Motivators and Barriers of Ethnic Groups to Engage in Arts Performances

Dr Huong Le*

School of Management and Marketing, Deakin University, Australia

Email: huong@deakin.edu.au

Dr Yuka Fujimoto

School of Management and Marketing, Deakin University, Australia

Email: yuka.fujimoto@deakin.edu.au

*About the authors

Dr Huong Le
Dr Huong Le received her PhD from the University of Sydney and is a Lecturer in Management at the School of Management and Marketing, Deakin University. She has taught and conducted research at universities in Australia and institutions in Vietnam. Her research interests include cross-cultural research in arts management, arts marketing, audience development, tourism marketing, gender and leadership, and arts entrepreneurship. Her research has been published in a number of journals and in chapters in edited books such as Museum Marketing, and Tourist Satisfaction and Complaining Behavior. Dr Le is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: huong@deakin.edu.au.

Dr Yuka Fujimoto
Dr Yuka Fujimoto is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Management and Marketing, Deakin University. Her research interests lie in the area of diversity-oriented participation, social inclusion and human-oriented human resource management education for current and future managers. She acts as a regular reviewer for Human Resource Management Journal and serves on a Reviewers Panel for the Research and Practice in Human Resource Management (RPHRM) Journal. She is also a co-author of a Human Resource Management Education Book. (Email: yuka.fujimoto@deakin.edu.au)
This paper aims to highlight the behavioural processes of ethnic minority group consumers in relation to arts performance in Australia. Our findings indicate that Chinese, Vietnamese, Italians and Greeks have varying perceptions, practice and experiential decision-making. The major barriers for ethnic audiences to attend arts events were cost and time; a lack of understanding of or exposure to some art-forms; language difficulties. Motivating factors for ethnic audiences were events associated with their own ethnic backgrounds; socialising/meeting with friends/people, and familiarity with the art-form. Our research will be critical for future arts marketing and cultural research and contribute to socially inclusive communities where every resident can act as a contributor to build socio-economically strong cities and nations.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, cross-cultural marketing, audience development, arts marketing

Audience development is much-discussed in arts marketing decision-making bodies (Rentschler, 2006). While promotion of cultural diversity is a priority for many Australian arts organisations, attendees of arts and cultural events from non-European and non-English speaking backgrounds (e.g., Vietnamese, Chinese, and Indian) have been under-represented in comparison with mainstream groups (Australia Council, 1998). Recently, governments and community agencies in Australia have provided resources and research to increase the diversity of audiences and to enhance social inclusion in Australian communities (Rentschler, 2006). Various multicultural programs and different art-forms have been introduced to enrich the audience experience, to foster the unique diversity of Australian culture, and to achieve financial and artistic purposes. Further, ethnic audience development is believed to contribute significantly to community development in multicultural countries (Globalism Institute & VicHealth, 2006).

Many research projects have evaluated the audience experience/satisfaction after their attendance at arts events (e.g. Rentschler, 2006). However, there is a paucity of arts literature investigating factors that influence ethnic audiences’ level of attendance and preferences for certain arts events. Notably, arts marketing research has overlooked the poor and disadvantaged ethnic groups (Huntington, 2007). Furthermore, although overall marketing literature reveals a growing interest in the consumer behaviour of different cultural groups, the consumption of arts’ products by ethnic minority groups (possibly as a result of their low-income-earner status) remains relatively unexplored. Thus, there is a need and demand not only to develop arts marketing

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1 By arts events we mean the following: carnivals, street arts and circuses (not animals), culturally-specific festivals, museum or gallery exhibitions, musicals, pantomimes, plays/dramas, operas/operettas, music concerts or other live music events, live dance events.
strategies to attract culturally diverse audiences, but also to create societal harmony and development through arts events.

This research investigates the barriers and motivators that influence ethnic minority group members to attend arts and cultural events in Australia. Our research questions are: (1) What factors motivate ethnic minority groups to attend arts events in Australia? (2) What barriers impede ethnic minority groups’ attendance at arts events in Australia? and (3) What kind of arts events would ethnic minority groups like to attend? The findings of this project will provide arts organisations with a better understanding of factors which influence ethnic audiences’ participation in arts events.

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Literature in audience development often investigates why people attend some arts events and not others, who attends and what their motivations or barriers to attendance might be, and what factors influence their decision-making to attend and what can be learnt about those factors to find ways to encourage them to attend arts events more frequently. With the current constraints on resources, arts organisations need to look beyond their traditional subscribers to reach new participants who have not previously attended arts events (Hayes & Slater, 2002).

