

Opera participants' perceptions of brand resonance

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Abstract

Brand resonance is a marketing concept under-explored in the performing arts context. This paper responds by analysing focus group findings from a large Opera group, "Big Opera"^[1] on how decision-makers can enhance brand resonance. Opera patronage was dwindling before the COVID-19 pandemic, which was further crystallized during the pandemic. As the performing arts sector tries to revive, it is useful to understand how brand resonance concepts can be used to reinvigorate patronage at the opera. A qualitative study of four opera focus groups, which included 24 participants with varying levels of attendance was conducted to examine brand resonance. The study reveals that when customers have brand attachment and love, developed through intense experiences at the opera, facilitated by engagement with the brand, and community, then brand loyalty develops for the opera by intention to re-purchase. The paper contributes to the literature by making recommendations on how to enhance brand resonance thereby increasing attendance. Intense experiences at the opera and engagement can be enhanced by offering packaged deals, such as accommodation and dinner, or drinks and canapés packages, backstage access, the development of a social club, social media brand community and loyalty programs to increase brand loyalty.

KEYWORDS

attendance, brand resonance, focus group, opera, performing arts

1 | INTRODUCTION

The Australian performing arts industry, in the decade prior to COVID-19, was operating on a knife's edge with dwindling attendance and reductions in revenue (Fanelli et al., 2019). Reverberations from the pandemic created a crucial tipping point for the ongoing viability of performing arts organizations, including the subject company, Big Opera (Westwood, 2020). Adding to the traditional challenges of appealing to generationally shifting audiences, COVID-19, with its aerosol infectivity, required vocal arts organizations to re-think their production methods and venues as a matter of business survival (Terracini, 2020). This study postulates that organizations such as Big Opera, while aiming to operationally reconfigure after the

pandemic, also need marketing innovations to restore and enhance their brand relationships with customers to improve patronage. As such, the objective of this study is to examine traditionally successful brand resonance concepts of loyalty, attachment, community and engagement (Keller, 2001, 2020) specifically for rebuilding and sustaining attendance at the opera in the post-crisis period. The paper responds to the calls by Kemp (2015, p. 186) to undertake research to, "examine arts engagement from a ... situational perspective".

Operatic events are the pinnacle of the performing arts industry, both artistically and financially. Fanelli et al. (2019, p. 78) stated that, "opera is one of the most fascinating forms of performing arts which gives expression to human passions and emotions at the crossroads between music and theatre". Further extending these sentiments, Edelman et al. (2016, p. 25) mentioned that "opera is one of the most aesthetically complex of art forms, often portrayed in the popular media as cultivating an "élite" audience with high cultural capital and

¹For research integrity and anonymity requirements of focus group research, the company pseudonym is Big Opera.

socioeconomic status." The performing arts are a significant service within the world's economic landscape. In 2009 in the US, 81 million or 36% of the adult population attended an arts event (Espinola & Badrinarayanan, 2010). In 2016/17, the arts, screen and culture sector contributed \$16.4 billion to New South Wales's (NSW) (Australia) Gross Domestic Product (KPMG, 2018). Recognising the significance of this sector's contributions, the Australian Government (2020) had provided A\$277 million of additional support for the arts, a majority in the latter part of 2020. Furthermore, an additional A\$50 million "rescue and restart package for NSW arts and cultural organizations" (NSW Government, 2020) was delivered by the respective State government.

Opera represents a significant cultural asset (Fanelli et al., 2019; Montoro & Cuadrado, 2018; Ratten & Ferreira, 2017), however the landscape that performing arts operated within pre-pandemic was increasingly competitive and audiences were depleting. Performing arts organizations commonly relied on a mixed-funding model, comprised of private funding, including ticket sales and donations, as well as public funding (Fanelli et al., 2019). Declining attendance challenged the ability of non-profit performing arts organizations to generate the revenues necessary to maintain their artistic standards (Baumgarth et al., 2016; Hager & Winkler, 2012). Performing arts organizations have been facing serious continuous constraints due to decreased public spending and diminished private support Tubillejas-Andrés et al. (2020a). Guibert and Hyde (2021) demonstrate that spending on performing arts in the US had plateaued at around \$30,000 million in 2019, dropped to \$4,000 million in 2020, yet has since rebounded.

The outbreak of COVID-19 affected opera events globally. As the virus spread, cancellations and postponements occurred in response to State and country lockdown measures. Major concert venues around the world closed their doors, including New York's Metropolitan Opera House and Carnegie Hall, Royal Opera House, London, Sydney Opera House, and Stopera, Amsterdam. Reopening of venues was restricted with spatial distancing. The number of people allowed to attend continues to seesaw as localized reinfection waves occur, thus making capacity and revenue planning difficult. The revelation that aerosol spreading of the virus was especially likely through the process of singing (Scheuch, 2020) put opera companies and performance venues on notice that big service delivery changes are going to be needed (Bailey, 2020). The industry literally had to pause for breath and rethink its operating and branding approaches.

COVID-19 has crystallized longer-term trends of decreased arts funding and attendance (Kemp, 2015) however it has also catalysed new opportunities, such as the move to online content delivery (Bell, 2021). The cultural sector has adapted to lockdown with many organizations modifying existing materials and creating new digitized content (Szedmák, 2021). The Australian Ballet created *At Home with Ballet TV* digital season, which enabled streaming of free full-length performances (Australian Ballet, 2020). Similarly, Big Opera created *BO TV*; an on-demand experience where some of Big Opera's grandest productions are streamed for free. Other performance arts organizations are producing various content

over social media, including interviews with artists to continue engagement with audiences. The UK National Theatre created online weekly broadcasts, soon after the first UK lockdown, which attracted over 12 million viewers in the subsequent year (Jortner et al., 2021).

Decreased funding and declining attendance at theatres before and after COVID-19 has changed the management and marketing of opera houses (Maule, 2012). Theatre-based opera is among the most expensive art forms, where 58% of budgets comprises labour costs (Maule, 2012). It is essential managers have a better understanding of how to attract and convert attendees into loyal subscribers and ongoing consumers (Polegato & Bjerke, 2019; Tubillejas-Andrés et al., 2020). One way to influence Opera attendance is through developing brand resonance. The power of branding is widely acknowledged within the fast-moving consumer goods context, but for performing arts it is relatively under-researched (Hall et al., 2016; Larsen & Kerrigan, 2019; O'Reilly & Kerrigan, 2016). As the whole opera world opens and closes and opens again through pandemic reverberations, brand relationships will be critical for engaging new and existing audiences (Boyle, 2007; Colbert & Dantas, 2019; Davis & Swanson, 2009; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999; Hume et al., 2007; van Rensburg & Slabbert, 2019; Rentschler & Gilmore, 2002; Swanson et al., 2008).

We contribute to the literature as no previous studies have examined brand resonance concepts in the opera context and how decision makers can enhance this resonance (Camarero et al., 2010). We argue that the brand resonance concept (Calder et al., 2018; Keller, 2012) is relevant within a performing arts context (Colbert & Dantas, 2019) as there has been a growing body of literature examining brand management in the arts (Baumgarth, 2018). We contribute to theory by articulating that brand resonance (Keller, 2001, 2013, 2020) is relevant for the performing arts sector; some theory exists in brand perception (Dijk et al., 2014), engagement (Barari et al., 2020), and authenticity leading to equity (Södergren, 2021). However, the brand resonance elements of brand equity in performing arts have not been explored until now. Opera brand resonance is found to emerge from intense and active expressions of loyalty, attachment, community and engagement which manifest respectively as repeat purchases, brand love, belongingness, and being engrossed in the service and brand. In the context of dwindling opera attendance, conducting this study on enhanced resonance is essential, because attendance can be improved by creating stronger brand resonance.

