

Thomas Schultheis National University - COM 640	1
----------------------------------------------------	---

Week 4 Assignment

Compare & Contrast Case Study

RENT and *HAMILTON*

Thomas Schultheis

National University



Two of the most impactful, popular, and successful Broadway musicals of the last 30 years are *Rent* and *Hamilton*. Both shows received the Pulitzer Prize for Drama as well as winning the Tony Award for Best Musical. *Rent* is listed as the 11th longest running Broadway show in history and grossed 280 million (“List of the longest-running Broadway Shows”, 2019). *Hamilton*, which is still running in New York and is already the 44th longest running show in Broadway history and has grossed over 340 million (Harding, 2018). The shows share similarities such as non-traditional casting, word-of mouth, and historical context. They also have differences including: source material, solo versus ensemble promotion, and marketing campaigns.

Rent opened on Broadway in 1996 to much critical acclaim as well as having “word-of-mouth popularity” (“Rent (musical)”, 2019). The show also had an “ethnically diverse principal cast” which was ground-breaking at the time. *Rent* is based on Giacomo Puccini's opera *La Bohème*:

La Bohème was also about the lives of poor young artists. Tuberculosis, the plague of Puccini's opera, is replaced by HIV/AIDS in *Rent*; 1800s Paris is replaced by New York's East Village in the late 1980s or early 1990s. (“Rent (musical)”, 2019).

This innovative approach and young artist sensibility added to the allure of this inventive enterprise. Social proof was largely at play as the show was promoted as the cool place to be. The New York Times featured an article at the time of *Rent* in which the marketing efforts for the show presented the strategy, “to make them "cool," that ineffable quality attained recently by grunge or moshing or the actress Jennifer Aniston's hair styles but hardly ever by a Broadway show” (Baldinger, 1996).

The promotion of the show revolved around the dynamic ensemble cast, which inspired the

campaign. SpotCo, an advertising, marketing, and branding company was responsible for

marketing *Rent*. Drew Hodges, the founder, said “on “*Rent*,” you could make a poster, put it in the subway, and that was your brand. You could make a cool ad and then realize later what your message was — you could instinctively find your way into it” (Cox, 2016). Additionally, the producers of *Rent* are responsible for changing the approach for discount ticketing which changed Broadway forever:

According to one of *Rent*'s producers, Jeffrey Seller, the producing team decided that they wanted to keep the show accessible for people “in their 20s and 30s, artists, Bohemians—the people for whom [Jonathan Larson] wrote the show.” The method they came up with for achieving this was unprecedented on Broadway: rush tickets. (Culwell-Block, 2015).

The younger market is a desired audience for Broadway producers as they insure the growth and sustainability of the theatre segment of the entertainment industry. Shows such as *Rent* and *Hamilton* engage new audiences to the theatre and help encourage attendance to productions in the future.

Hamilton opened on Broadway in 2015 to incredible critical acclaim and off-the-charts ticket sales and popularity:

Hamilton set a Broadway box office record for the most money grossed in a single week in New York City in late November 2016, when it grossed \$3.3 million for an eight-performance week, the first show to break \$3 million in eight performances. (Hamilton (musical), 2019).

Essentially, the show had extraordinary word-of-mouth popularity, which is primarily social proof at the core. “The most powerful social proof in terms of its effect on word of mouth is social proof that comes from friends. We trust information that's shared by people we know and share this information further with much excitement” (Barysevich, 2019). The marketing promotion centered around one main

character, one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, Alexander Hamilton. The historical distinction influenced the campaign and the poster design. These combined elements caused *Hamilton* to be one of the most talked about show on Broadway in 2015 (Piepenberg, 2015).

Hamilton, when compared to *Rent*, also had non-traditional casting with “color-conscious casting of non-white actors as the Founding Fathers and other historical figures” (Hamilton (musical), 2019). Additionally, the show was also connected to an existing work as it was “inspired by the 2004 biography Alexander Hamilton by historian Ron Chernow” (Hamilton (musical), 2019). The elements of using ethnically diverse actors along with hip hop music set against an American history story proved to be a winning combination. The marketing efforts were not only bring in young audiences but also to broaden the appeal as “there was a real goal not to portray the show as this incredibly cutting-edge young thing, even though it is, in many ways. We wanted it to feel broader than that, and we very intentionally made that graphic to be kind of classic” (Cox, 2016).

