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**The Evolution and Adaptation of the Identity of the First European Opera Companies:
A Journey From Conservative Cultural Institutions,
To Visionary Contemporary Brands**

Doctoral Thesis Summary

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Cluj-Napoca
2022

Table of Contents

List of images and tables

Chapter I. Introduction

PART I: Theoretical Framework

Chapter II. Public Relations and the Cultural and Artistic Industry

- 2.1. Definitions and introductory notes
- 2.2. Campaigns and public relations strategies

Chapter III. Identity and the cultural-artistic brand

- 3.1. Identity. Introductory notes
- 3.2. The brand in the cultural-artistic sector
- 3.3. Branding. The steps of a circular process

Chapter IV. Performing arts institutions and Opera theatres

- 4.1. Performing arts and the beginnings of Opera
- 4.2. Structure and organisation of opera institutions
- 4.3. Cultural management
- 4.4. The identity of cultural and artistic institutions. Mission. Vision. Values

Chapter V. Communication and promoting opera theatres

- 5.1. Promotion strategies of opera institutions
- 5.2. Advertising and Public Relations of the artistic brand
- 5.3. The first forms of promotion of opera institutions
- 5.4. The new stages and new media. Online communication of opera institutions
- 5.5. Social media and opera institutions
- 5.6. Opera institutions and the co-creating public
- 5.7. Digital influences and celebrity-influencers of opera theatres
- 5.8. Crisis communication of cultural-artistic institutions. Reflections upon the COVID-19 pandemic effects
- 5.9. Online communication and virtual stages of opera theatres, during the COVID-19 pandemic

Chapter VI. Research methodology

- 6.1. Methodologic design
- 6.2. Qualitative Research
 - 6.2.1. Document analysis

6.2.2. Semi-structured interviews with experts

6.3. Quantitative Research

6.3.1. Content analysis

PART II: Empirical Research

Chapter VII. Research results: Qualitative document analysis

7.1. Opéra national de Paris

7.2. Teatro alla Scala di Milano

7.3. The Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca

7.4. General conclusions and implications of the qualitative document analysis

Chapter VIII. Research results: Semi-structured interviews with experts

8.1. Theme 1: The main elements of the identity of a cultural-artistic brand

8.2. Theme 2: Strategies for maintaining and highlighting brand identity of a cultural-artistic brand

8.3. Theme 3: The role of tradition and heritage for the identity of a cultural-artistic brand

8.4. Theme 4: The meeting point of cultural tradition and modernity

8.5. Theme 5: The role of communication in the existence and evolutionary path of an opera institution

8.6. Theme 6: Appropriate and effective communication platforms for opera houses

8.7. Theme 7: Managing communication through social media networks of opera institutions

8.8. Theme 8: The objectives of the Facebook communication strategy of an opera house

8.9. Theme 9: COVID-19 post-pandemic resilience strategies for performing arts institutions

8.10. Theme 10: The future and projected evolution of opera institutions, in terms of identity and communication

8.11. General conclusions and implications of the semi-structured interviews with experts

Chapter IX. Research results: Content analysis of communication through the Facebook platform

9.1. The first interval of analysis. The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic

9.1.1. Opéra national de Paris

9.1.2. Teatro alla Scala di Milano

9.1.3. The Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca

9.2. The second interval of analysis. Adjustment and pivoting period

9.2.1. Opéra national de Paris

9.2.2. Teatro alla Scala di Milano

9.2.3. The Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca

9.3. The third interval of analysis. The resumption of live activity

9.3.1. Opéra national de Paris

9.3.2. Teatro alla Scala di Milano

9.3.3. The Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca

9.4. General conclusions and implications of the content analysis of communication through the Facebook platform

Chapter X. Conclusions, research limits and future studies perspectives

Bibliography references

Appendix 1. Analysis grid applied to the document analysis following the three institutions

Appendix 2. Analysis grid applied to the semi-structured interviews with experts in the fields of cultural-artistic managements, branding and cultural PR

