

# Customer Education Programs: An Investigation in Italian Opera Theatres and Foundations

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## Abstract

*Purpose.* The aim of this paper is to explore customer education programs (CEPs) in Italy. For this study, the Lyric Opera Theatres and Foundations (LOTFs) industry is chosen as investigation field.

*Methodology.* This study adopts a qualitative approach based on the analysis of textual data gathered from LOTFs' websites. The population of Italian LOTFs was explored and a final sample of 27 LOTFs presenting CEPs on their websites was selected. The NVivo 10 software supported the data analysis.

*Findings.* The findings show that most CEPs are targeted to young students and teachers and include a variety of activities such as meetings, rehearsals, tours, and laboratories. They are organized mainly from October to April/May, generally in theatres. CEPs pursue cultural, social and educational goals. They present a wide range of prices and use quite traditional learning tools.

*Practical implications.* New potential targets need to be identified, such as older consumers, novice and expert consumers, and tour guides. Educational activities should be customized for different segments in terms of content, time and price. CEPs could be used as a tool to deseasonalise LOTFs demand and to support fund raising initiatives. Finally, Information and Communication Technology could provide new and more effective ways to increase customers' involvement and interaction.

*Originality/value.* This is one of the very few studies on customer education and customer education programs in the performing arts and in the opera realm. In addition, while several studies about customer education focus on the demand-side, this research takes into account the supply-side perspective.

## Keywords

knowledge management; novice and expert consumers; consumer expertise, performing arts; opera theatre; communication model (5W)

## 1. Introduction

Since the end of the Nineteen-thirties (see Herrmann, 1982), customer education as a topic has been investigated in a number of subject areas such as psychology (e.g., Friedman and Rees, 1988), psychiatry (e.g., Bielavitz et al., 2011), economics (e.g. Armstrong and Uhl, 1971; LaForge, 1989; Coppack and Brennan, 2005; Bienenstock, 2014), finance (e.g., Xiao et al., 2004; Lee and Jaramillo, 2013), management (e.g., Miller, 1980; Noel et al., 1990; Jung, 2013; Retana et al., 2016) and marketing (e.g. McNeal, 1978; Fast et al., 1989; Smith, 1996; Dillard and Johnson, 2015). Although it is a multidisciplinary concept, customer education is commonly defined among scholars as a process encompassing educational activities undertaken to improve customers' expertise with respect to the goods and services they buy.

Generally, customers become educated by means of investments in personal experiences or in education initiatives organized by companies (e.g., Bonfanti and Brunetti, 2015) or also by government (e.g., Brennan and Coppack, 2008; Clement, 2009). Personal experiences can be developed through the reflexive participation to purchasing processes, and the use, of goods and services during the different stages of life, as well as the reading of specialized magazines and collection of information by means of websites, advertising, word-of-mouth, and recommendations. In the other case, customers can participate in training courses, seminars, consulting services and other education activities provided by companies. In this regard, particularly significant are customer education programs (CEPs) that include formalised consumer orientation programmes, external communication provided to customers such as written institutional documents, news, reports, instruction booklets, flyers and tourist guides (Zeithaml et al., 2012), as well as learning by service personnel and other customers or users.

Participating to CEPs allows customers to obtain information and advice that increase their knowledge levels, greater personal satisfaction and appreciation because of improved decision making and skills of information evaluation, and greater protection of their rights and interests (Oumlil et al., 2000; Aubert, 2008; Brunetti et al., 2016). For example, educated customers are empowered to recognize how products work and assess the hazards associated with different products (Thompson, 1974; Staelin, 1978), understand their role and what they can expect from the service delivery process (Burton, 2002; Zeithaml et al., 2012), as well as make decisions and participate meaningfully in the customer-provider relationship (Bielavitz et al., 2011).

Investing in customer education, especially in CEPs, generates benefits also to companies (McNeal, 1978; Oumlil et al., 2000; Burton, 2002; Brunetti et al., 2016) such as to obtain and retain satisfied and loyal customers, create favourable attitudes towards a product or company, reduce confrontation with consumer advocates, improve effectiveness of marketing strategies, differentiate from competitors, add value to service offerings and assist in customer retention.

With reference to marketing and service marketing literature, CEPs are mainly studied in the Seventies and Eighties in terms of implementation, especially communication processes, and evaluation (e.g., Bloom, 1976; Wallendorf and Zaltman, 1977; Langrehr and Mason, 1978; Way, 1984; Fast et al., 1989). More recently, this topic has been examined in purchase decisions (van der Merwe, 2014) to sensitize customers to carefully read labels and emphasize their skills to optimally utilize such labels, and in decisions on product returns in consumer electronics (Rogers et al. 2002; Stock and Mulki, 2009) to reduce customer's difficulty in properly operating the product and, accordingly, improve customer relationship and decrease costs of product returns. Also, CEP are used in financial services field (Xiao et al., 2004; Lee and Jaramillo, 2013) to increase customers' awareness and evaluation about savings and debt reduction. The CEPs topic embraces both young (Makela and Peters, 2004) and older customers (e.g., Oumlil et al., 2000; Shim, 2005). For example, some studies focus on

consumer education programs for elder consumers (Oumlil et al., 2000) suffering from a disorder termed “learned helplessness” by psychologists (LaForge, 1989). Physical disability, financial instability (LaForge, 1989) and lack of experience (Aronson, 1993) can cause a feeling of helplessness and loss of control over various activities. Such programs contribute to prepare mature consumers to more adroitly confront the marketplace.