Surprisingly the same company, SpotCo, also is responsible for marketing and promoting *Hamilton*. Drew Hodges says about the goal of a Broadway poster, “You’re making an emotional promise. If an ad campaign sets up what the show is going to feel like, and then when you go, you get that” (Cox, 2016). Pathos has been strategically used in the *Hamilton* campaign as well as the *Rent* campaign. The founder of SpotCo specially spells out the intention behind each campaign by focusing on “you’re not telling people what’s going to happen in the show; you’re telling people how it will feel to go” (Cox, 2016).

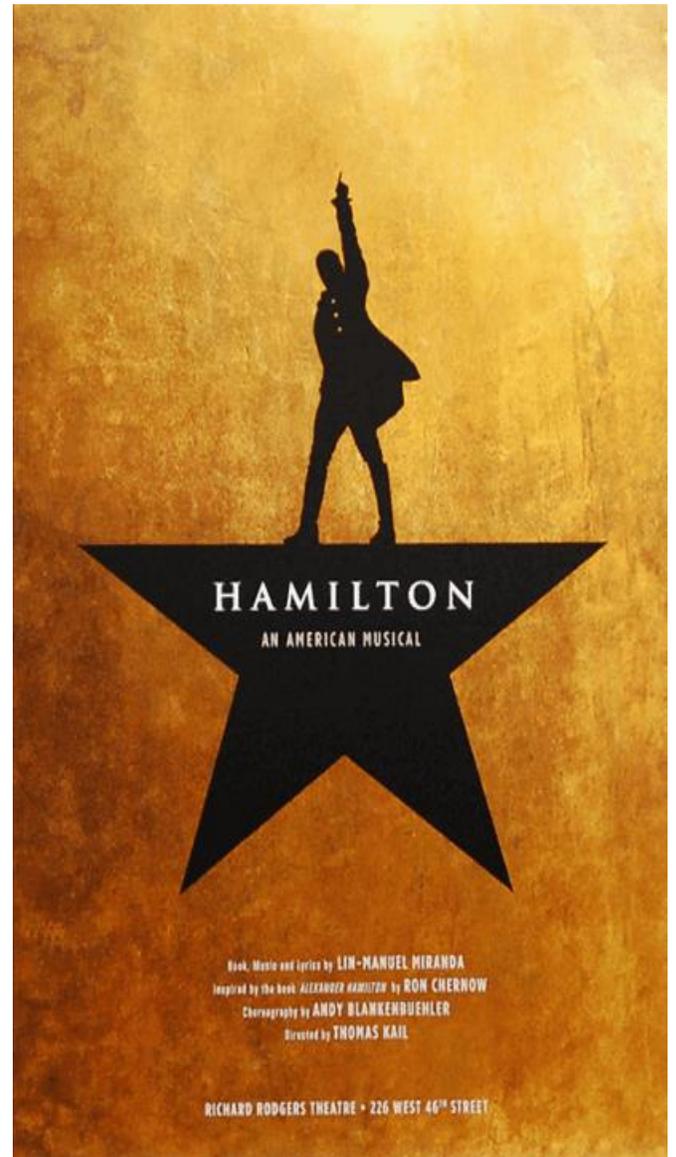
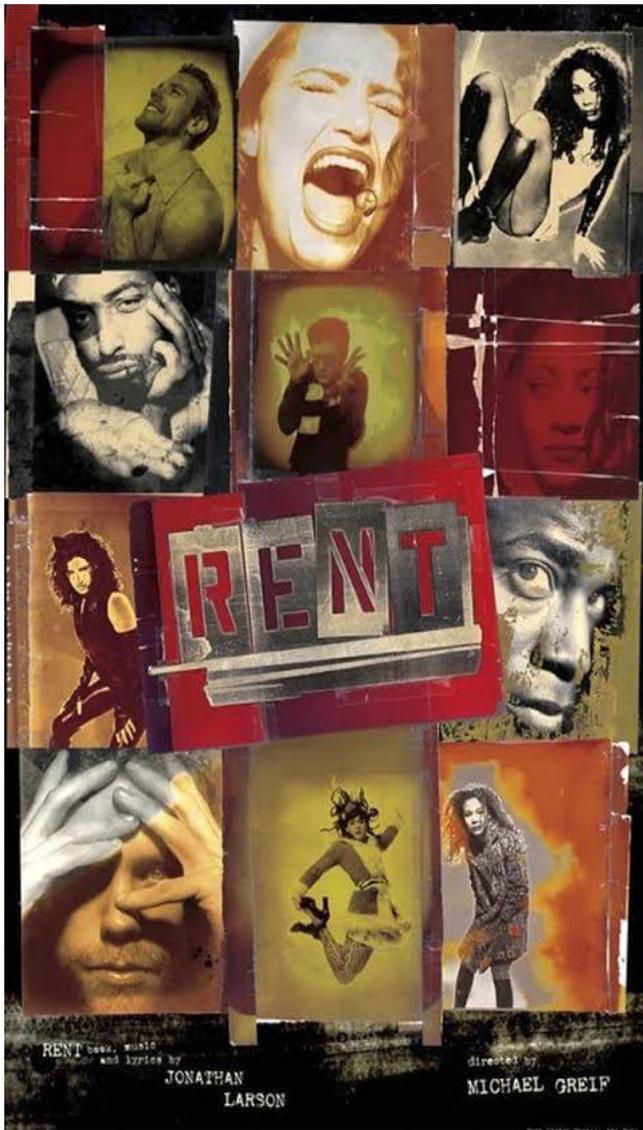
Hamilton producers also owes a debt of gratitude to the producers of *Rent* due to the scarcity persuasion principle and the innovative and sales tactic changing rush ticket process. The demand for

