntyre 2003). This contrasts starkly with urban audiences, whose drivers for attendance were primarily concerned with edutainment and emotional impact (Walmsley 2011). This adds to the existing evidence suggesting that rural

marketers need to tailor their promotional copy and imagery to meet the specific needs of rural communities and consumers.

The rural audience's voice

The findings of the primary research confirmed these essential differences between rural and urban marketing, and unearthed further examples of good practice, providing fresh insights into the concept and definition of rural marketing. The primary research comprised questionnaires and short audience interviews conducted during an extensive rural tour by the National Theatre of Scotland in 2007. The tour is an annual event in which the national organization tours an ensemble company of around six actors to rural venues all over Scotland; it generally includes two to three small-scale productions with actors cross-cast across the productions. The touring company usually arrives in a village the day before the first performance to erect the set and prepare the venue, while often delivering an accompanying workshop in a local school or community venue. The company tours its own rig, lighting and sound equipment, and usually performs productions in the round, in the middle of tiered seating blocks specially designed for small-scale venues. This reflects its manifesto commitment to create small-scale work and tour it all around the country:

‘National Theatre of Scotland has no building but instead will tour work to venues large and small all around Scotland, from Shetland in the north to Dumfries and Galloway in the south. We will produce our own work and collaborate with other companies and individual artists, creating large-scale productions through to theatre specifically made for the smallest venues’ (National Theatre of Scotland 2011).

National Theatre of Scotland launched to the public in February 2006. As witnessed in its manifesto, it has always had a clear focus on rural communities and touring, and in this respect, it follows in a long and proud tradition of Scottish companies like 7:84, which get out

on the road and tour their work the length and breadth of the country. It should be acknowledged that Scotland is a highly rural nation, with rural areas accounting for nearly 90% of its land and housing 30% of its people (Donald Dewar, cited in Scullion 2004). This means that 70% of the population live in urban centres, concentrated around the so-called central belt around and in between Edinburgh and Glasgow. As arts funding tends to follow people, this inevitably means that most of the major theatre companies are based in urban centres, and only a few of these include rural touring as a core part of their remit. Since the advent of the National Theatre of Scotland, the number of core funded touring companies has been drastically reduced, so while rural audiences have not necessarily witnessed a reduction in provision, there is certainly less variety and multiplicity. This in turn means that with notable exceptions like Mull Theatre, rural touring is undertaken predominantly by urban-based organizations, supported by a network of largely voluntary rural promoters. So Scotland provides a particularly suitable test-bed for exploring the challenges and opportunities presented by rural touring and marketing.

The interviews with rural audience members revealed an overwhelming sense of gratitude and a delight at the experience of seeing their village hall transformed. One local man commented specifically on the quality of the core and augmented product: 'What they achieved in our hall was fantastic with the seating and the rigs and things [...]. It was really head and shoulders above what we are used to; it was fantastic, we're very grateful.

We're so lucky to have seen that here [...] some of the best theatre I've ever seen, anywhere.'

The interviews revealed an unanticipated mood of collective gratitude, almost as if the local community didn't feel worthy to host their national theatre company. One audience member expressed her gratitude as follows: 'The lighting, the acting, the set ... we're just extremely lucky here in Dervaig that you actually brought it, so wonderful, thank you.' There was an interesting disconnect between the local audience, who appeared to be pleasantly surprised that their national company would make the effort to tour to their island, and the theatre

company itself, whose staff regarded the tour as a vital part of their core remit. A group of mothers who were interviewed after the children's production *A Sheep Called Skye* confirmed Morris Hargreaves McIntyre's (2003) finding that theatre is perceived to enhance the quality of village life: 'It's a great opportunity for kids in small communities to get to see things like this because they don't often do that.' In cultural policy terms, this statement highlights the inequity of cultural provision between urban and rural areas, and it confirms the importance of the role of national touring organizations. In its early days, National Theatre of Scotland made much of its aspiration to be 'national with a small n' and the audience feedback in Mull indicated that this objective had been achieved.

The results of the analysis of the audience questionnaires from Craignish – a small village with around 400 residents in a west coast peninsula of Argyll – closely reflected the findings of the Mull interviews, with respondents again focussing on the quality of the product, the transformation of their local space and the relative lack of cultural provision in their area. One respondent summarized these issues as follows: 'First class acting. Great to see something of such a high caliber locally. Please could we have some more plays like this?' Another respondent again picked out the company's creative use of the space: 'Wonderful transformation of a village hall. Superb performances.' Comments like this one pointed towards an emerging theme regarding the different expectations and responses of rural audiences: it seems that for many rural audience members, the core product, the production itself, is almost secondary to the augmented product of the lighting, seats and ambience, which work together to transform a familiar space into something different and almost magical.