Opera theatres are an important part within the wider performing arts realm. Although in recent years they have been suffering from a decrease in attendance, they still are a fundamental institution in preserving and advancing culture, namely opera. With respect to Italy, then, such a role is even more important, since the number and the prestige of authors who in past times wrote many of the most famous and highly performed pièces.

Although many scholars argue the importance of customer education in terms of “educational initiatives undertaken by a company to better educate, inform, and develop the knowledge and skills of the customers in order to unlock the full value of the products at end use” (Antonios, 2011, p. 3), very little attention is currently paid to CEPs. Even less is known about CEPs deployed by Opera theatres, so that a research aiming at gathering education initiatives developed by these institutions is no doubt beneficial.

Consistently with this need, the aim of this paper is to explore the nature of CEPs adopted by Lyric Opera Theatres and Foundations (LOTFs). The context of the study is limited to Italy, a particularly relevant market in terms of its tradition in the LOTF industry. Given that customer expertise impacts on perceived quality (Boerner and Renz, 2008; Boerner and Jobst, 2008) and also on attendance (Damen and Van Klaveren, 2013; Espinola and Badrinarayanan, 2010), an investigation in CEPs proves useful since these are exactly meant as actions addressed towards an increase in operagoers knowledge. For this purpose, a qualitative approach is adopted based on the analysis of CEPs as presented on Italian LOTFs’ websites.

The paper is structured as follows. After a review about CEP in the marketing and service marketing literature, the main research streams concerning performing arts and Opera theatres are outlined. After that, the methodological approach is described and the salient elements of the CEPs adopted by of main Italian Lyric Opera Theatres and Foundations are presented. Managerial implications are also provided. Finally, this study concludes with some future research directions and limitations.

## **2. Literature review**

### *2.1. Customer education*

With specific reference to the marketing studies, research streams dealing with this topic are mainly two: a) consumer behaviour and b) service marketing. In particular, consumer behaviour studies aim to examine how to protect consumers’ interests. In particular, Nelson et al. (1977) argue that consumer education includes the development of skills, concepts and understanding to help consumers attain a maximum level of satisfaction and utilisation of their human and material resources. Wells and Atherton (1998) maintain that consumer education is concerned with the skills, attitudes, knowledge and understanding needed by individuals living in a consumer society. Bannister and Monsma (1982) define consumer education as the process of gaining the knowledge and skills needed to manage consumer resources and take action to influence those factors, which affect consumer decisions. Effects of information on consumer behaviour have particularly been discussed with regard to services’ intangibility (see Murray, 1991).

Only recently the consumer education issue has been examined in service marketing literature (Fast et al., 1989; Oumlil et al., 2000; Burton, 2002). Such studies highlight that consumer education is mainly based on the following three elements: a) presentation of

information related to goods, services and their providers; b) improvement of basic and in-depth knowledge and c) development of skills to use information. The topic is specifically related to the context of technical services such as specialist information technology suppliers, where information alone is often insufficient to ensure high levels of service quality (Carsky, 1991). Recently consumer education and information have been seen as concepts intended as part of a continuum in which consumer information is a lower-level activity useful for achieving a basic knowledge, whereas consumer education is at a higher and advanced level of knowledge (Burton, 2002). In the financial services field, “customer education is the extent to which advisors provide customers with the skills and abilities to utilise information” (Bell and Eisingerich, 2007, p. 473) or, specifically, it includes “service advisers’ willingness to explain financial concepts and the pros and cons of recommended investment opportunities to their clients” (Eisingerich and Bell, 2006, p. 90). More generally, it “is a process feeding by customer personal experiences and by companies’ education initiatives aimed at informing and training customers in order to increase their knowledge levels (basic, general, and deep)” (Bonfanti and Brunetti, 2015, p. 219). Accordingly, combining different types of information during the customer education process enables to develop skills for using information in terms of service quality (Oumlil et al., 2000; Burton, 2002) and promote increased knowledge levels (Aubert and Gotteland, 2010) by moving from novice to informed to expert customers (Clarkson et al., 2013).

## 2.2. *Customer education programs (CEPs)*

CEPs include “educational initiatives undertaken by a company to better educate, inform, and develop the knowledge and skills of the customers in order to unlock the full value of the products at end use” (Antonios, 2011, p. 3). Furthermore, they embrace all educational initiatives that allow customers to meet the right to full product information, learn how to make rational and efficient future choices, and protect their rights and interests. It is important that the educational initiatives are addressed to mature consumers to both enhance their capacity of navigation in the increasingly complex marketplace (Oumlil et al., 2000) and empower customers with limited literacy abilities to enter the marketplace (Adkins and Ozanne, 2005).

Marketing scholars have paid much attention to CEPs from the mid-Seventies to mid-Eighties (Bloom, 1976; Wallendorf and Zaltman, 1977; Bloom et al., 1977; Langrehr and Mason, 1978; Bloom and Ford, 1979; Way, 1984). In this period, a television series entitled “Consumer Survival Kit” was taken into account to explore differences in knowledge levels, behaviour, and satisfaction between viewers and non-viewers (Wallendorf and Zaltman, 1977; Bloom et al., 1977; Bloom and Ford, 1979). In brief, watching this TV program helped viewers to be more “active” consumers. More recently, a number of scholars examined the nature of and effects from the implementation of CEPs in terms of financial education and services. MONEY 2000™ is the CEP proposed by Xiao et al. (2004) and implemented by Cooperative Extension personnel in over two dozen states of the USA between 1996 and 2002. It is based on the Transtheoretical Model of Change, a framework that has been widely used to study health-related behaviour changes such as smoking cessation. Just as interesting in the financial education field is the study of Spader et al. (2009) who present and evaluate *Nuestro Barrio*, a Spanish-language telenovela designed to reach Latino immigrants with financial education with respect to bank account ownership and preparation for homeownership. *Nuestro Barrio*’s educational model is discussed in the context of the Transtheoretical Model of Behaviour Change, which defines the stages individuals move through as they make incremental progress toward sustained behaviour change. The empirical evidence shows that *Nuestro Barrio* is particularly useful as a tool for raising viewer awareness. Lee and Jaramillo (2013) discuss how Consumer Education for Branchless