We first review the literature and explain linkages between brand resonance and opera attendance, culminating in our research question. Then the focus group methodology will be outlined followed by key findings with the focus groups, and a subsequent discussion extending the contentions of the brand resonance concept. The conclusion will articulate our contributions to the knowledge base of arts branding and the reformation of cultural policy post-pandemic. It will provide deep insight into brand resonance experiences of Big Opera patrons, thus informing marketing managers of potential strategies for improving opera attendance.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has begun to investigate the application of brand management techniques to performing arts organizations; including brand orientation (Baumgarth, 2009; Gromark, 2019), positioning (Easson & Leask, 2020; Pulh et al., 2008), and brand management for cultural institutions (Massi et al., 2019). However, to date there has been limited research examining the impacts of brand resonance for performing arts attendees. Many factors impacting a consumer's arts attendance decisions go beyond issues specific to the artistic offering (Kotler & Scheff, 1997). Research into goal orientations motivating consumers to attend dramatic theatre has highlighted goals including, enrichment and leisure (Johnson & Garbarino, 2001); socialization (Price et al., 2019) and aesthetics via appreciation of the beauty and grace found through artistic expression (Shrum, 1991). Branding is a key driver for services (Berry, 2000; Voorhees et al., 2017) and differs from the branding of goods due to their respective distinguishing attributes (Berry, 2010). Specifically, services have fewer cues for consumers to evaluate which therefore increases purchasing risks (Chen et al., 2020; Murray & Schlacter, 1990; Zeithaml, 1988). The impact of opera service branding has been found to include attendance (Katz et al., 2018; Trinh & Lam, 2016), satisfaction (Baumgarth & O'Reilly, 2014; Siu et al., 2016) and retention (Obiegbo et al., 2019; White et al., 2020). Polegato and Bjerke (2019, p. 148) assert "arts managers need to have a deep understanding of what engages audiences and how that engagement leads to satisfaction and repeat attendance".

2.1 | Key branding concepts

In this section we define key branding concepts (Table 1) relevant to the study. Camarero et al. (2010) introduced the concept of brand equity in the arts sector. Brand equity is about the total value, linked

to the assets and liabilities of a brand (Aaker, 1991), and firms spend millions of dollars each year developing and managing brand equity (Paul, 2019). The brand equity model has a range of brand building blocks, namely salience, performance, imagery, judgements, and feelings, which leads to resonance (Keller, 2003) as the ideal behavioural outcome. It is important for managers to work on these elements, to develop brand resonance. Alves et al. (2018) and Camarero et al. (2012) suggested brand equity for cultural institutions builds resonance to motivate attendance. Brand resonance is part of the customer-based brand equity model, defined by Keller (1993, p. 1) as "when a brand is known, and has strong, favourable and unique associations in a consumer's memory." It was more recently defined as the "intensity or depth of psychological bonds that customers have with the brand, as well as the level of activity engendered by this loyalty" (Keller, 2013, p. 92). Brand love is also relevant to our study, referred to as a consumer's emotional attachment to a brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Södergren (2021, p. 1) identifies consensus in the literature that enhancing brand equity (of which resonance is the pinnacle level), through authentic branding which "adds value to the consumer experience". Authenticity encapsulates truthfulness, responsibility and transparency (Södergren, 2021). Finally, brand prestige that is "masstige" (Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2019) is relevant for Opera, as Opera is often considered a luxury brand. Paul (2019) and Kumar et al. (2020) explain, masstige is about premium and luxury brands, but which is attainable by the masses. In this situation, brand equity is developed through developing love, attachment, engagement, and loyalty, by focusing on the premium market.

2.2 | Brand resonance and related concepts

Brand resonance is the connection the consumer develops with the brand based on their previous encounters (Keller, 2016). The brand resonance concept reflects the complete harmony between

TABLE 1 Definitions of key branding concepts

Concept	Definition	Examples of studies
Brand equity	Aaker (1991) defines it as the "set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name, and symbol that to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm, and/or that firms customers" (p. 15)	Gilal et al. (2021)
Brand resonance	Is defined by Keller (2013, p. 92) as the "intensity or depth of psychological bonds that customers have with the brand, as well as the level of activity engendered by this loyalty"	Kim et al. (2020)
Brand love	Drawing on Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006), Joshi and Garg (2021, p. 259) define brand love as the passionate and emotional attachment of a consumer with a brand	Joshi and Garg (2021), White et al. (2020)
Brand authenticity	Södergren (2021) drawing on Morhart et al.'s (2015, p. 202) work defines brand authenticity as "the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful, and true toward itself, and its consumers, and to support consumers being true to themselves." It often concerns the "real thing" from the fake (Södergren, 2021)	Loebnitz and Grunert (2021), Södergren (2021)
Brand prestige (Masstige)	According to Paul (2019, p. 300) "Masstige (Mass Prestige) marketing is a strategic term for market penetration for premium, but attainable, brands based on brand equity, thus aiming to create brand knowledge, likability, love, and attachment grounded in prestige". It entails a premium/high value product marketed to a maximum number of consumers by creating mass prestige, while keeping prices constant (Kumar et al., 2020)	Kumar et al. (2020), Paul (2019)

the consumer and the brand. With true brand resonance, consumers have a high degree of loyalty that is closely related to the brand, so customers can actively seek ways to interact with the brand and share experiences with others. Keller (2020) suggests the relationship can continue to develop and become so strong that consumers will make a vested effort to stay connected to the brand, which can be characterized by the energy (intensity and activity) the consumer exerts to consume the brand. Opera patrons, for instance, can exhibit strong investment through subscription, repeat visitations to performances, declarations of love and attachment and so forth. It is on this point that the work of Taylor et al. (2019) on neural binding creates parallels with the marketing literature on resonance. Taylor et al. (2019) touched on resonance mainly as part of brain perception. They discuss how novel or innovative experiences can lead to neurological experience of resonance in the arts (McDonnell, 2014; McDonnell et al., 2017; Schudson, 1989). To investigate this, we explore brand resonance for opera attendees. Keller (2020) proposed that consumers are more likely to purchase a brand to which they feel a close bond and attachment. Figure 1 expresses the main brand resonance concepts.

Table 2 represents the theoretical scope of our focus group research and is the tip of the broader brand equity model (Keller, 2001, 2003, 2020) of brand resonance which includes loyalty, attachment, community, and engagement, which we overview next.