Appendix 3. Interview guide applied to the semi-structured interviews with experts in the fields of cultural-artistic managements, branding and cultural PR

Appendix 4. Analysis grid applied to the content analysis of communication through the Facebook platform of the three institutions

Appendix 5. Visual identity elements of Opéra national de Paris

Appendix 6. Visual identity elements of Teatro alla Scala di Milano

Appendix 7. Visual identity elements of The Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca

Key concepts:

identity; cultural PR; performing arts; brand; the process of cultural branding

I. Introduction

Rich in essence and meaning, the art of theatre has been stirring, inspiring and engaging for hundreds of years. From the earliest curtain calls of the Middle Ages, to stately Classicism, to the artistic Renaissance, to the innovative present, every era and current crossed has helped shape the history, vision and identity of the world's first theatrical institutions. The present captures them more alive and visionary than ever, displaying their cultural heritage and setting the tone for contemporary artistic modernity.

This doctoral study aims to trace precisely this *rise, direction and development of cultural-artistic identities*, and how *cultural institutions are transforming into genuine cultural brands adapted to the modern society*. Our focus is on a representative cultural segment: *performing arts institutions and opera houses* – cultural brands with a long history and rich history, invented and reinvented over centuries. Once seen as mere elitist cultural heritage institutions, rigidly rooted in the past, opera houses have proved the opposite, standing out for their modern adaptation to the present and their visionary shaping of the future of their field.

Opera has become a fundamental part of the world's cultural heritage, whose rise, prestige and popularity have developed over more than four centuries, from the first documented opera performance in 1607 to contemporary compositions. In this context, the most recent report by the international opera profile organization, Opera Base, currently lists 2.520 opera companies globally, 661,296 performances performed annually, 681 opera festivals, 115,675 artists and 558 opera cultural managers (Operabase, 2022). These figures show a visible increase compared to the same indicators reported in the previous year, 2021, despite the challenges brought by the pandemic that marked these intervals (2,500 opera companies globally, 596,293 performances, 609 opera festivals, 109,718 artists and 554 opera cultural managers) (Operabase, 2021).

It is therefore not surprising that the internationally renowned agency EY Consulting calls the cultural-creative industry “an unprecedented and growing economic force experiencing intense innovation and constant variety” (EY Consulting, 2021). At the time of this study, in 2022, the CCI reports revenues worth \$2,250 billion worldwide and 3% of global GDP (UNESCO, 2021), and at the European level - €643 billion and 4,4% of the continent's GDP (EY Consulting, 2021). These figures indicate an increase of €93 billions in revenue and 1,7% in GDP compared to the detailed study conducted by the same agency in 2013.

These imposing values have kept opera institutions at the top of the creative industry, despite the critical episode of the COVID-19 pandemic, which produced a blockage and successive closure of theatres, but opera has shown an impressive capacity for resilience and readaptation, being

considered that “art has a cathartic power that can accompany post-pandemic society on the road to resilience” (EY Consulting, 2021).

Within this framework, the first opera houses in Europe, among the most long-lived, admired and representative cultural institutions in the world, have emerged as *true brands* ranked among the most powerful and imposing identities worldwide. The sold-out daily performances, the hundreds of thousands of spectators and tourists who cross their gilded halls every year and the virtual premieres that connect them with millions of users around the world – all prove the *importance, timeless* and *modernity* of the works, setting the tone for a cultural industry that arouses great interest worldwide and generates remarkable profits, uniting cultures and people, needs and desires, in a cultural context that makes them relevant and highly topical.