Banking program can be used as a tool to address the innovative use of branchless banking for delivering financial services. They highlight how consumer education can support the adoption of this technology by addressing potential use challenges and enhancing the customer's experience with the branchless banking service.

Table 1 shows the main contributions about CEPs published in literature.

**Table 1. Analysis of CEPs in literature**

Author(s), year	Research area	Objective(s) and main contributions from the paper about CEP
Bloom, 1976	Consumer studies	This paper contains a brief description of existing CEPs and a discussion of several hypotheses about how programs of this type could affect consumer's behaviour.
Bloom et al., 1977	Consumer studies	This paper proposes a pilot study conducted to examine the differences in knowledge levels, behaviour, and satisfaction between viewers and non-viewers of the television program "Consumer Survival Kit".
Staelin, 1978	Consumer studies	This paper describes the results of a pilot study aimed at increasing knowledge level of consumers with respect to safety principles by means of a CEP in order to reduce the number of consumer product related injuries.
Bloom and Ford, 1979	Consumer studies	This paper discusses challenges and problems encountered in evaluating CEPs. It focuses on the evaluation research literature about developing measures of effectiveness, choosing a research design, and interpreting results, as well as the experiences of the authors in attempting to evaluate a major CEP.
Miller, 1980	Consumer studies	This paper proposes a product/service characteristic checklist to help determine the appropriateness of consumer information/education programs as remedies to consumer problems.
Oumlil et al., 2000	Services marketing	This paper highlights the role of CEPs in enhancing the capacity of mature consumers to identify market information, complaint and consumer redress procedures, and understand a more technology based consumer environment. A conceptual model of the relationship between consumer education and mature consumers' ability to manage marketplace dynamics is developed and discussed.
Kitson et al., 2003	Consumer studies	This paper tests the hypothesis that many adult consumers lack knowledge and understanding of their consumer rights and responsibilities. Results in both countries indicate that adult CEP is needed.
Lai Yeung, 2003	Consumer studies	This study attempts to reflect critically on the implications about deceptive advertisements and labelling on food products for the health and well-being of young people at school. It explores directions for designing relevant and effective education programs to empower young people in understanding food advertising strategies and making informed decisions on food choice.
Xiao et al., 2004	Consumer Studies	This paper describes the MONEY 2000™ program in relation to major constructs contained within the Transtheoretical Model of Change. It suggests that several change processes are associated with specific stages of change and there may be differences in behavioural changes between participants who increased their savings and those who reduced their debts in relation to smoking habits.
Makela and Peters, 2004	Consumer studies	This paper studies senior secondary schools' students to determine their awareness of consumer rights and responsibilities and their perceptions of consumer behaviour and consumer education. It outlines that CEP has an impact on students' consumer behaviours that when interacting with the market they often act as informed consumers.
Adkins and Ozanne, 2005	Marketing	This paper highlights how adults with limited literacy abilities enter the marketplace without the literacy resources of other consumers and are potentially more vulnerable. It discusses the role of a more critical consumer educational approach in literacy assistance programs and its impact on adult learners' feelings of self-esteem, empowerment, and agency.
Spader et al., 2009	Consumer affairs	This paper presents and evaluates Nuestro Barrio, a Spanish-language telenovela designed to reach Latino immigrants with financial education, and discusses it in the context of the Transtheoretical Model of Behaviour Change. The empirical evidence suggests that Nuestro Barrio is particularly useful as a tool for raising viewer awareness.
Stock and Mulki, 2009	Business logistics	This paper focuses on reverse logistics practices. It outlines that the retailer's emphasis on training customers in the proper use of their products can help in improving customer relations as well as decreasing costs of product returns. The use of various return programs in retail stores that either encourage or discourage customers from returning products are also important.
Lee and Jaramillo, 2013	Microfinance	This paper examines how customers experience a branchless banking service. It highlights how the Consumer Education for Branchless Banking program can support the adoption of this technology by addressing potential use challenges and enhancing the customer's experience with the branchless banking service.
Davidson, 2015	Consumer culture	This paper studies the commercialization of education by analysing the messages of a consumer education curriculum which was initiated by the Ribua Ha-kahol chain of supermarkets for junior high schools. Based on an ethnographic study, it revealed two prominent images of the consumer in the program's contents and activities: "the wise consumer" and "the enterprising self".
Brunetti et al., 2016	Marketing	This paper suggests some directions to future conceptual and practical research about CEPs in a marketing perspective.
Jung and Jin, 2016	Consumer studies	This paper identifies potential slow fashion consumer segments and understands their characteristics in relation to their attitude for sustainability. It suggests that CEP can help customers recognize and

		admit the negative impact of their overconsumption in the long term, and motivate them to change their habits.
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### 2.3 Performing arts and Opera theatre

In the field of performing arts, three main research streams can be found in the literature. The first one is about audience development, the second deals with satisfaction and quality issues, the third one regards repurchase intentions.