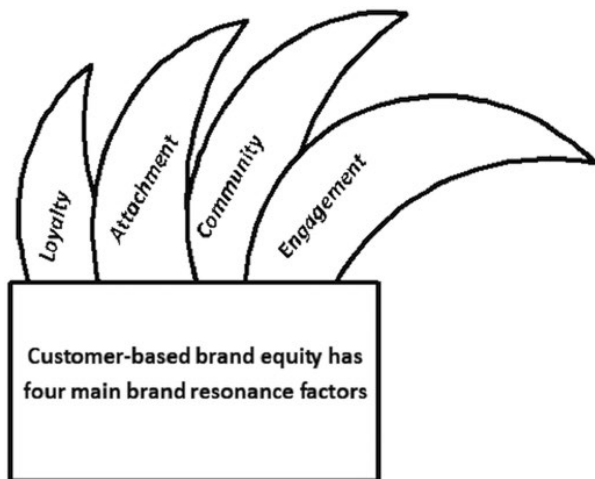


FIGURE 1 The brand resonance concepts

TABLE 2 Authors' compilation of definition of Keller's (2013) brand resonance concepts

Concept	Definition
Loyalty	Favourable attitude and commitment towards a brand, leading to continuous purchase (Ballantyne et al., 2006)
Attachment	Strength of bonds that connects consumers with a brand, exemplified by rich and accessible cognitive representations that involve thoughts and feelings about the brand (Park et al., 2010)
Community	Specialized, non-geographically bound community that is based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001)
Engagement	The level of a customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioural investment in direct brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011)

2.2.1 | Loyalty

Brand loyalty is measured by repeat sales, through the frequency and volume of same-brand purchases and defined as favourable attitudes and commitment to a brand, leading to continuous purchase (Ballantyne et al., 2006). Prasad et al. (2019) states individuals who have loyalty typically exclude competitor products and brands from their consideration. Researchers have suggested that loyalty is both a behavioural and attitudinal concept (Bandyopahay & Martell, 2007), where behaviour is the repeat purchase, and the attitudinal component refers to favourable attitudes to the brand. Loyalty is influenced by the interplay of other brand resonance aspects, for example brand attachment due to brand authenticity leads to developing more loyal behaviour (Södergren, 2021). Södergren (2021) and Vredenburg et al. (2020) identify that loyalty is significantly influenced by consumers' perception of brand authenticity, which grows from repeated positive experiences building trust in the features and benefits of the brand. The need for arts organizations to retain loyal customers for business sustainability is recognized by Tubillejas-Andrés et al. (2020a). Authentic experiences with performing arts can lead to trust, a sense of attachment to the brand and, ultimately, a loyal behaviour of returning to view more performances. The most intense and active loyal consumers exhibit higher purchase frequencies over the longest periods (Keller, 2008).

2.2.2 | Attachment

Brand attachment, a concept rooted in psychology, is informed by Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory which was developed to understand an infant's attachment to a primary caregiver. People can develop attachment for a brand (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), and it is defined as the strength of bonds that connects consumers with a brand, exemplified by rich and accessible cognitive representations that involve thoughts and feelings about the brand (Park et al., 2010, p. 2). People who have brand attachment will invest social, financial and time resources to maintain relations with the brand. Brand attachment leads to consumption behaviour and higher levels of consumer loyalty (Park et al., 2010). Previous research reveals that a credible brand is an antecedent of brand attachment (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021), which influences brand loyalty. People who are

attached to a brand will have a high intention to return, and brand attachment has a strong mediating effect. Jawahar et al. (2020) finds event image having a positive relationship with brand attachment, and destination attachment playing a mediating role between event image and destination loyalty.

Arya et al. (2019) find that authenticity of a brand leads to positive attachment to a brand, which then provokes consumers intentions more positively. Arya et al. (2019) see active participation of consumer in online brand communities moderating the relationship between brand authenticity and attachment. Dwivedi et al. (2019) in their study of social media users find brand attachment has a direct positive effect on brand credibility and consumer satisfaction. Cuny et al. (2020) noted an art intervention developed intense and vivid experiences for consumers, which increased brand attachment. They saw music enhanced people's behavioural intentions to recommend and revisit an artist's gallery.

A uniquely intense and active expression of attachment comes in the form of brand love, which is defined as "the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name" (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). Brand love connects with brand attachment, as Shetty and Fitzsimon (2021) found in luxury branding, where higher brand personality congruency increased brand attachment and brand love. Antecedents of brand love include a sense of community, group affiliation and identity expression (Zhang et al., 2020), sometimes built through fantasy and imagination via celebrity endorsement. Cheung et al. (2021) found that social media brand community (SMBC) played a role in shaping tourists' emotions, including love, which influenced people's intentions to co-create (engagement) and visit. Fernandes and Inverneiro (2020) find that brand identification and brand experience influence brand love. Researchers also find that brand love has an influence on brand loyalty (Fernandes & Inverneiro, 2020; Shetty & Fitzsimmons, 2021).

2.2.3 | Community

Brand community can be defined as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). While online communities are captured in the definition, the influence of geography and specific places, like opera halls can enhance brand community experiences creating feelings of belonging (Lupinek, 2019). "We-ness" (Bender, 1978) is at the core of a brand community which brings, attracts and retains its members whether it be in physical, digital, or hybrid mode, and we posit there is an evolving concept of customers as community members as COVID-19 has forced many changes in the online performance spaces (Sanz-Marcos & Elías-Zambrano, 2020). There may also be the existence of both pro- and anti-brand communities (Wong et al., 2018). Brand communities may develop around loyal consumers who share their attachment, love, and feelings of belonging. Positive brand attitudes and intentions are generally linked in a virtuous loop with a community that develops around them.

2.2.4 | Engagement

Brand engagement is a psychological process with both cognitive and emotional aspects (Kemp, 2015). Hollebeek (2011) defines brand engagement as, "the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions" (p. 790). Direct brand interactions refer to a "direct, physical contact with a focal brand" (Brakus et al., 2009). A meta-analysis has shown engagement depends on context (in person or online), industry type, product type (whether for pleasure or utility) and cultural context (Barari et al., 2020). Brand engagement at the opera emerges ideally in person in a social context (Kucharska & Mikołajczak, 2018). Co-creation of brand resonance can occur through both positive and negative engagement with consumers (Kristal et al., 2018) and, in an in-person social context, where a brand community can develop, both constructive and destructive brand engagement can occur (Kristal et al., 2018). Constructive, active and intense brand engagement intersects with other factors of brands to generate resonance. Practical ways to enhance engagement can be drawn from this understanding, such as combining social dinner and drinks packages with showtimes (Chung & Rao, 2003), and offering repeat performance discounts, low demand period free shows, seating upgrades, and packaged group accommodation (White et al., 2020). The greater challenge as an emerging field is how to develop active and intense engagement through online performances or socially distanced situations (Sharma et al., 2021).

Cognitive activity includes concentration and engrossment in a brand. Emotion is related to the customers brand related inspiration and pride, and behavioural brand-related activity is expressed through a customer's level of energy when interacting with the brand. When extra time, money, energy, and other resources are put into the brand beyond purchase and consumption that is, when engagement happens. For example, operagoers who join clubs, loyalty programs, events beyond the opera performance (like fundraisers), and provide testimonials or other publicity, are strongly showing brand engagement. Previous research identifies brand engagement contributes significantly to performing arts attendance (Walmsley, 2016, 2019). Patrons are more likely to attend when performing arts appeal to them, or when they feel comfortable at performances (Hager & Winkler, 2012), as feeling comfortable is linked with the co-creation aspect of opera attendance, whereby one might interact with the crowd in the foyer (Dijk et al., 2014) or may be engaged throughout the performance.