Our doctoral thesis therefore aims to identify, study and explain the path of this development, the step followed in the adaptation, evolution and modernization of the first opera houses and the winding road that has brought them to the present day, harmonizing their important cultural heritage with new stages and new media. Verdi, Bellini, Puccini or Rossini are now no longer just reference composers, but also the names of cultural subscriptions designed to attract audiences with diverse preferences, the opera box can now be brought into the home thanks to live streaming projects, the monotonous wait at the airport can be broken by the aria of a soloist with a flash mob that reminds us of the excitement of the performances, the stage no longer belongs only to the finished planks but also to the crowded city pavement on which the theatre often descends, applauses sometimes become virtual likes and hearts, and in the metro we may be surrounded by the dance of graceful ballerinas promoting the next choreographic premiere. Opera has learned to express itself artistically not only on stage, but also through extensive and novel communication strategies, and constant interaction with its audiences. It has ingeniously redefined its communication, strategy and focus in tune with modernity, as well as the recent challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic, using its cultural heritage and long history to its advantage, becoming increasingly attractive, sought after and loved internationally.

Looking through this spectrum of the cultural phenomenon of the theatrical arts, we propose through this PhD thesis to identify and analyse the process of creation, differentiation, development and adaptation of the identity of the first European opera theatres, in an attempt to observe and study the factors that lead to the success and longevity of a brand in the cultural-artistic field.

Our study will be concretized by the synchronic and diachronic analysis of three reference opera institutions: *Opéra national de Paris*, *Teatro alla Scala di Milano* – two of the oldest, long-lived, most admired and representative opera in Europe, emblems of artistic excellence and identity worldwide; and, on a national level, *The Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca* – the first opera

institution founded in our country and appreciated as the most representative Romanian institution of profile, in the process of building its own image and identity.

The famous composer Richard Wagner said opera is “a unique mixture of story, music and drama [...] without doubt the most complex art form” (Wagner, 1893, p. 194), a view elaborated in the aesthetic principle *Der Gesamtkunstwerk*. Thus, opera houses – as institutions whose main mission is to present cultural products to the general public – base their work on the most complex of the performing arts, which brings together music, dance and theatre in a single creation. How should the identity of such institutions be presented and communicated in order to be attractive and desirable to all the generations it crosses? We aim to understand the steps of this broad process. The theme of this paper follows and studies a complex, long and constant process of *creating, maintaining and developing* a brand identity, based on the science of communication, public relations and advertising – for this reason, we consider it is essential to address all these specialized areas that underpin and shape the evolution of a *cultural-artistic brand identity*.

Based on these stated intentions, we would like to detail in the following the objectives and perspectives of our study. In order to give an evolutionary course to our work, we will refer to five key concepts, which we consider interconnected and essential to the theme of this work: ***identity, cultural PR, performing arts, brand, cultural branding process***. These are defined and detailed in the first part of our study, thus facilitating our highlighting and exemplifying them in the empirical research.

These dimensions and sub-dimensions are linked through **two main research objectives**:

- 1) To identify and analyse the process of creation, differentiation, development and communication of the identity of the first European opera houses during their centennial history;
- 2) To analyse their transition from *conservative institutions*, to *visionary brands adapted to the digital age* and – nowadays – to identities with great capacity to pivot their own field through *resilience strategies imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic context*.

In line with and complementing these objectives, our empirical approach intends to answer the following **six research questions**, which will guide our study through specific indicators, as well as theoretical benchmarks that will support and stimulate our research:

- Q1. What are the constitutive elements of the identity of a cultural-artistic brand?***
- Q2. How does communication materialize in the evolution of a performing arts brand?***
- Q3. What are the steps followed by an opera house in its evolution from a conservative tradition to a future adapted to the contemporary?***
- Q4. To what extent is the identity of an opera house preserved throughout its existence, maintaining a balance between tradition – modernity – and crisis situations encountered?***

Q5. How is the communication strategy of opera houses readapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, through the necessary resilience measures, so that they maintain their relevant identity and image?

Q6. How did the cultural institutions of the Paris National Opera (ONP), the La Scala Theatre in Milan (TSM) and the Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca (ONRCN) communicate during the COVID-19 pandemic and what was the engagement of the followers?

Guided by these questions and objectives, our study is structured in two parts. The first part will represent the *theoretical component* – an incursion into the literature, focused on explaining and detailing the key concepts mentioned earlier. Considering that the core of this paper is the *evolution of identity*, our focus will be extrapolated and multidisciplinary, following its red thread through the contribution of communication, public relations and brand management. The second part of the paper will provide a detailed *empirical research* of the process of creating, developing and maintaining an identity in cultural-artistic institutions and opera houses – which are examples of excellence and secular longevity.