This sense of magic was palpable when observing the audiences entering their hall and seeing it transformed for the first time. This finding reflects previous research into the impact of the

arts, which delineated the environment and context of an artistic experience as a key enabler of impact (White and Hede 2008). It was expressed in the simplest terms by one respondent as follows: ‘Huge impact of such fine acting in ideal small space.’ This audience acknowledgement of the enhancing role of their village halls is reminiscent of Massey’s (2005) description of space as ‘the product of social relations [...] multiple in its formations and negotiations, and as always in the making’ (Oliver and Walmsley 2011: 5). Matarasso’s (2004b) claim that rural arts experiences have a ‘unique power’ and can be more intimate, communal and social than urban arts events was discussed earlier in the paper, and this hypothesis has been confirmed by both the primary and secondary research.

Discussion and implications

Chong (2010) ponders whether marketers are perceived as image promoters or value creators, and the notion of the potential of marketing to add value goes to the heart of the debate about the role and definition of rural marketing. McGrath (2002) argues that theatre has a key role to play in giving a voice to minorities and the excluded, and the role of the arts in celebrating local cultures and promoting and preserving local identities has been well documented (Matarasso 1996; Matarasso 1997). These issues are especially acute in remote rural areas such as the Scottish Highlands and Islands. In this sense, marketing to rural communities can be perceived almost as a duty, at least for publically funded organizations, which exist partly to implement cultural policy (Matarasso 2004a). The manifesto and related activities of National Theatre of Scotland provide a clear acknowledgement of this public duty – which is, of course, especially resonant for a national organization, and it is perhaps partly for this reason that the newly formed National Theatre Wales has followed the Scottish model so closely.

One of the key benefits of this innovative national model is that it forces organizations to constantly seek out new and creative places and spaces in which to present their work. From a marketing perspective, this presents significant challenges of branding, distribution, promotion and customer service (Walmsley 2010). But on the positive side, it means that these companies meet their audiences on the audience's terms and in familiar surroundings, circumventing the widely acknowledged barrier to attendance of arts venues intimidating new and unfamiliar customers (Kotler and Scheff 1997) and reducing the risk of dissonance (Hede and Thyne 2010). The analysis of the audience reactions to National Theatre of Scotland's rural touring revealed the tangible value that touring productions can bring to rural communities and indicated that arts organizations and their marketers can indeed be perceived as value creators if the marketing mix is right.

The impact of rural touring on the marketing mix

The paper has posited the idea that rural touring has a profound impact on all the elements of the marketing mix. So let's now take these elements in turn and explore the implications of authentic rural marketing for the marketing mix. In terms of the product, we have seen in the example of Théâtre du Soleil the benefits of developing new work in rural communities.

Developing a product in a rural market can help a company understand the needs of its customers and create a better, more authentic experiential product. It should go without saying that products designed for rural markets should reflect their values, interests, needs and expectations; but they should ideally even be developed not just for them, but with and even by them. A good example of this is National Theatre of Scotland's adaptation of *A Sheep Called Skye*, which is set in a rural location and explores rural issues such as tourism, wanderlust and local pride with which rural audiences can readily identify and empathise. A further implication for product and experiential marketing in rural markets is that in contexts

such as live events, the secondary or augmented product may well be as important as the core product, especially where the transformation of local spaces is involved.

Rural products also need to be priced strategically to attract the optimal market. Sayre (2008) identifies setting price objectives as the first step of a pricing initiative and when marketing to a rural market, companies need to be particularly clear about what they are hoping to achieve. In the case of national, subsidised and non-profit organizations, there is clearly also a social duty role to fulfil. The case study analysis of National Theatre of Scotland's rural touring illustrated the company's commitment to rural audiences and this is reflected in its pricing strategy. For example, full price tickets to see Molly Sweeney in Dervaig Village Hall in 2007 cost £8, whereas full price tickets to see the company's production of *The Bacchae* at Glasgow's Theatre Royal the same year cost £21.50. National Theatre of Scotland uses its public funding to subsidise its rural tours in order to fulfil its mission. It should be noted here that rural touring makes no commercial sense: the company's rural tours incur significant deficits due to the high fixed costs (namely wages, set, travel and accommodation) and the low income from reduced price ticket sales to small audiences in small venues. This generic problem of rural touring provides an excellent illustration of Baumol's cost disease theory, whereby wage costs increase steadily without any corresponding rise in productivity (Towse 2010). It also provides a solid justification for Boorsma and Chiaravalloti's (2010) call for artistic organizations to evaluate their marketing strategies according to their mission and artistic objectives, rather than relying on purely financial or other quantitative objectives.