As noted, brand resonance in the arts has received limited research attention (Camarero et al., 2010), and Walmsley (2019) highlights the need for performing arts organizations to develop meaningful relationships with audiences, positing that the priority should be long-term relational approaches offered by audience engagement. With the decades-long downward pressure on opera attendance and the additional reverberations from COVID, there is a clear and present need. This paper responds by answering the following research question: *how can decision makers enhance brand*

TABLE 3 Focus groups

Participant groups	Number of participants
Big Opera Heavy – Subscribers who held a subscription of six or more productions, for the past three consecutive years	7
Big Opera Light – Subscribers who held a subscription of between 3 and 5 productions, for the past three consecutive years	6
Non-Big Opera Light – Single ticket buyers who have bought tickets to a total of one to three opera performances over the past three years	6
Big Opera Potentials – Individuals who have never attended BO performances but have expressed an interest in attending the opera through requests for information and competition entries	5

resonance, thereby, the relationship with opera attendees? and the next section presents the method undertaken.

3 | METHOD

A qualitative approach fulfilled the exploratory nature of the research (Goodyear, 1990), and addressed the call by Jarness and Friedman (2017) to utilize qualitative methods to help sift through cross-class interactions, which may be expected in some segments of the opera market. Opera attendance explanations are multifactorial (Edelman et al., 2016) and a qualitative method enabled analysis of a complex, holistic picture, incorporating detailed, in-depth views of participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) cycles of reinterpretation and literature corroboration.

3.1 | Procedures

Data for this study were collected before the COVID-19 pandemic, using qualitative focus groups method as per the recommendations of Morgan (2019) whereby a moderator interviewed research participants in a group encouraging discussion on issues. There has been a growing literature in the arts marketing field using focus groups as a method (Gosling et al., 2014; Grassi, 2020; Scarpaci et al., 2018). We then conducted thematic analysis built upon the literature review to iteratively develop the knowledge base (Hall et al., 2016).

The four focus groups were conducted in a major Australian capital city with different Big Opera (BO) audience groups (Table 3).

These groups were chosen so that participants in each group could have a level of commonality of experiences (Morgan, 2019), allowing them to express how the opera organization might best address the needs of these different groups. The focus groups were designed to have approximately six people in them, and lasted 1–2 hr (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Morgan, 2019). Focus groups with approximately 6 people in them are large enough for participant diversity in responses yet small enough to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts, opinions, beliefs, and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Morgan, 2019). This number also affords the chance for higher engagement in the focus group.

3.2 | Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to recruit focus groups in line with the frequency of attendance at BO performances. There are advantages to having homogenous groups in focus groups, such as finding common ground between participants, which allows for a shared perspective among participants and a free-flowing discussion of shared interests (Morgan, 2019). Homogeneity encourages sharing points of view, without the feeling of being judged by people who perceive differently, thus facilitating exchange. Focus group organizers were provided with the BO database, every 50th person on the database was randomly selected and called via telephone and asked if they would like to participate in the focus group. When contacting with potential focus group participants, an overview of the research was provided. To eliminate bias, participants who answered yes to question “have you ever worked at BO?” were excluded from the study. Participants had to be either subscribers or previous contacts of BO, 18 years of age or older, and self-select to take part in the study. They were offered a voucher for attendance at future opera events. Offering incentives to potential participants in arts-related marketing research is common (Kotler & Scheff, 1997; Thomas, 2017).

3.3 | Focus group questions

The guide for the moderators is provided in Appendix 1. Aligned with Morgan (2019), questions were created that avoided yes/no, leading or biased responses, or the moderator giving examples. The focus groups were designed to first build rapport, and share essential data namely their name, occupation and a description of last opera performance attended. The moderator was a good listener and took a non-judgemental role (Morgan, 2019) exploring, probing, and stimulating discussion, consistent with the approach of Patton (1990). Subsequently, the questions focused on consumers' attitudes about BO branding, including factors affecting attendance including pricing, production qualities and facilities, plus reasons for taking out (or not) opera subscriptions. A wrap up question concluded the focus groups (Morgan, 2019).

An example of focus questions asked:

Thinking about various operatic performances that you have attended in recent years—which features or attributes of the performance do you think are the most important?

PROBE: Try to list in order of importance. Which are critical? Why is the most important attribute important?

This open-ended question enabled discussion of factors that influenced attendance. For example, some operagoers may be motivated by social interaction, or community, so this open-ended question sort to elicit that. Similarly, other attendees may be motivated by a desire to extend their understanding of music in general, or opera specifically. For this group, educational programs might be more appropriate, and accordingly questions such as the following were included:

Thinking about the last opera that you attended, what triggered your decision to attend?

PROBE: In thinking about opera performances that you have considered attending—but have not attended, what triggered your decision not to attend?

This question aimed to clarify the most important aspects in the decision-making process.

3.4 | Analysis

All focus groups were professionally transcribed, and content analysed by two of the researchers using NVivo. Thematic categories (Yin, 2015) were identified according to the brand resonance model. In this process, focus groups transcripts were entered into the NVIVO software, read line-by-line, and sentences or groups of sentences were coded according to a theme aligned with the brand resonance concepts to produce the first interpretation and analysis, these were later collapsed into second level codes. The coders met to discuss their coding and agree on the final coding for the study. The NVIVO first and second level codes are provided in Appendix 2.

Thematic analysis gave opportunities to understand the potential of any issue more widely (Marks & Yardley, 2012). Braun and Clark (2006, p. 91) noted that “data within themes should cohere meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes”. As recommended by Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2007), constant comparison of the data with the research literature was undertaken. Thematic analysis provided meaning to fragments of ideas thus contributing a “sense-making” context (Wilkinson & Klaes, 2012). The situational context of opera was revisited, as it happened, only a short while before the significant COVID-19 event (Hall et al., 2016). The iterative process of data analysis occurred with comparing the focus group data with the literature we had originally examined, and with current literature to contextualize the

findings with the current consumer environment. In the next section, we discuss the findings of our study.

4 | FINDINGS

We found that focus group participants exhibiting brand resonance demonstrated an intense, active, loyal and deep relationship between customers and Big Opera, and this varied according to participation levels. Brand loyalty appeared as ongoing attendance over many years, expressing favourable attitudes towards opera, such as, having feelings towards the Opera brand, including “love”, and consumer activities that were more than transactional in nature, like engaging in opera with the community.

4.1 | Brand loyalty

To investigate brand loyalty, focus group participants were asked how long they had been attending Big Opera (BO) performances and their responses are summarized in Table 4.

Long-term loyalty was prevalent with many participants expressing that they had been subscribers for decades. Keller’s (2003) behavioural loyalty includes regular and repeat purchases. As expected, the level of behavioural loyalty was far greater in the BO Heavy and Light participants in comparison to BO Potentials who barely attended a performance, and in fact they mentioned they preferred to attend competitor offerings. In addition to BO subscriptions some participants discussed multiple subscriptions or subscribing to different companies in different years. This was interpreted as a broader loyalty to supporting performing arts.