Colbert (2003) identifies a number of factors that can influence an adult’s cultural preferences such as values transmitted by family or at school, exposure to the arts as a child, or practising an art form as an amateur. Those factors have strong links with individuals’ motivations to participate in or attend cultural activities. Botti (2000) divides arts consumers’ motivations and/or intentions to attend arts events into the following segments: cultural need seekers for those who desire to search for information; symbolic benefits for those who communicate their personality and values via their consumption choices; social relationships for those who go to arts events for opportunities to meet with their peers; and emotional benefits for those who wish to experience something compelling, stimulating and enjoyable. The identification of these segments can help arts organisations apply appropriate strategies to develop each market segment.

For all audiences, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, lack of time and the cost of tickets are identified as the most frequent barriers to attending arts events (Colbert, 2003, Colbert, Beauregard & Vallée, 1998). While arts organisations cannot always remove these barriers depending on the art-form they present
and their organisational mission, Colbert (2003) suggests that general marketing strategies to ease barriers or facilitate participation can be applied. Further, as arts consumers are influenced by their association with the arts during childhood or through their family or school, Colbert (2003) indicates that providing children with memorable artistic experiences, or targeting future teachers during their training to connect them to values compatible with the arts, can facilitate their association with the arts in adulthood.

In addition, ethnic audiences may also experience other barriers to their attendance in the arts. For example, ethnic groups in Scotland indicate that barriers for them are cost and transport; lack of previous exposure; the perception and understanding of certain art forms; unease with coarse language and sexual explicitness; lack of gender separation; and language difficulties (Netto, 2008). Further, the exclusive nature of many arts practices (such as classical music and opera) and a requirement for specialist knowledge and understanding of arts discourse, genres and conventions are potential barriers to ethnic engagement and inclusion in the arts (Sifakakis, 2007). Some Western art forms, such as classical music, tend to be more formal and less focussed on social elements, which could also alienate some ethnic audiences (Kolb, 2002) due to their lack of knowledge or experience of such art forms.

From a different perspective, South Asian attendees at a festival in the U.K. reveal that family disapproval is their main barrier, along with the type or themes of shows which are irrelevant to their religion or traditional cultures (Syson & Wood, 2006). In addition to the above barriers, ethnic arts organisations also face barriers in terms of funding, and their lack of representation on decision-making bodies to change the focus of their marketing strategies and campaigns to influence this marginalised market (Netto, 2008).

Motivators for ethnic audiences to attend arts performances are also found in a number of studies. Ethnic communities are interested in attending arts events associated with their ethnicity or with culturally similar backgrounds (Netto, 2008, Kottasz & Bennett, 2006). They believe attending such events can help them to stay in touch with traditional culture, as well as contributing to the formation and maintenance of their cultural identity (Syson & Wood, 2006). Further, ethnic cultural practices can provide migrants with a sense of belonging and self-determination, and ethnic identity and pride support self-esteem and “cultural strength” (Netto, 2008:55). Research on ethnic groups in the U.K. indicates that “participating actively, meeting people
and *being in casual comfortable surroundings*” are significant motivating factors (Canning & Holmes, 2006:291, Syson & Wood, 2006).

The literature on barriers, facilitators and different preferences of ethnic minority groups for arts events indicates the need for further investigation to understand the dissimilar consumer behavioural processes of different ethnic minority groups.

**RESEARCH METHODS**

This paper presents the qualitative data and findings of the first stage of the research. In this exploratory phase, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to inductively explore. The findings in this stage also help to develop constructs for a scale to be used in the second stage (quantitative measurement) of this study.

The interview data were collected from two sources: (1) sixteen interviews with ethnic attendees and non-attendees, and (2) three interviews with community arts co-ordinators/managers in Melbourne, Australia.