Audience development is of course a matter subject and its importance is growing since attendance is generally declining. While early work of Andreasen and Belk (1980) focuses on predictors of attendance, more recent research explores various factors associated with Australian high-school students' participation in arts events (Martin et al., 2012) and examines if cultural and artistic education in the Netherlands lead students to participate more in high cultural events. Cultural and artistic education was found to increase, although with little effect, the participation in high culture, but not the participation in popular culture (Damen and Klaveren, 2013). Espinola and Badrinarayanan (2010) consider specifically the role of consumer expertise on arts events attendance and propose the concept of sacralisation as positively related to event attendance intentions.

Quality and satisfaction in performing arts are quite extensively studied in the literature. Hume and Sullivan Mort (2008) discuss the notion of value and find that it mediates the relationship of show experience quality and peripheral service quality to satisfaction. Traditional measures of quality in the performing arts are then complemented with a new one, namely audience experience, able to capture more appropriate dimensions (Radbourne et al., 2009).

Repurchase intentions, on their part, are considered to identify their predictors via in-depth qualitative interviews (Hume et al., 2007). Hume and Sullivan Mort (2010) later modelled and tested the interrelationships of appraisal emotion, core service quality and peripheral quality on repurchase intentions. Finally, attention was devoted to the interplay between positive emotions and product involvement on repurchase behaviour at the product category level and not only in within-category competition (Troilo et al., 2014).

Since performing arts are encompassing different cultural genres (classical or jazz concerts, opera, musicals, ballets), research exclusively focused on Opera has received comparatively less attention. Interesting contributions, however, can be found again on audience development and satisfaction.

Tajtáková and Arias-Aranda (2008) address the challenge of increasing participation in opera and ballet events among Slovakia university students. They propose a model for segmentation as a basis for the development of an appropriate marketing strategy.

Boerner and various colleagues published over time several papers dealing with the perception of quality in opera. Starting with a field study (Boerner and Jobst, 2008), spectators' individual judgements both on single components and on congruency components were analysed. They were found to be highly homogeneous, showing little differences between experts and non-experts. Such a result was confirmed, even if experts are able to elaborate more differentiated judgements than non-experts (Boerner and Renz, 2008). Later, customer satisfaction was investigated and a model integrating the services marketing approach and music perception and theatre studies was suggested and tested (Jobst and Boerner, 2011). The content and the structure of participants' judgements on the quality of the opera performance were finally scrutinized and an instrument was developed (Boerner et al., 2015). Drawing on the social constructivist paradigm, Cuenca et al. (2015), on their part, discuss the conditions for enjoying opera and depict opera attendance basically as an emotional experience. Nam and You (2015) explored the impacts of demographic characteristics and education experience in arts on consumers' behaviour, including frequency and diversity of seeing performing arts, acquisition of information, attributes, and expected benefits. The frequency of seeing performing arts was increased, if consumers were

accompanied by friends or family members, had experience in arts education, and looked for information on websites before attending the event. While the frequency of seeing performing arts increased as consumers perceived popularity as an important attribute, the frequency of seeing performing arts was decreased when they perceived facilities as an important attribute.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Research design

This study follows a qualitative approach (Lee, 1999). It is based on textual data gathered from institutional websites and materials of the main Italian Lyric Opera Theatres and Foundations. Being a first exploratory study in this field, the choice of this method is most suitable because of novelty of the topic and context of analysis that is hitherto unexplored in relation to CEPs. Since the aim of the study is neither to measure any variable nor to verify any hypotheses, but rather to gain a thorough understanding of the CEPs deployed by Italian theatres, the chosen method fits well.

#### 3.2. Sampling and data collection procedure

In terms of sampling, we first explored the universe of Italian LOTFs (N= 62) based on a publicly available contact list ([www.cantarelopera.com](http://www.cantarelopera.com)). Company websites are a good source of data in management research since they provide information coming directly from the institution who is responsible for them (Micelotta and Raynard, 2011). After analysing the LOTFs' website pages, 32 companies were identified as eligible targets, since some kind of CEPs was found. Out of the 32 companies, only 27 Lyric Opera Theatres and Foundations developing customer education programs were found. Table 2 presents the final list of units considered for this study.