both shows was and is so high that the producers of both shows were and are able to motivate the market. The rush ticket process is only needed for popular shows where the tickets are less available, more scarce, and more in demand.

Nearly 20 years later, the rush and lottery programs that *Rent* pioneered have been adopted by countless other productions. *Hamilton* has received lots of attention for its extremely popular lottery, especially because the show's writer and star, Lin-Manuel Miranda, has taken to entertaining the lottery crowd with a special performance, often featuring stars from other Broadway shows (Culwell-Block, 2015).

Lin-Manuel Miranda was also using the authority persuasion principle in creating more interested and demand for his show by appearing to the crowds who were clamoring for tickets. Using other Broadway stars only increased the coolness factor and the credibility of the endeavor.

Drew Hedges spoke about making the *Rent* poster cool but had a different approach when creating the Hamilton poster. “We wanted it to feel broader than that, and we very intentionally made that graphic to be kind of classic. I love that the metallic gold is appropriate for both 1776 and for Missy Elliott” (Cox, 2016). While the posters for both shows present how it will feel to experience the live events, *Hamilton* has a simpler and wider appeal. *Rent*, while ground-breaking in both the subject matter and approach, also helped to change the approach to marketing Broadway through cool images and fresh, new rush ticket offers. *Hamilton*, being the successor to *Rent* has benefitted from lessons learned in 1996 and the producers were able to be most persuasive by capitalizing on word-of-mouth, using Pathos strategically in marketing campaigns, and bringing a creative, inspiring, and innovative story of 1776 to life.



References

- Baldinger, S. (1996). THEATER; Marketing Broadway as a Cool Spot. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com/1996/04/14/theater/theater-marketing-broadway-as-a-cool-spot.html>
- Barysevich, A. (2019). The Psychology of Social Proof and Why It Makes Word-of-Mouth Marketing So Effective. Retrieved from: <https://www.convinceandconvert.com/word-of-mouth/social-proof/>
- Cialdini, R. B. (2007). *Influence: the psychology of persuasion*. New York: Collins.
- Cialdini, R. B. (2018). *Pre-suasion: a revolutionary way to influence and persuade*. New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks.
- Cox, G. (2016). From 'Rent' to 'Hamilton,' SpotCo Founder on Broadway Marketing Campaigns. Retrieved from: <https://variety.com/2016/legit/features/broadway-marketing-from-rent-to-hamilton-1201724780/>
- Culwell-Bock, L. (2015). From Sleeping on the Streets to Swiping on a Screen: The Evolution of Rush Tickets From *Rent* to Digital Lotteries. Retrieved from: <http://www.playbill.com/article/from-sleeping-on-the-streets-to-swiping-on-a-screen-the-evolution-of-rush-tickets-from-rent-to-digital-lotteries-com-361078>
- Glazer, R. (2016). Four Marketing Lessons from the Success of Hamilton. Retrieved from: <https://spinsucks.com/marketing/four-marketing-lessons-hamilton-success/>
- Hamilton (musical). (2019). Retrieved from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamilton_\(musical\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hamilton_(musical))
- Harding, A. (2018). The 15 Most Popular Broadway Musicals of All Time. Retrieved from: <https://www.cheatsheet.com/culture/the-15-most-popular-broadway-musicals-of-all-time.html/>
- List of the longest-running Broadway Shows. (2019). Retrieved from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_the_longest-running_Broadway_shows
- Piepenberg, E. (2015). Why 'Hamilton' Has Heat. Retrieved from: <https://www.nytimes.com > theater > 20150806-hamilton-broadway>
-

Thomas Schultheis National University - COM 640	3
----------------------------------------------------	---

Week 4 Assignment

Rent (musical). (2019). Retrieved from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rent_\(musical\)#Recordings](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rent_(musical)#Recordings)