**Participants**

All respondents were selected by purposive and snowball sampling procedures (Neuman, 2006). Our ethnic informants were chosen to meet the following criteria: (1) Australian residents who have lived in Australia for at least two years (to ensure that each participant had a certain familiarity with Australian culture and, possibly, some involvement in mainstream cultural life); (2) Non-English speaking background (their first language was not English). This criterion helped us to investigate the extent to which levels of English proficiency and cultural origin affected involvement in the arts and cultural events; (3) the ability to understand and communicate in English as evidence of their level of acculturation in Australia. We selected from four significant ethnic groups: Chinese (Mandarin speakers) (5), Vietnamese (4), Italians (3) and Greeks (4). Respondents were from 20 to 60 years old and covered a range of participation and involvement in the arts as attendees. We selected these four ethnic groups because they were the most populous minority groups in Australia. In order to validate and triangulate the data, we also interviewed arts co-ordinators/managers of Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV), the Immigration Museum and the Arts Centre in Melbourne, who often worked with ethnic audiences and ethnic artists. The arts managers provided us with interesting data from their different perspectives, and we supplemented the data with interviews with audience members.
Data Analysis

Qualitative content analysis was used to identify themes and patterns. Our data analysis comprised three linked sub-processes: data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After editing, segmenting and summarising the interview data, we developed a coding system to identify and develop concepts and categories based upon research questions and conceptual frameworks. We then identified certain themes and propositions and directly coded and analysed the data. These processes helped yield patterns and regularities, which then became the categories or themes, compatible with the purposes of the study. In the data reduction stage, themes and categories were confirmed, discarded and refined in relation to what we saw in the data. Knowing that this was an ongoing process, we refined and rewrote the data repeatedly to confirm and verify themes, and drew conclusions from the data in relation to ethnic participants’ motivators and barriers to attend arts events.

FINDINGS

We examined the data by considering cultural backgrounds in relation to cultural perceptions, and practical and experiential considerations. Our content analysis led primarily to findings of individuals’ culturally-diverse motivators and barriers for attending arts events. These findings provide implications for the marketing activities of arts organisations attempting to reach ethnic arts consumers.

Motivation to Attend Arts Events

We found major common themes among all participants such as a preference for ethnically-relevant events, outdoor events, socialising with friends/people, and involvement in arts events (as performers or organisers).

First, ethnically-relevant events/programming or events connected to the community were mentioned by all selected ethnic groups as the major motivator. For example, one Italian respondent explained:

I tap in mainstream arts and cultural activities a lot. For example, I am happy to attend festival if I know it is on. I attend Italian film festival, and if French film festival is on, we also want to attend … I often like to attend culturally-specific ones such as Spanish festival, Mongolian, Italian. I like attending outdoor (arts) events such as festival at the weekend, which is not expensive so that I can meet up with my friends (R.)

The manager of the Immigration Museum in Melbourne reflected a similar message, “The main motivation could be relevance, if they think it is meaningful to them, and that could be ethnic relevance or could be an art relevance … it could be personal type relevance” (GM). The manager of MAV further
explained that ethnic audiences often like to attend events not only with ethnic relevance to their culture but also to other cultures. As well, a majority of audience participants indicated that they like to attend diverse cultural festivals because they want to learn about other cultures/communities and to learn about the arts.

Second, outdoor free events or festivals with a mix of everything such as arts performances and food stalls seem to attract participants irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. This is a salient point for arts managers as community-oriented events often attract a crowd of diverse participants and become an important tool for multicultural community development. Nonetheless, more of the Italian and Vietnamese participants preferred attending arts events such as exhibitions, museums and musicals, compared with the Greek and Chinese participants. For example, one Italian participant said, “Mainly what I do is I go to exhibitions, galleries or National Gallery of Victoria” (C); and a Vietnamese participant said, “I am an avid fan of jazz, classical and operatic music and attend concerts on an occasional basis” (K).

Third, meeting/socialising with friends/new people was also quoted frequently as a reason for their attendance, as indicated by the Italian, Greek, Vietnamese and Chinese participants. For example, “I think because as a single person, it gives me an opportunity to mingle with people or meet with people with similar interests and also just to be engaged in the society”, said C, an Italian participant. However, Chinese participants often had pragmatic reasons for attending arts events. For example, they sometimes attended arts events as a situational convenience such as, ‘see it and drop in’, or ‘it is free, so…” which seemed to act as an important conduit for their decision-making. One Chinese participant expressed, “Sometimes … I go there [arts events]. Because I am working in the city, so I hang around. Free of charge. Public outside area [sic] … still it is good to look at different cultures (W).