When asked how BO could increase attendance at opera events, participants noted that a loyalty program could be developed for frequent attendees: “Loyalty discount, like ... a Gold Member after so many years and people who have been going for however long” (BO Light). Participants also suggested discounts for long standing subscribers; “Any rewards system for if you have been a subscriber for 10 years or 5 years, greater discount for longer you have been subscribing” (BO Light Non-Subscriber). Another participant suggested the ability to “invite someone and end up with a discount” (BO Subscriber Light). Loyalty programs are prevalent within services industries and can have mixed outcomes depending on their benefits (Stathopoulou & Balabanis, 2016). Loyalty programs can enhance customer relationships and, by obtaining additional customer data, brands can strategically use it to gain a competitive edge (Petersen et al., 2019).

4.2 | Attachment

Positive attitudes were broadly expressed as an appreciation or love for BO and productions. Keller’s (2003) attitudinal attachment occurs when customers love the brand or product, and they see it as a special purchase. The findings highlighted those who regularly attended

TABLE 4 Brand loyalty of Big Opera users

Big Opera heavy	Big Opera light	Big Opera light – Non-subscriber	Big Opera potentials
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involved in opera for many years, and have a subscription. Being a subscriber for 27 to 28 years, subscriber for many years. Being a subscriber for 10 years and went with my family. Being an opera subscriber for 15 years. Opera subscriber for 20 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Been going for years. Being a subscriber for 18 years. Being a subscriber for years and go 3–4 times a year. Been going for 30–35 years and love opera. Been going for 15 years. 5 to 6 years and am an opera lover. Been going for a few years and love it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Been going for 5 years because of family, hard to get to opera because I live in Canberra, but I love it. I went to opera with my family, and like it a lot. I live in the country and grew up listening to opera on the radio. Went to the opera with my friend, and now subscribe. My family are very interested in music, so I go a lot. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have not been for a while. Never been. Cannot go, too expensive, I am on Centrelink. Not sure which one is the best one to go to. Interested in other performances such as comedy.

TABLE 5 Influence of social groups on attendance

Big Opera heavy (5 references)	Big Opera light (10 references)	Big Opera light – Non-subscribers (9 references)	Big Opera potentials (6 references)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I go with a couple of friends, and we are all opera lovers. First went to opera my father took me to see John Giovanni when I was in primary school. 	<p>I go with her sister or a friend and usually a group of 3 or 4 and been subscribing for 18 years</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A group of friends of mine we go every year. My parents had been subscribers to Opera Aust for as long as I can remember, decades and decades and once I became maybe late teenager perhaps, I got much more interested. 	<p>I have been twice this year to the opera and am going next year thanks to a friend. I used to go years ago ... but thanks to this friend I have started going again</p>

opera, had made declarations of their love for opera as an art form. Across the focus groups, there were 27 references to the love for opera, and this was distributed quite evenly across the focus groups types, although there was one case, where an Opera Potential had actually stated they “*hated opera*”. Both Light and Heavy subscribers demonstrated love for example, a participant expressed: “*We are passionate about Opera, being long-term subscribers and patrons of BO. I subscribe to BO and Victorian Opera, I wouldn’t miss a production*” (BO Heavy). A light subscriber commented: *I go with my husband and I think we have been going for 30, 35 years and we just love it* (BO Light – Subscriber). As with love, others had referred to their attachment to the opera as *been hooked on opera* or *being latched on to it*, and that opera was *like a drug* to them. Previous research demonstrates that passion and love predict repurchase intention (White et al., 2020), suggesting that it is important for BO to develop love and attachment in their consumers. As Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) specify, brand love also encompasses an emotional element, and there were 23 references to emotion through the transcripts, for example: *the operas that make the biggest impact on me are the ones that I get emotionally charged and in fact sometimes you get a tear in your eye from the whole experience*.

4.3 | Community

Participant groups were asked what triggered their decision to attend the opera, and many identified the influence of social groups,

whether it be their family or friends, and the opera community in shaping attendance (see Table 5).

We found social groups encouraged attendance, bringing added value for subscribers. Conversely, the lack of social groups could lead to decreased attendance, as some individuals were uncomfortable to attend alone, indicated in the response from the BO Potential (Table 5). It was clear that participants were on a broad spectrum of relationship with the brand. There were no significant distinctions in the content of the focus group’s discussions surrounding social groups and attendance. In Keller’s (2003) brand resonance model, customers feel a sense of community with the people and consumers associated with the brand. The findings are in contrast with Benzecry’s (2009, p. 140) research into devoted opera goers in Buenos Aires, which found that attendees often attended on their own, experiencing opera as “an intense one-on-one relationship with that work”. However, the findings corroborate the Price et al. (2019) research finding arts serve the personal and social needs and desires of the audience, including the building of social cohesion. It became evident from responses that social and family group influences can work to both encourage attendance as well as bring added value for subscribers by turning the event into a social occasion (Price et al., 2019).

When asked how BO could attract people to attend the opera, participants noted that developing a “social club” or opera community could be acted on, and this was warmly considered by those who had attended opera but were not subscribers. Participants commented: “*I would like that*” (BO Non-Subscriber Light) and that it would be a “*lovely*

TABLE 6 Experiences that enhance engagement of Big Opera users

Big Opera heavy (27 references)	Big Opera light (20 references)	Big Opera light – Non-subscribers (15 references)	Big Opera potentials (11 references)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It was just wonderful. • Has a richness. • It is always a very lively production. • Stimulation • Utter exhilaration • Warm feeling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staging and costumes are fantastic. • It is spectacular, bright and happy. • Grand. • It's a beautiful evening out. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the physical thrill and shivers running up your spine watching the first live performance. • It is uplifting and makes you feel better. • Opera is quite a spectacle. • Wonderful experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I think it can be quite intense experience in a good way. • Can be very colourful and exciting. • Being transported into another world. • The surprise element

idea for older people that perhaps live alone" (BO Non-Subscriber Light). Community is an important driver of attendance at performing arts events as the results of the study indicate, and those of previous research (Price et al., 2019) shows that there is a clear relationship between social group influences and attendance. It has been found that not having someone to go with is a common barrier to attendance (Blume-Kohout et al., 2015). This was illustrated by a participant who stated *I subscribed way back ... probably 15 years and the friend I went with died 15 years ago and I let it lapse*, similarly another suggested they *Didn't like going out by my own* (BO Heavy).

4.4 | Engagement

Engagement encompasses elements of cognitive, emotional and behavioural activity, and direct interactions with the brand (Hollebeek, 2011). Previous research on the role of an arts intervention Cuny et al. (2020) reveals that individuals can develop brand attachment due to intense and active experiences. We had similar finding for those attending opera, for example when asked to compare opera with other arts, participants invariably thought that opera was the art that had everything. Indicative comments included: *Richness of music, the drama ... other people have said the richness and the costumes and settings, the whole package, it is like a beautiful old wine* (BO Heavy). BO Light participants held similar views: *the staging and costumers were fantastic and it is a dark stage and all of a sudden it comes to light and you become emotionally involved when at the end of the night you have a feeling*. Notably, the number of times that opera participants mentioned these types of experiences decreased with their attendance type, that is those people who attended less (BO Potentials), mentioned less intense experiences, suggesting this was more the mainstay of subscribers (Table 6).