**Table 2. Italian Lyric Opera Theatres and Foundations considered for this study**

N.	Name	Location	Website	Foundation year
1	Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia	Roma	<a href="http://www.santacecilia.it/">www.santacecilia.it/</a>	1585
2	Fondazione Arena di Verona	Verona	<a href="http://www.arena.it/arena/it">www.arena.it/arena/it</a>	1913
3	Fondazione I Teatri	Reggio Emilia	<a href="http://www.iteatri.re.it/">www.iteatri.re.it/</a>	2002
4	Fondazione Lirica Sinfonica Petruzzelli e Teatri di Bari	Bari	<a href="http://www.fondazionepetruzzelli.it/">www.fondazionepetruzzelli.it/</a>	1903
5	Fondazione Teatro Comunale e Auditorium	Bolzano	<a href="http://www.fondazioneteatro.bolzano.it/it/teatro-comunale-bolzano/1-0.html">www.fondazioneteatro.bolzano.it/it/teatro-comunale-bolzano/1-0.html</a>	1999
6	Maggio Musicale Fiorentino	Firenze	<a href="http://www.operadifirenze.it/it/">www.operadifirenze.it/it/</a>	n.a.
7	Nuovo Teatro Verdi	Sassari	<a href="http://www.nuovoteatroverdi.it/joomla/homepage">www.nuovoteatroverdi.it/joomla/homepage</a>	1884
8	Teatro alla Scala	Milano	<a href="http://www.teatroallascala.org/it/index.html">www.teatroallascala.org/it/index.html</a>	1778
9	Teatro Carlo Felice	Genova	<a href="http://www.carlofelicegenova.it/">www.carlofelicegenova.it/</a>	n.a.
10	Teatro Coccia	Novara	<a href="http://www.fondazioneteatrococcia.it/">www.fondazioneteatrococcia.it/</a>	1888
11	Teatro Comunale Città di Vicenza	Vicenza	<a href="http://www.tcvi.it/">www.tcvi.it/</a>	n.a.
12	Teatro Comunale Goldoni	Livorno	<a href="http://www.teatrostabileveneto.it/sedi/goldoni/">www.teatrostabileveneto.it/sedi/goldoni/</a>	1992
13	Teatro Comunale Lo Stignani	Imola	<a href="http://www.teatrostignani.it/">www.teatrostignani.it/</a>	n.a.
14	Teatro Comunale Luciano Pavarotti	Modena	<a href="http://www.teatrocomunalemodena.it/">www.teatrocomunalemodena.it/</a>	1841
15	Teatro dell'Opera	Roma	<a href="http://www.operaroma.it/">www.operaroma.it/</a>	n.a.
16	Teatro di Tradizione Dante Alighieri	Ravenna	<a href="http://www.teatroalighieri.org/">www.teatroalighieri.org/</a>	1852
17	Teatro Donizetti	Bergamo	<a href="http://www.gaetano-donizetti.com/DoniPortal/homePageProcess.jsp">www.gaetano-donizetti.com/DoniPortal/homePageProcess.jsp</a>	n.a.
18	Teatro La Fenice	Venezia	<a href="http://www.teatrolafenice.it/site/index.php">www.teatrolafenice.it/site/index.php</a>	1792
19	Teatro Massimo	Palermo	<a href="http://www.teatromassimo.it/">www.teatromassimo.it/</a>	1897
20	Teatro Massimo Bellini	Catania	<a href="http://www.teatromassimobellini.it/">www.teatromassimobellini.it/</a>	1890
21	Teatro Municipale di Piacenza	Piacenza	<a href="http://www.teatripiacenza.it/">www.teatripiacenza.it/</a>	1804
22	Teatro Municipale Giuseppe Verdi	Salerno	<a href="http://www.teatroverdisalerno.it/">www.teatroverdisalerno.it/</a>	1872
23	Teatro dell'Opera Giocosa	Savona	<a href="http://www.operagiocosa.it/">www.operagiocosa.it/</a>	1956
24	Teatro Regio	Torino	<a href="http://www.teatroregio.torino.it/">www.teatroregio.torino.it/</a>	1740
25	Teatro Regio	Parma	<a href="http://www.teatroregioparma.it/">www.teatroregioparma.it/</a>	1829
26	Teatro San Carlo	Napoli	<a href="http://www.teatrosancarlo.it/">www.teatrosancarlo.it/</a>	1737
27	Teatro Sociale di Como	Como	<a href="http://www.teatrosocialecomo.it/">www.teatrosocialecomo.it/</a>	1813

The keywords guiding the first selection of theatres were: “education” and “educational activity”. In light of the exploratory nature of the study, however, the selection criteria have been refined and validated during the investigation, including other keywords such as “school and teaching”, “projects”, “laboratory on stage”, “young opera”. Being all the websites in Italian language, it was not necessary to compare the syntax adopted but the translation in English language was fundamental in the phase of elaboration of this paper.

### 3.3. Data analysis

After the data collection, the selected texts were analysed. Despite the wide and varied amount of consulted official documents, texts suitable for the analysis results proved relatively limited. These texts were analysed via Qualitative Solutions and Research (QSR) NVivo 10 software which supported the distribution and archiving of data. Given that texts do not require the normalization process, an open coding was carried out to identify words more frequently mentioned (words with a frequency equal to or greater than 5 units to avoid an excessive dispersion of the results).

The coding of themes was inductively carried out (Saldana, 2009) in relation to the study’s purpose. Given that a specific analysis model about customer education, to our knowledge, does not exist in literature, we examine the CEPs by means of the elements identified at the end of the thirteenth century by the moral theologian San Tommaso d’Aquino: 1) ‘quis’ (=who), 2) ‘quid’ (=what), 3) ‘quando’ (=when), 4) ‘ubi’ (= where), 5) ‘cur’ (= why), 6) ‘quantum’ (= how much), 7) ‘quomodo’ (= how), and 8) ‘quibus auxiliis’ (= by what means). The first five elements correspond to Five Ws and bring to mind Lasswell’s model of communication (1948) that is widely used in marketing studies (Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Jensen, 2013). Table 3 shows these elements and their description.