Fourth, involvement in the arts event (as performers or organisers) was another significant antecedent to their participation mentioned by all groups except for the Chinese participants. A Vietnamese participant emphasised this factor as her motivation to attend an arts event:

Association with the program is most important factor. If we involve in organizing the program, or if we have some friends perform in that program, we are more likely to attend, not because of the exhibition or performance itself, not because of the art forms. Sometimes performance is not always good, or attractive enough for us to go to. So it needs to be worthwhile as we don’t have time (V).
Consistent with the above findings, all arts managers emphasised that developing relationships with ethnic communities/community leaders by inviting them to organise or perform in the events is a key factor to increased ethnic participation in arts/cultural events. For example, the manager of the MAV mentioned:

We have connections with the communities, we have connections with community leaders, we have connections with the artists, who I think are the cultural ambassadors for the community ... and plus, we look at very different programming ... if you’ve got at a Local Government level, a local festival, local community events, it’s really important for the Cultural Development Officers, or the Arts Officers to engage the ethnic communities (JM, MAV).

From the above findings, it appears that the Italian, Greek and Vietnamese participants are more motivated to attend arts events compared with the Chinese participants who often attend because of a combination of their love of the arts, their wish to develop their social relationships and their desire to experience the emotional benefits (i.e., to have fun). These attributes are potential segments for the marketing of various arts and cultural events, especially outdoor festivals.

**Structural barriers to participation: Ability to attend arts events**

Stokmans (2005) indicates that ability can be conceptualized by four types of resources, namely, *financial resources, mental resources, time budget, and physical capacities*, all of which can create barriers to attending arts events for the selected ethnic participants.

To varying degrees, all participants indicated that *cost* is a significant factor that determines their ability to attend arts events. Chinese participants expressed the highest cost-concerns in comparison to the participants in the other ethnic groups. For example, a Chinese participant said, “Cost. If good arts festivals, and if good musicians, then the price is not cheap, and that is the major reason” (W).

Regarding willingness to pay, Italian participants indicated that they were happy to pay between $30 and $50 for an event. However, free events/festivals were still quoted as their most preferred events, as C, the Italian participant mentioned:

Because I am a single person and of course the budget, it is quite important, so I look for free events; I want to go out and get my brain going, keep me interested but also something is not expensive. For example, when I look up newspaper, if I see something free, or not expensive, I would often like to join in.

Consistent with Colbert’s (2003) research, *lack of time* has also been mentioned by all participants, with highest concerns raised by Chinese participants. For instance, one Chinese participant said, “I am busy and I am not interested in it...”. Furthermore, individual time budgets appeared to influence their arts attendance, as mentioned above. One Vietnamese participant said:


I don’t have time. No time is the main reason... I work 12 hours a day. I turn up at work at 7 o’clock and I finish at 6.30, by the time I got home is 7pm, so 12 hours. Then you have little kid and you have other family matters, things to attend to. You really don’t have time to do anything else unless there is a very special reason to do it (V).

*Mental resources* follow two major antecedents - ‘cost and time’. The majority of our participants mentioned that *lack of knowledge about the art forms* and/or *cultural differences* hindered their understanding and attendance at arts events. None of the participants expressed an interest in the fine arts. For example, a Chinese participant expressed:

Actually, I attended the Arts Centre twice. It is first time to attend this kind of activity. I find it hard to understand what picture actually means. I go through the center very quickly, like 30 minutes, but my friends there for 2 hours [sic]. I think I begin to learn more from these pictures. I think I start to like this kind of activity (F).

In addition, a majority of Chinese and Vietnamese participants mentioned *language* was a barrier for them when attending arts events, whereas Italian and Greek participants did not express such a concern. For example, a Vietnamese participant said, “I think mainly language. I have been here for over 30 years so my English is not bad. I went to ‘Miss Saigon’ and I could not understand 100%, especially comedy, I don’t understand the joke they make… (H, C). These findings can be explained by the length of time the Italians and Greeks have lived in Australia, thereby enabling the younger generations to speak English like a native speaker. Also, their cultures may be closer to that of the Anglo-Saxon Australians than the Asian cultures, thus allowing them to tap into the mainstream cultural activities more easily than Asian migrants.

*Physical capacities* were not mentioned directly by the respondents as the sample selected in the study only included able-bodied or non-retired people. However, some Vietnamese and Italian respondents indicated that members of the older generations in their community would have greater difficulty attending arts events due to their language disadvantages or the accessibility of the city locations where major events are often held.