Participants were asked about several options to enhance active engagement with the brand and queried how an opera experience could be improved. Participants suggested enhancements to subscriptions with augmentations to parking, pre-show dinners, and the implementation of social groups and loyalty programs. Participants discussed the notion of current subscriptions; when asked "What is included in this subscription?" by confirming; "It is just the ticket" however clarified that with a subscription *you get a discount off the prices* (BO Light). Participants were asked if they would construct their own opera subscription package what it would include and as a result a discussion ensued about enhancing BO subscriptions.

To improve engagement at BO, participants made several suggestions around enhancing the experience of attendees, including accommodation or dinner packages, champagne and canapés on arrival or at interval, and backstage access. Pre-show dinner or drinks are commonplace within the performing arts industry with competitors to BO doing this (Australian Ballet, 2020). Prominent in the focus group discussions was the idea of drinks and canapés being included in an opera experience: *You should have the champagne beforehand for new people to get them in the mood* (BO Heavy) another participant suggested *"food and little finger food for free"* (BO Heavy). If this can be done at low cost, it may be a way to promote engagement, develop better feelings of engrossment in patrons, and attract more attendees.

Others suggested dinner and opera packages: *"I would like a light meal, doesn't have to be a big meal there are places nearby where you can do such things"* (BO Light). Or as one suggested, *Dinner after the show* or as another suggested including accommodation in the deal, *"it might be nice to stay overnight at a hotel and be given discounts for the hotel, dinner and opera as a package - a little bit cheaper than sort of thing"* (BO Potential). The concept of packaging together dinner and drinks with a performing arts event is common within the industry (Chung & Rao, 2003), and has been shown to make an event more memorable, and attractive to potential attendees, hence developing a stronger experience with engagement and engrossment leading to brand resonance. White et al. (2020) suggest that performing arts organizations could consider actions that encourage repeat exposure, such as, discounted or free admission during low demand periods, seating upgrades or bundling tickets with other services like hotels and restaurants.

Several participants suggested they would like behind-the-scenes access, for example *"Access to the pre-opera talks and maybe get to know people there"* (BO Heavy) additionally those who had not yet attended an opera suggested that a backstage experience could be of interest: *"Tour of behind the scenes and tickets to the opera combination"* (BO Potential). Pullman and Gross (2004) evaluated VIP hospitality services and found that that VIP experiences can create emotional responses and hence loyalty.

5 | DISCUSSION: RESONANCE AT THE OPERA

In this paper, we answered the following research question: "How can decision makers enhance brand resonance, thereby, the relationship with opera attendees?" The focus group conducted with opera

attendees, with varying levels of attendance and literature analysis, revealed a range of action points that we built around the elements of Table 2 and iteratively expanded into the summative Figure 2. We now discuss the finding of our study.

Cuny et al. (2020) found that an art intervention developed an intense and vivid experience, which evokes a cognitive and emotional reaction, which leads to brand attachment, and in turn increases people's intention to revisit. We provide qualitative support for this argument as those who were subscribers (BO Heavy and BO Light), did report on emotive and intense experiences, which engaged these individuals at the opera, they also reported on their love and attachment for the opera, and this was facilitated by attending opera with their friends and family, and hence community, and brand loyalty was also evident. Findings by Bae et al. (2020) concur that an experience with a mixed reality art intervention engaged attendees, which, influenced affective aspects, including perceived enjoyment, influencing brand loyalty. To develop attachment, engagement and loyalty, it is necessary for BO, to develop intense and vivid experiences for opera attendees. BO can enhance engagement and experience by offering drinks/canapés, dinner/drinks, dinner/accommodation and back-stage access packages. One way to attract new customers, could be offering discounted tickets to first time users, to encourage them to attend, allowing them to have a strong experience of opera, in the hope that they will develop a love and attachment, hence developing their intention to attend in the future. Similarly, current subscribers could invite a newbie and end up with a discount, to assist with developing new patrons.

It was apparent that there was brand loyalty in terms of the frequency and duration of purchases, especially for BO Heavy and BO Light subscription users, who had been going for many years, and would often go more than three times a year. Loyalty was much less for BO Potentials, and there were often barriers for those people to attend. Considering that brand attachment and love is an antecedent of loyalty (Fernandes & Inverneiro, 2020; Park et al., 2010; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021; Shetty & Fitzsimmons, 2021), it would be appropriate that BO, again develop greater engagement, attachment

and love with consumers, by enhancing experience at the opera. Developing a loyalty program with discounts and rewards could assist with enhancing customer relationships (Petersen et al., 2019), but also in developing loyalty to a brand (Koo et al., 2020). Loyalty programs can include an elimination of direct financial costs (Koo et al., 2020), in the case of Opera, free tickets, and soft benefits, such as back-stage access, or special seating. Loyalty programs have the effect of repeat purchase loyalty and decreased intention to switch to other brands (Koo et al., 2020), which could be valuable for BO.

For brand attachment and love it was apparent those people who were subscribers (BO Heavy and Light) did report that they love the opera and could be classified as having brand love, according to Caroll and Ahuvia's (2006) definition. This was in contrast to Opera Potentials, with one stating they *hated opera*. Research by Khatoon and Rehman (2021) identify a plethora of negative emotions in brand relationships, and we support this previous research by identifying the same can occur in the opera setting. Findings revealed that love was mentioned more than brand attachment; however, there were some quotes that pertained to attachment. Participants displayed emotional feelings for the opera, another element of brand love. As previous research indicates brand love can increase intention to attend in the future (Park et al., 2010; White et al., 2020) and brand loyalty (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fernandes & Inverneiro, 2020; Park et al., 2010; Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2021; Shetty & Fitzsimmons, 2021). If BO wish to increase loyalty, and intention to purchase it would be appropriate for them to seek to develop love and attachment in their consumers, which can be done by enhancing the experience of Opera goers.

There were few differences between the focus groups in terms of their reporting of brand community, with most participants stating that they attend with family and friends, or those friends and family introduced them to the opera. Previous literature reveals that sense of community can develop brand love (Zhang et al., 2020), and this was evident in the focus groups, with participants mentioning they go to the opera with family and friends because they were all opera lovers. To enhance attendance, BO could create a strong opera community through a social club adding to feelings of belonging, and

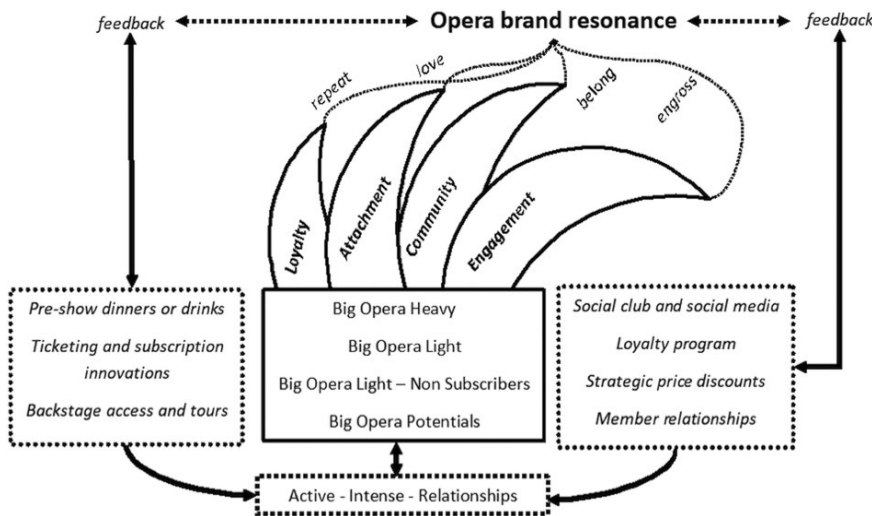


FIGURE 2 Brand resonance concepts from Big Opera focus groups

this could be facilitated by developing a SMBC, through Big Opera's social media pages (Facebook and Instagram), with a focus on co-creation, and spreading the electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Gaber et al. (2021) identified that social media pages can foster a sense of belonging and assist with developing brand relationships. This is because SMBCs can play a role in shaping consumers emotions, including love, which influences their intention to visit (Cheung et al., 2021). Clark et al. (2017) find co-creation and engagement makes people feel part of the brand community, which BO could work on creating. BO are encouraged to have a face-to-face social club that has social activities linked to the opera, such as a "single mixer" before the show, meetups, and "coffee at the café", which can be facilitated by the SMBC group.