**Table 3. Examining CEPs: a reference grid**

Elements for analysis		Description
in Latin	in English	
quis	who	It presents CEPs’ target audience and organisers
quid	what	It describes CEPs’ content
quando	when	It indicates the period in which CEPs are organized
ubi	where	It points to the location in which CEPs are arranged
cur	why	It explains CEPs’ objectives
quantum	how much	It specifies the price of CEPs initiatives
quomodo	how	It highlights the learning processes
quibus auxiliis	by what means	It outlines the educational tools

With specific reference to ‘quomodo’ (how) elements, we use some concepts from social learning theory (McGregor, 2009) to highlight the main learning processes developed during the CEPs examined. In addition, we analyse the educational tools (‘quibus auxiliis’ elements) using the pedagogical methods proposed by Aubert and Gotteland (2010) that combine the presence or lack of educators with the degree of interaction with consumers in moderate (when information is developed) or strong (when exchange and interactivity are developed) terms.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. *Quis* (= who)

This section presents CEPs’ target audience, as well as the organisers of the educational projects. The CEPs that are implemented in the 27 Italian Lyric Opera Theatres and



Foundations examined in this study are mainly addressed to young students of schools from elementary/primary to high schools and their teachers. Secondly, they are delivered to kids of preschools and their families. Most of the theatres offer CEPs with targeted approaches according to age ranges of students, thus not considering specifically their level of knowledge and expertise accumulated in relation to different performing arts. There are few specific initiatives for adults. Only a small number of theatres offer cultural activities for socially disadvantaged people.

The choice to be more addressed to young highlights how theatres aim heavily to achieve a new audience that day by day has the opportunity to live experience the world of the theatre. Approaching especially young people to the world of performing arts means that theatres are trying to educate the audiences of tomorrow to participate to not only the lyric culture development but also learning the cult of beauty and the use of leisure quality, as well as familiarizing with the theatre and arts in terms of entertainment and knowledge tool. In other terms, today's young, when they will be adults, will remember their exciting and curious experiences made in the theatre and, therefore, they will continue to frequent theatres. In this way, they will increasingly acquire information by becoming from novice to (even more) expert customers. In this regard, the Theatre Giocosa in Savona maintains as follows:

*“the student can participate in the theatrical-musical dimension not as a passive spectator, but rather as a subject actively interacting with a stimulating context, a universe which communicates ideas and feelings not only with words, but also through sounds, colours and movements, gathered in a synthesis that is much more than their sum”.*

In addition to organized structure of theatres and foundations, many CEPs are organized in collaboration with local schools and, only in very few cases, also with departments of human sciences belonging to the local universities. A few theatres cooperate with academics, journalists and critics, experts in teaching methodologies or in performing arts such as professional actors, playwrights, writers, dancers, and musicians to organize educational courses.

#### 4.2. *Quid (= what)*

The offering of CEPs is rich and varied. It essentially includes performing concerts or lessons, educational and entertainment activities, guided tours, meetings, and courses. These are usually organized in the form of seminars or laboratories aimed at creating awareness and increased knowledge about theatre, music and dance, as well as about backstage activities. In addition, customers have the chance to obtain information about the characters and the plot of a specific opera. In particular, laboratories allow people to immerse themselves in an atmosphere of theatrical and scenic involvement in which they can develop their gesture, acting and improvisations skills. Some theatres organize laboratories of (instrumental or choral) music, drama, dance, creative writing, and choreography.

The three following initiatives are pretty much developed among the 27 theatres considered for this study: a) provision of brochures focused on the operas currently run and containing the detailed plots, their genesis and analysis, b) open rehearsals, and c) pre-show meetings in which students, young people and families can meet the protagonists of the performances before the opera. In this regard, for example, the Giuseppe Verdi Municipal Theatre of Salerno organizes during the day before the dress rehearsal a meeting among students of the high schools of Salerno and the conductor or director of opera to know characters and plot about opera to be staged at the theatre. The event concludes with the interpretation of the main operas by some members of the Choir of the Opera House of Salerno. To live in a different way the opera, the Massimo theatre in Palermo organizes a

series of aperitifs “close to the stage” before the show starts, or afternoon tea to comment on the event, as well as a series of conferences and meetings with interpreters.

With specific reference to students of all levels, some theatres create targeted approaches according to the different age groups to educate them to know the secrets of the daily life of a large theatre and the various artistic and technical creativity that are expressed and realized in the fitting such as orchestral rehearsals, scene evidence, singing, stage direction, sets, lights, costumes, and final show. In addition, students can learn by doing: the kids can play musical instruments of orchestra, sometimes build them, directing, and singing.

Specific refresher courses are scheduled to educate teachers in the months before the show. Some theatres organize a series of educational meetings, led by experienced musicians, during which teachers acquire the tools and the expertise needed to supervise and guide their students to the discovery of opera. These CEPs aim to be an intensive training to teachers aimed at presenting the opera world with its language, its syntax, its style and its expression in storytelling form.

All of the paths above mentioned passionate participants by creating an original teaching method based on moments of game and introducing them to the world of opera through study and fun.

#### 4.3. *Quando* (= when)

CEPs are heavily organized during the winter and spring months usually from October to April/May, when students are still attending school. Specific initiatives are annually planned during the Christmas festivities. During the summer months, only one CEP is offered to kids from 6 to 10 years.

Even if the CEPs addressed to students are organized in collaboration with their teachers during school hours, many initiatives take place on Saturdays or during the whole weekend. Usually, teachers take part in meetings of education that are taught by experienced musicians during the outside school hours while CEPs for adults are organized in the late afternoon or in the evening.

#### 4.4. *Ubi* (= where)

CEPs are mainly organized by lyric opera theatres and foundations localized in Northern Italy (about 41 per cent), followed by Central Italy (about 33 per cent) and by regions of southern Italy (about 26 per cent). All CEPs take place in lyric theatres and most of them are historical buildings. A few concerts that are addressed to disadvantaged people take directly place in hospitals. Some CEPs also include the opportunity of knowing and visiting the theatre’ spaces such as the building, the foyer, the great hall, the stage, the dressing rooms of the artists, the rehearsal rooms, tailoring, make-up and wigs department, and the auditorium outdoor.