**Situational Barriers to Participation: Opportunity to attend arts events**

Participants indicated a number of situational barriers to their participation. *Lack of information* on arts events was mentioned by all groups of participants, as well as by the arts managers interviewed. The fact that the advertisements for arts events are not often shown on ethnic media, or if they are, they are often in English, excludes older generations from accessing the information. For example, a Vietnamese participant indicated:

They would need to inform or advertise in ethnic media, Vietnamese radio, Vietnamese newspapers. Now I rarely see arts advertised in Vietnamese newspapers. I read a lot of the Age, Hero, every Friday there are arts shows so I know. If many Vietnamese only read Vietnamese newspapers, they wouldn’t know... (H, C).
The arts managers also revealed the same message in the interviews, stating, “Well, they don’t know about it for a start, because it’s not advertised in their networks. So, if they don’t know about it, they can’t attend … So, it’s about looking at where … what’s … you know, programmed and how it’s marketed as well …” (JM).

While arts organisations might be aware that ‘not knowing about the events’ creates initial barriers to attendance, which was mentioned many times by ethnic participants and arts managers, arts institutions may not have enough resources and expertise to market their products to multicultural audiences. Such barriers decrease ethnic participation in the arts. To tackle this issue, partnerships with other arts organisations could be an option, as suggested by the following participant:

Currently, with mainstream arts organisations, there is a lack of creating awareness and promoting to certain ethnic community groups and audiences. To increase and develop attendance and participation, arts organisations should look at contacting and working with organisations such as Vietnam Community Association, Vic. (VCA) or Victoria Multicultural Commission, to seek out contacts who could consult with and assist in creating improved awareness to various ethnic groups (K).

Other situational barriers indicated by participants were the locations of the events, ability to travel to events, time of performance, and the exclusive nature of some art-forms, although these were not major themes.

Some recent migrants even mentioned that adjusting to the new life in Australia seems to dominate their concerns much more than attending any arts/social events. For example, a Chinese participant said, “I think [for] people who just came from China, to see something is not a priority. They need to settle down first.” (C). This finding indicates that it would be more challenging for arts marketers to reach new migrants to buy tickets for arts events except for free outdoor events.

A summary of our findings about the barriers and motivators of different ethnic groups in relation to their attendance at arts events, and the level of interest, is shown in Figure 1:

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DISCUSSION

This paper investigates barriers and motivators of ethnic groups in regard to their arts attendance, and the types of arts events they prefer to attend. The findings of this paper set preliminary culturally-sensitive typologies for holistic arts sector development in Australia.
Consistent with the ethnic arts consumers’ literature, our findings also demonstrate a variety of barriers to ethnic audiences in attending arts events such as cost and time (see Netto, 2008); lack of understanding or exposure to some art forms (especially high art such as opera and classical music) (Sifakakis, 2007); language difficulties (Netto, 2008); lack of information on the events; or other less-mentioned barriers such as travelling to arts events, location of the event, accessibility, parking, or weather. In agreement with the literature, a number of motivating factors for the attendance of ethnic audiences at arts event were found, such as events associated with their ethnic backgrounds (Netto, 2008, Kottasz & Bennett, 2006); socialising/meeting with friends/people (Canning & Holmes, 2006, Syson & Wood, 2006); and, like certain art-forms (Botti 2000), segmented them as cultural need seekers. These findings indicate that culturally-diverse attendees have dissimilar perceptual antecedents toward arts sectors which are accompanied by common practical concerns such as cost and time, as well as distinctive concerns such as art form preferences and language needs. These research findings, therefore, suggest arts organisations should develop relevant marketing strategies to reach specific ethnic markets, after having developed a good understanding of their cultures.

Our findings also provide evidence that each ethnic minority group shows different levels of motivation and obstacles to arts attendance. For example, Chinese audiences demonstrated relatively high pragmatic antecedents, with high costs, language and time as major determining factors for participation in arts events. Scholars also confirm the Chinese tendency to possess a relatively high pragmatic and utilitarian approach to a variety of issues (e.g. Gu, Humphrey & Messner, 2007:280). The rapid increase in the Chinese population in Australia means that their relatively high pragmatic and social concerns in the area of costs, time, language and inclusiveness require imminent attention from the arts sector. With a greater understanding of this segment and of their concerns, arts marketers can improve their tactics to reach this large and increasing market segment.

Our findings also show that compared with the other selected ethnic groups, Italian participants tended to have stronger preferences for arts and socialisation with people, a moderate level of cost and time concerns, and low language difficulty concerns. However, Vietnamese participants demonstrated a moderate level of arts preference and a high level of previous arts involvement as motivating factors, along with a moderately high level of cost, time and language concerns as determinants to participation in arts events. Greek audiences
illustrated relatively high community-based antecedents, with moderately high cost and low time concerns, combined with low language difficulty concerns as their determinants to participate in arts events. These preliminary findings offer us an indication that Italian, Greek and Vietnamese participants are potentially valuable targets for arts marketers (see Figure 1).