Existing research on the WOM in hotels in China and Pakistan finds it has an effect on brand loyalty (Huo et al., 2021). BO could encourage patrons to provide online reviews. Patrons could be motivated to do so through incentives provided for a review; such as the chance to win free opera tickets if they make a review. An eWOM meta-analysis showed significant relationships in areas brand loyalty amongst other factors (Ismagilova et al., 2021). WOM has been shown to create brand communities within music fans (Cova et al., 2021). eWOM can be linked by electronic loyalty programs (eg via apps), and those who use loyalty apps are more vulnerable to accepting deals (Son et al., 2020, p.835) which BO can deploy to retain existing customers, and attract new ones. Furthermore, previous research finds that virtual interactivity is a driver of brand involvement (Elsharnouby et al., 2021). Loyalty programs (Formanek & Tahal, 2017) can be supplemented with alliance programs of other services such as car parking, hotels and restaurants in this case. The performing arts sector can learn from experiences of credit card companies (Bukhari & Hussain, 2020) who commonly team up with other partner companies to attract and retain customers. Brand microblogs (Huang et al., 2019; Tang & Chen, 2020) can also be used to send regular, concise messages to existing and potential customers.

Research indicates that engaged customers exhibit greater loyalty to focal brands (Bowden, 2009; Hollebeek, 2011). It was evident that opera patrons had indirect engagement (Hollebeek, 2011) with BO, by watching as part of the audience. BO are encouraged to offer direct brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011) through the SMBC, social events, and backstage access to further promote engagement as previous research finds a relationship between brand engagement and loyalty (Bowden, 2009; Hollebeek, 2011). Co-production is being talked about within performing arts sector, and in the case of BO, it can be implemented by collaborating with other stakeholders to co-create events that attract audience from diverse backgrounds. Research in other areas has shown a relationship between loyalty, co-creation and consumer engagement within fitness clubs (Behnam et al., 2021). Co-creation can also help to create virtual brand communities (Zhao et al., 2019) which can be used for the multiple purposes of product/ service marketing & promotion, spreading brand awareness by encouraging (electronic) word-of-mouth, and subsequently brand loyalty.

Overall, brand resonance was expressed with regular attendance, attending with social groups, whether that be family or friends, expressions of brand love/attachment and engagement with the opera. Brand resonance was much more predominant in the BO Heavy and Light participants. It is evident that the BO Heavy users were more likely to purchase subscriptions, attend more, and hence have a greater connection with the opera, than those who did not have a subscription, or opera potentials.

6 | MANAGERIAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

There are many managerial and practical implications that arts organizations could implement to increase attendance. BO could implement enhancements to subscriptions, including adding parking, accommodation, pre-show dinner packages, the development of social groups and loyalty programs. The development of a SMBC is important as clear links have been established between the social factors impacting attendance (Price et al., 2019), as favourable brand attitudes and intentions can be created. Similarly, a loyalty program was proposed by participants which could encompass aspects mentioned above including access to the opera social club, discounted parking and invitations to pre-show dinners or drinks. This could be implemented both digitally and physically, with either online social discussions/meetings or a physical meeting, such as, "coffee at the café" or single mixer before the show. Research into the impact of a university programme for older adults learning about opera found that programs can contribute to the engagement of cultural audiences by facilitating a path to the enjoyment of cultural experience (Cuenca-Amigo, 2019), and Big Opera could seek to include an educational element.

Noting the difficulties faced in the aftermath of COVID-19, it will be essential that performing arts organizations have clear actionable methods of enhancing engagement (Walmsley, 2016, 2019). BO currently have a Facebook and Instagram page, and through these pages, a SMBC, with competitions, interaction, and co-creative activities could be used to create further engagement (Clark et al., 2017; Keller, 2016). Videoblogs of vlogs endorsing the brand (Munnukka et al., 2019) are another way a company can create awareness of their brand.

7 | LIMITATIONS

This study had several limitations, suggesting opportunities for future research. First, 24 participants took part in the four focus groups, indicating larger participation rates and more diverse focus groups can be conducted to improve generalizability. Future research could assess the degree to which the characteristics revealed in this study are predictive of purchasing outcomes, using quantitative methods. Second, whilst the data have been discussed in relation to post-pandemic resonance, data collection took place prior to these

events. Future research could specifically investigate the effectiveness of revolutionary marketing activities post-pandemic on the brand resonance of performing arts attendees. Third, there is a limitation in the self-reported nature of the data. This was particularly clear when participants were unable to fully explain the causes of their emotional brand resonance reactions. The fact that the study was conducted in only one country, namely Australia and the data collection was cross-sectional in nature are also limitations, which could be addressed in future research.

8 | FUTURE RESEARCH

This study sought to answer one unanswered research question in the arts marketing literature that is, how Opera companies can build brand resonance, and hence better relationships with opera attendees. Even though this question was answered, there are many other areas that could be explored, that relate to Keller's brand equity model (2012). For example, future research could examine brand salience, judgements, imagery, performance and feelings to determine whether this assists in creating stronger resonance, and hence engagement with the brand. Other areas could be explored, including, how engagement is facilitated through social media and online events. For that matter, BO's Facebook and Instagram pages, could be analysed for the levels of engagement that it actually creates, and strategies developed for how to promote engagement. Future research could be conducted across countries to determine if brand resonance could be enhanced through similar strategies as articulated above, as it may or may not be context specific. The research could be conducted longitudinally to determine if brand resonance can be enhanced by the suggested strategies.

9 | CONCLUSIONS

Until now, methods of enhancing engagement of performing arts attendees have been relatively under-researched. Notwithstanding economic, and regulatory reverberations in the aftermath of COVID-19 pandemic, it will be essential that performing arts organizations have clear and actionable ways to enhance brand resonance for growing attendance. The objective of this study was to provide a deeper understanding of how an opera organization can enhance brand resonance, thereby retaining customers and enhancing attendance post-pandemic. It was built upon developing knowledge of neurological resonance in consumers of the arts (Taylor et al., 2019) and articulated with established brand resonance in the marketing literature (Keller, 2001, 2020).

The focus group findings suggested an opera consumer who is well informed regarding the nature of opera and has high expectations regarding the type of experience is more likely to purchase opera subscriptions. Overall, we found a lack of subscription does not necessarily imply that attendees are not invested in or committed to attending opera productions; to the contrary, evidence

from Big Opera potentials suggests that price was a prohibitive issue.