#### 4.5. *Cur* (= why)

This section summarises the objectives of CEPs. The Italian lyric opera theatres and foundations essentially aim to approach and involve more and more young people, families and schools to the performing arts of dance and music and, more generally, to the world of opera house by offering new educational opportunities to familiarize, know and appreciate the great tradition of the opera house and, thus, stimulate the young people to attend to performances in the future. As argued by Theatre Massimo in Palermo,

*“The more children have the opportunity to experiment different stimuli, the more they refine their critical ability ... to choose and compare. The experience in theatre is undoubtedly an opportunity that must not be lost, because it is not mere*

*entertainment - as yet unfortunately many think - but it is a means to develop attention and arouse emotional reactions always new and different”.*

Through specific CEPs, each theatre intends to stimulate curiosity, interest, if not love, for the opera. Through these educational initiatives, customers can gain greater self-awareness through the emotions and experiences expressed in the language of music and dance. Each person can be educated in order to better understand not only the language and culture of opera house, but also to increase self-knowledge and creativity and facilitate the recognition and management of emotions.

In addition, some theatres explain young people the many career opportunities by training the future professionals in the theatre and opera context and, more in general, in the industry of cultural events. Some theatres especially offer them the opportunity to acquire organizational and management skills that are needed to implement cultural and theatrical projects. They teach to young how they can know theatre from the inside of theatre itself such as to follow different construction phases of a show. In this way, theatres create a close linkage with the world of job.

In order to introduce students to the world of opera, many theatres are investing in the training of their teachers, making them aware of the importance of educating their pupils to theatre, music and dance. Through targeted CEPs, teachers will gain tools and develop expertise to supervise and guide their students to the discovery of opera house. As maintained by Theatre Verdi in Sassari,

*“A day spent in the theatre is not a missed school day only a different school day. The theatre is a world full of stimuli that children are able to grasp and acquire, if suitably guided”.*

The CEPs that are addressed to adults allow them to understand and appreciate the spectacle of opera, music and ballet, by starting in some cases in-depth knowledge courses about opera house, as well as of theatrical involvement and acquisition of a greater self-awareness and identity through emotions and experiences expressed in the language of dance and music.

#### *4.6. Quantum (= how much)*

The ‘quantum’ can be understood in terms of duration and price of CEPs. In particular, CEPs vary length: some initiatives are single such as attending general rehearsals or presentation of opera before its start while other are scheduled over several meetings. In this last case, lessons are usually weekly organized but some of courses require a weekly or biweekly continued participation for several months.

Very few initiatives are free: usually, students of primary schools can freely attend general rehearsals of the show, teachers can attend a meeting of training and update to subsequently evaluate if carry out an education path addressed to supervise and guide their students to the opera world, and young people can attend to one or two test lessons aimed at bringing people together to opera. Most of the CEPs present a price that on average varies from 7 to 20 euro per person. Education courses very structured can also cost from 80 to 200 euro.

#### *4.7. Quomodo (= how)*

From the learning processes point of view, students approach to the opera world by combining observational learning and reciprocal determinism (McGregor, 2009). Specifically, observational learning means vicariously acquiring a behaviour by ‘watching’ someone else do it and by watching what happens to the person when that person does do it (outcome). After watching, the person enters the information into his or her memory for recall to guide his or her behaviour in the future. Reciprocal determinism includes ongoing interaction among people, their environment and their behaviour in order to create mutual relationship.

Students combine these approaches because they can collectively learn inside recreational and creative settings and vicariously acquiring a behaviour by watching someone else doing it and what happens as outcome. After watching, the student enters the information into his or her memory for recall to guide his or her behaviour in the future. In addition, interaction among students' behaviour, other people and environment determines how they will evolve together.

In addition to these learning methods, vicarious capabilities are the learning process that better characterises adults people attending opera because they attain new knowledge by exploring situations and activities that normally are out of reach because of time constraints or resources.

#### 4.8. *Quibus auxiliis* (= by what means)

The CEPs examined for this study are addressed to develop information and, at the same time, exchange interactivity between audience and educator such as conductor, performer, actor, and musician.

From the pedagogical methods point of view, some CEPs such as presentation of opera are mass education-oriented because information about opera are indistinctly transferred to many people regardless of their knowledge level about that opera. Instructional books, audio CD and DVD are educational tools that can help people learn, also in self-education way, something more about opera world. As previously described, most of CEPs are heavily based on personalized education and some of them on experiential education. In particular, education is personalized in terms of CEPs targeted upon same age ranges of students, a specific opera, music, drama or dance. Group games, acting and improvisation based on an easy and immediate language support learning. The involvement of people develops their emotions and enables them to approach to opera world through direct experience and edutainment, i.e. education and entertainment.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The aim of this paper was to explore the CEPs adopted by Italian LOTFs and gain in-depth insights into the structural/founding elements of CEPs in this specific industry. The analysis was based on a model derived from Lasswell (1948), McGregor (2009) and Aubert and Gotteland (2010). Though exploratory in nature, our study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it provides empirical evidence with respect to CEPs organized by Italian Opera theatres. Out of 62 institutions, 27 displayed education initiatives in their websites. Thus, it is possible to see how customer education works in an industry which is still under-researched. While previous research focused on services, especially on financial services (Eisingerich and Bell, 2006), few contributions are available on customer education and customer education programs, especially in the realm of performing arts and opera. Since opera performances are complex products, a certain amount of knowledge is required in order to fully appreciate them. So, getting some insights about what opera theatres actually do is important.