Australia has been recognised as one of the highest-ranked individualistic nations in the world (similar to the U.S. and the U.K.), which tends not to prioritise interdependent relationships over individual goals and needs (Hofstede, 2001). Our research findings show that the collectivist nature of the Vietnamese, Italian and Greek’s preference for association, socialising and community-based arts events indicate the need for the Australian arts sectors to acquire a greater collectivistic orientation in the process that determines culturally-diverse audience development and participation. Furthermore, our research findings indicate that there are differences among collectivistic arts attendance preferences (i.e., derived from association with art forms or socialising with people, or a preference for community-based events), which reveal an important undertaking of the Australian arts sector should be to examine in detail the culturally-dissimilar processes of motivations, behaviours and expectation in order to present ways in which the arts sector can attract diverse audiences. Our future research, therefore, will examine these differences in more detail.

**PRACTICAL CONTRIBUTION**

Arts events are believed to be a vital means of connecting culturally-diverse communities (Globalism Institute & VicHealth, 2006). Therefore, our research has created the foundation for understanding the perception processes of ethnic audiences in order to enhance their attendance and participation in arts events. Arts managers can apply these findings when considering different ways to attract ethnic audiences, by identifying major barriers and facilitators based on the dissimilar motivations, abilities and opportunities of ethnic communities.

In addition to the recommendations in arts consumer literature, we emphasise some practical implications for arts managers. As previous involvement with the arts can contribute significantly to the increasing participation of ethnic audiences, arts managers could focus on building relationships with ethnic attendees through getting them involved in events as organisers, cultural ambassadors or performers. Our findings also indicate that partnerships between arts organisations and multicultural arts organisations, or any
multiculturally-oriented bodies, can be very important conduits for assisting each other to reach and build relationships with ethnic communities.

Our findings confirm that social interactions between different communities and people are a key to attracting diverse participants. Festivals or outdoor cultural events are excellent opportunities for cultural groups to mingle and learn from each other’s cultures and, at the same time, to develop attendees’ familiarity with different art forms. This can form an essential platform for developing community harmony and societal cohesion. While the findings show the correlation between ethnic-relevant arts events and participant attendance, organising multicultural activities in festivals/outdoor arts events with a variety of activities, such as multicultural and high arts performances, food stalls and crafts, prove more significant for cultural exchanges, as indicated by the participants. Arts managers may consider combining their events increasingly with sport events which may attract larger audiences, as sport is the most preferred leisure activity for a majority of Australians.

The marketing channels of arts organisations need more effective ways to reach ethnic communities using a variety of ethnic media to inform ethnic audiences about upcoming arts events. The use of word of mouth, and especially ethnic newspapers distributed through diverse cultural organisations, such as Multicultural Arts Victoria and the Victorian Multicultural Commission, would be a useful tool to advertise specific events to target ethnic groups. Alternatively, as the arts managers interviewed suggested, connecting with community leaders/ambassadors proved its effectiveness to increase the participation of ethnic audiences.

We propose that by creating collectivistic and culturally-sensitive art forms, arts organisations can be a key lever to developing a community that creatively connects culturally-diverse people and enables them to overcome the cultural fault lines.

CONCLUSION

This paper highlights the consumer behavioural processes of ethnic minority members in relation to arts performance in Australia. By understanding the barriers and motivators of ethnic arts audiences, this research contributes not only practical strategies for arts marketers to develop their ethnic audiences, but also provides evidence-based research for policy-makers to create a socially-inclusive arts industry. As social demarcation between the rich and the poor continues to grow in many developed multicultural countries, our research
would not only be critical for future arts marketing and cultural research, but also to contribute to socially-inclusive communities where every resident can act as a contributor to build socio-economically strong cities and nations.

As the intent of the first stage of our project was to explore the arts consumer behaviours of selected ethnic groups, we employed a small sample using mainly professional groups who possibly had a higher ability to attend arts events than those with low socio-economic status and/or less-educated backgrounds. Our future research will use both qualitative and quantitative approaches and a large sample size, in marginalised and small ethnic communities in Australia, to test and refine the results of this study, and to develop an ethnic arts consumer scale for use in both academia and industry.
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Figure 1: Culturally-Diverse Audience Development (CDAD) Model (based on the RAND model of audience development) (McCarthy & Jinnett, 2001)