BO Heavy users demonstrated strong brand resonance. However, the BO Light Subscribers, and BO Light Non-Subscribers often demonstrated many of the characteristics of brand resonance, however, were prevented from attending more frequently due to barriers such as price. Overall, those who were more regular attendees felt more passionate about the performing arts compared to regular attendees with more mentions of "love" for BO.

In summation, this research is a foundation for future empirical resonance validations within a variety of performing arts settings. Further contribution is to the knowledge base of performance arts branding and the reformation of cultural policy post-pandemic. In specific terms, this study gave deep insight into brand resonance for Big Opera patrons. Further development of the identified relationships and connections will assist with consolidation of future attendance and subscriptions. By considering the calls for a better social club, loyalty programs, pre-show dinners, drinks/canapés or dinner/accommodation and back-stage access, performing arts organizations could work to better engage and maintain subscribers. Overall, this supports the marketing contention that when consumers have resonance with an artistic product and its overall impression, they are more likely to purchase, engage, enjoy, and return for more positive arts experiences.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge the focus group participants, and the critical and insightful comments made by the reviewers.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest that could be perceived as prejudicing the impartiality of the research reported.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data are not publically available due to their confidential and anonymous nature.

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How to cite this article: Hall, E., Menzies, J., Zutshi, A., & Creed, A. (2022). Opera participants' perceptions of brand resonance. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 46, 1016–1034. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12743>

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APPENDIX 1

FOCUS GROUP MODERATORS GUIDE

I. Introductions and explanation

1. Moderator introduction, explanation of a focus group, purpose of the research, no right or wrong answers.
2. Introduce observers/associates.
3. Explain the role of the moderator.
 - Present issues/subjects
 - Facilitate the discussion
4. Establish ground rules of the focus group.
5. Participant introduction and warm-up (name, occupation, description of last opera performance attended).

II. Attributes of opera

1. How would you classify different

PROBE: What are the differences and the similarities between each of these groups?
2. Thinking about various operatic performances that you have attended in recent years – which features, or attributes of the performance do you think are the most important?

PROBE: Try to list in order of importance. Which are critical? Why is the most important attribute important?
3. Thinking about the features of an operatic performance that are important to you, how well does Big Opera deliver?

PROBE: Discuss – what could be done to improve delivery?

4. Thinking about Big Opera as a provider of operatic performances how well does it perform?

PROBE: What services does Big Opera do well at? What is not done so well? What would you expect or like to see that are not currently delivered? Why?

III. Subscriptions and package deals

5. How would you feel about purchasing a subscription? How do you feel about the price of subscriptions?

PROBE: Discuss. What features would you expect to have included in a subscription? [CURRENTLY INCLUDES: Priority seating, restaurant/hotel discounts, invitations to special events, free exchanges]

6. A subscription is an example of a package deal. If you were to design a new package deal for Big Opera, what would you include in the package?

7. How do you find information about new operatic performances?

PROBE: The internet, publications, guides. Booking and payment by internet? Do you expect to be able to book and pay online? Other options?

IV. Identify the underlying factors that drive attendance at BO performances.

8. When thinking about attending an operatic performance what would you say you get out of it? That is what are the benefits that you achieve from attending?

PROBE: To establish benefits that other groups of individuals might achieve. What are non-attendees missing out on? PROBE: The internet, publications, guides. Booking and payment by internet? Do you expect to be able to book and pay online? Other options?

9. What are some of the challenges that you associate with attending an operatic performance?

PROBE: To establish the challenges that you feel other groups of individuals might achieve. How could such issues be overcome? PROBE: The internet, publications, guides. Booking and payment by internet? Do you expect to be able to book and pay online? Other options?

10. What sort of people would you say are most likely to attend an operatic performance?

PROBE: Discuss categories of attendees, what are the differences between heavy light and non-attendees? Describe the people

you meet when attending an opera – Who are they? Are they different from you? What are some of their characteristics? PROBE: The internet, publications, guides. Booking and payment by internet? Do you expect to be able to book and pay online? Other options?

11. What feelings are aroused by your decision to attend the opera?

PROBE: How widespread are such feelings? Are they shared by other groups of attendees, would people who have not attended share such feelings? Why? PROBE: The internet, publications, guides. Booking and payment by internet? Do you expect to be able to book and pay online? Other options?

12. Thinking about the last opera that you attended, what triggered your decision to attend?

PROBE: In thinking about opera performances that you have considered attending – but have not attended, what triggered your decision not to attend? PROBE: The internet, publications, guides. Booking and payment by internet? Do you expect to be able to book and pay online? Other options?

13. What sort of circumstances or conditions might influence you to reduce or even cease attending operatic performances?

PROBE: Alternatively discuss – the circumstances or conditions might influence you to increase the frequency with which you attend operatic performances? What sort of conditions would be necessary for a person who has never attended, to attend? PROBE: The internet, publications, guides. Booking and payment by internet? Do you expect to be able to book and pay online? Other options?

V. CONCLUSION Thank you and close

PROBE: Is there anything that you want to add before we close?

APPENDIX 2

NVIVO CODING

First order codes	Number of references	Second order codes	Number of references
Go to the opera with family	18	Community	30
Go to the opera with friends	9		
Go in a group	3		
People who go are old/wealthy	3		
Emotion	8	Emotion	23
Beautiful	12		
Enjoyed it	1		
Escapism	1		
Opera makes me cry	1		
Stirring stuff	1		
Amazing	1	Engagement through intense experience	73
Bold and gutsy	1		
Colourful	1		
Completeness of the music	1		
Crisp and focused	1		
Drama and Tragedy	2		
Excellent/unique experience	7		
Exhilaration	2		
Fabulous	2		
Fantastic	7		
Great feelings	2		
Gold Standard	1		
Grand	2		
Highest art form	1		
Highlight of the month	1		
Lively	2		
Magnificent	1		
Occasion/special night out	6		
Perfect	1		
Pleasure	1		
Relaxation	1		
Richness	5		
Sexy	1		
Spectacle	5		
Spiritual	1		

First order codes	Number of references	Second order codes	Number of references
Stimulation	1		
Surprise	1		
Terrific	1		
Voice of the singers	1		
Wonderful	4		
Excitement	9	Excitement	9
Hated Opera	1	Hated Opera	1
Attachment	4	Attachment	4
In love with opera	14	Love	27
Lovely thing to do	2		
Intimate	1		
Opera Lovers	9		
Particular opera I am in love with	3		
Passionate	1		
Going for 1–10 years	3	Loyalty	23
Going for 11–20 years	3		
Going for 21–30 years	1		
Going for 30 years plus	1		
Being going for many years	6		
Have being going a little bit	2		
Haven't been to the opera	1		
Find it difficult to go	3		
Hold a subscription	13		
Accommodation package	5	How to attract people to the opera	56
Backstage access	2		
Children's sessions	2		
Dinner and drinks package	13		
Drinks and canapes	8		
Education sessions at schools	7		
Loyalty discounts/free performances	3		
Social groups	6		
Make it more appealing to men	2		
Get out into the community	2		
Pre-opera talks	2		
Cheaper tickets/subscription for under 30s	3		