Second, this paper complements extant research in performing arts and opera taking into consideration the supply side. While quite a lot of studies can be found dealing with topics related with the demand side, such as audience development (Espinola and Badrinarayanan, 2010), quality (Hume and Sullivan Mort, 2008) and customer satisfaction (Jobst and Boerner, 2011), no research looking at what companies do is available. More, while sometimes customers' quality perception and satisfaction are investigated according to their degree of knowledge, distinguishing them between novice and expert consumers (Boerner and Renz, 2008), no research has been carried out yet looking at initiatives aiming at making an impact

on knowledge of customers. Customer education programs are purposefully intended to make the audience – especially the young one – more familiar with and in turn more expert in this kind of performing art.

Third, our research can provide some support to the literature arguing that “*the company who holds the best customers, wins*” (Kelly, 1998). Having expert opera attendees, urges theatres organizing better and better events along every dimension of the performance. Gathering some empirical evidence about initiatives opera companies put in place in order to improve their customers’ level of knowledge proves that companies engaged in having better customers do exist. Though nothing can be said yet about the effectiveness of such programs, still a piece of knowledge has been added.

As regards managerial implications, we propose the following recommendations for professionals in the LOTFs industry. First, from the analysis of the quis (who) element, we can derive that, although collaborations between LOTFs and other operators are still limited, CEPs are supported in organizational and educational terms by some educational institutions specialized in music, dance and cinema, as well as by other companies such as local banks, retailers and energy providers. This collaboration has two implications: on the one hand, theatres can acquire specific skills that may be not included in their organizational and education offer and, on the other hand, they can increase awareness about their educational projects and encourage people to participate. Moreover, the findings show that CEPs focus mainly on schools (i.e. students and teachers). A rough segmentation approach is used since LOTFs seem to cluster their customers based exclusively on (young) age and education factors. However, other segments could be identified. For example, marketing literature recognizes the importance of older customers, which represent an interesting target in terms of purchasing power and leisure time. In addition, families with young children are almost excluded from participating to LOTFs events apart from school-related initiatives. CEPs and performances targeted for this specific could encourage parents to participate to performances without feeling “out of place” and, at the same time, could bring the lyric opera culture closer to young children. Further, expertise and passion could be used as segmentation criteria to provide different types of CEPs for novice vs. expert consumers. In addition, CEPs could be targeted differently to residents and tourists, but also to professionals in the tourism industry such as tour guides. We highly recommend LOTFs to diversify CEPs according to the different targets.

Second, the findings suggest that CEPs’ content could be further personalised in order to meet the different segments’ needs (for example, novice vs. expert consumers).

Third, as regards the Quando (when) and Ubi (where) elements, CEPs could be effectively organized in off-peak periods as a tool for deseasonalization of the LOTFs demand. Further, some sort of “traveling CEPs” could be arranged to promote local LOTFs around Italy or in other counties, as well.

Fourth, as concerns the Cur (why) element, CEPs have a social relevance in terms of heritage preservation, education and creation of job opportunities. Specifically, the educational initiatives offered by Italian LOTFs share values of union, solidarity and participation and are aimed at not only protecting the immense Italian cultural heritage but also at renewing the future of opera. Creating a new audience interested in the opera, developing musical culture among young people, offering professional opportunities, and theatre spaces to create social aggregation allow opera to better penetrate into the local community and more and more reduce that distance which is created with respect to the new generations. In addition, CEPs could be used to find new investors, support fund raising initiatives and find new business customers, such as companies willing to organize educational initiatives for their top-clients.

Fifth, with regard to the Quantum (how much) element, we recommend that LOTFs should use diversified pricing strategies according to their target. For example, some high-value-high-price initiatives could be directed to experts and opera lovers, both among residents and tourists, while low price CEPs opportunities should be offered to neophytes, young people and low budget attendees to opera performances.

Finally, Quomodo (how) and quibus auxiliis (by what means) need to be considered conjointly. In particular, from our analysis the role of ICTs seems to be still underestimated by Italian LOTFs. However, technology (e.g. interactive videos, augmented reality, artificial intelligence) could play a major role in CEPs to stimulate new learning modes. In addition, ICTs could also enhance customer engagement and interaction with the performance, other spectators and actors.

Given that “not all customers require similar levels of educational support in the same service context” (Burton, 2002), managers should develop CEPs mainly aimed at customers who want to satisfy their own curiosity and increase their knowledge levels (Bonfanti and Brunetti, 2015). In this sense, opera should be regarded from a cultural and social interaction perspective, though not to the detriment of high quality and excellence.

The findings of this research provide interesting insights not only for the LOTFs industry, but also for other cultural organizations such as museums. However, some limitations should be considered in the interpretation of results. First, the sample was limited to Italian LOFTs. Future research should be expanded to other countries, considering not only theatres, but also museums and other types of cultural organizations (e.g. libraries). Second, because the analysis was based exclusively on LOFTs’ website contents. Hence, some CEPs initiatives might have been excluded from our analysis. Further research should involve CEPs organizers and participants in order to gain further insights about how educational initiatives are arranged and how customers perceive them. Finally, this research adopted a qualitative approach. Future quantitative studies should be conducted to measure for example customer education levels, customers’ motivations to participate to CEPs and customer satisfaction about these educational initiatives. Further, it would be interesting to explore the relationship between customer education and customer satisfaction about attendance to opera performances.

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