The importance and indeed the 'unique power' of space were acknowledged in both the primary and secondary research, and this clearly has profound implications for the place element of the marketing mix – i.e. where a product is sold and experienced. Challenges for rural marketers in this domain include the loss of control of the point of sale, which was illustrated in the earlier discussion on proxy products and CRM. So just as touring theatre

companies need to work with local promoters and volunteers, other companies could learn from this the need to sell via local agents who can adopt more personal selling techniques.

As noted earlier, the issue of where the product is experienced also presents challenges to rural marketers regarding branding and customer service; but it also offers significant opportunities. In the performing arts sector, the rural venue can be a key differentiator from the urban product. This research has shown that rural audiences enjoy seeing their village halls transformed by visiting companies and that smaller spaces can provide a more intimate, more authentic social setting. Whereas in urban venues, audiences are invited into theatre companies' spaces, in rural venues the converse is true. Companies could capitalise on this by engaging with their audiences on a more intimate level, facilitating conversations with performers or even following 7:84's revered tradition of ending the night with a social event like a ceilidh.

Regarding promotion, the logical conclusion from the secondary research is that as with products, promotional tactics and tools should be developed and designed specifically for, with and by rural markets. There is a need here for continuing professional development to train urban marketers to target rural markets more effectively in their imagery, copy and media campaigns. The literature review also revealed the particular power of word of mouth marketing in rural communities. The implications of this are that rural marketers should channel their resources to enhance word of mouth to generate buzz. Obvious tactics here include the recruitment and development of local ambassadors and the employment of social media. But strategies of this nature obviously require resources, and it is therefore unlikely that significant developments in rural marketing will be achieved without some form of rural investment. In an era of squeezed public spending and reduced regional development, the chances of this appear to be slim. There is certainly a role here for further research and advocacy (Matarasso 2004a).

Marketing as authentic engagement

The brief case studies of acknowledged experts in rural touring like 7:84, Théâtre du Soleil and National Theatre of Scotland have provided tangible examples of the benefits of authentic rural marketing. They have illustrated the need for rural marketers to engage in an authentic way with rural communities and to adapt their marketing mix accordingly. It is no coincidence that all three companies place rural audiences at the heart of their missions and tailor their core activities and processes to fit these audiences' needs; and they understand these needs by getting out of their home cities and talking to these audiences face to face. There are significant implications here for national cultural policy. If McGrath (2002) is right in his assertion that theatre should give a voice to minorities and the excluded, then arts funders and policy-makers have a responsibility to listen to and support the rural voice. As Jancovich (2011) argues, participatory budgeting could play an important role here – in this case by ensuring that the needs of rural audiences are met more effectively and that funds are not diverted unfairly towards urban centres of population.

Conclusions

This paper has illustrated how and why marketing rural theatre is a fundamentally different process from marketing theatre in traditional urban venues. It has also demonstrated that touring theatre can provide rich insights into the concept and nature of rural marketing and that by applying case studies of touring theatre productions to the limited literature on rural marketing, the theory and concept of rural marketing can be developed.

It should be acknowledged that the small samples and the predominantly qualitative methods employed in the research limit the general applicability of the findings. However, the research has supported many findings in the Marketing and Theatre Studies literature and identified emerging themes and principles that could be further explored in a quantitative study. Future research might also benefit from exploring the experience of rural marketers and audiences in other predominantly rural regions such as India and sub-Saharan Africa, both of which have proud traditions of rural touring theatre, particularly for social and educational purposes. The findings of the current study were inevitably biased by their unique focus on Scotland and France.

According to Modi (2009: 100): ‘The future of rural marketing as a useful subdiscipline within the marketing discipline lies in the study of how marketing can be used to enhance the development of rural people. A stream of research on how marketing could promote the well-being of rural people needs to be initiated in this regard’. The case examples provided by touring theatre companies illustrate how effective rural marketing can meet the needs, exceed the expectations and promote the well-being of rural people. But they also illustrate that the benefits of rural marketing are not limited to development. The traditional focus on the development needs of rural communities has come from the dominance of commercial rural marketing; the legacy of non-profit rural marketing tends to encompass a wider range of social and intrinsic benefits which must be reflected in any viable definition of the concept.

The review of the literature and case examples from the theatre sector has revealed the unique power of rural spaces and the tangible benefits of authentic rural marketing. It has also highlighted skills gaps which affect urban marketers’ ability to effectively target rural markets and suggested lessons that could be learned by rural marketers working in other fields. But while the case studies confirm Modi’s contention that successful rural marketing

should have a positive impact on rural people, the findings of the paper suggest the need to broaden out the existing definitions of rural marketing. This paper therefore adapts Kotler and Armstrong's (2010) definition of marketing to propose the following new definition: Rural marketing determines the specific needs and desires of rural communities and works in tandem with these communities to deliver their needs effectively and promote their general wellbeing.

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