In order to answer the first four research questions, a *qualitative study* was carried out, comprising *document analyses* of the three mentioned opera institutions, as well as a series of fourteen *semi-structured interviews* with experts in the field of communication, branding and cultural-artistic management. In order to answer the last two research questions, a *quantitative study* was conducted through *quantitative content analyses of online communication via Facebook platform* applied to the three opera institutions.

The structure of the work comprises a total of ten chapters. Of these, five chapters represent the theoretical component of this work, which covers the key concepts of the study and the notions on which the empirical study was based. The latter is set out in the last four chapters which gradually discuss all the research methods, followed by the research conclusions, the limitations of the study, and future research directions.

Theoretical framework

Chapter II. Public relations and the cultural-artistic sphere

The first theoretical chapter is dedicated to introductory notions in communication, public relations and their intersection with the cultural-artistic sphere, following categories of campaigns and communication strategies of performing arts institutions. The perspectives of some reference authors for the mentioned fields are addressed, such as P. Watzlawick (Rus, 2002), Frank E. X. Dance și Carl E. Larson, L. Forsdale și D. McQuail (2010), C. Shannon and W. Weaver (1949), Rex Harlow

(1976), Scott M. Cutlip, Allen H. Center și Glen M. Broom (2006), James E. Grunig și Todd Hunt (1983). Aspects of public relations campaigns and strategies are also discussed in detail, as well as models and structures of successful PR campaigns (Newsom, VanSlyke Turk, & Kruckeberg, 2003), (M. Cutlip *et. al.*, 2006), (Rus, 2009), (Coman, 2006), which can also be applied to the cultural-artistic sector studied.

Chapter III. The Cultural-artistic identity and brand

The second theoretical chapter highlights the notion of *identity* – a central concept of our study that we discuss from the perspective of its core and defining elements. We also discuss the correlation between *identity – meaning – image – reputation – success*, as well as the excellence that the identity element creates, develops and maintains within an organisational structure (Grunig & Grunig, 2008).

An important contribution to this chapter is made by the views of author W. Olins, a highly regarded pioneer in the field and author of world-renowned identities, who looks at *corporate identity* through the spectrum of the *personality* it gives to an organisation in its dealings with internal and external audiences. In this context, the three generic identity structures and categories are discussed: *monolithic*, *endorsed* and *branded* – according to which an entity shapes its entire organisational structure and image.

At the same time, we discuss in detail the four reference vectors of an organisation, through which its identity is reflected: *products and services; environments; communication* and *behaviour*. These vectors are the fundamental elements on which the first part of our empirical research is based, through the three document analyses applied to the Paris, Milan and Cluj-Napoca Opera Houses.

The same theoretical chapter also includes general and representative aspects of the *brand* and the artistic *branding* process. This complex symbol represented by the *brand* – which becomes the totality of the immaterial elements of an organisation, its name, image and history, the characteristics of its product, its reputation, its way of communication and promotion – is viewed through the spectrum of representative authors of this sector, such as D. Ogilvy (1985), K. J. Keller (1998), N. Hollis (2010), N. Kapferer (2008), M. Batey (2008), D. C. Balaban (2005), A. Adamson (2010), P. Hanlon (2006) – specialists who attribute the brand with the notions of: *word, image* and *emotion*, as well as authors Al and L. Ries, who accentuate the importance of differentiation in the existence and longevity of a brand.

Chapter IV. Performing Arts institutions and Opera theatres

The third theoretical chapter is devoted to performing arts institutions and opera houses, discussing the main components of these entities, their internal and organizational structures, cultural management aspects and the process of identity-building of such institutions (Pellegrin-Boucher & Roy, 2019), (Wainwright, 2019), (Pottinger, 2018), (Bonet & Schargorodsky, 2017), (Abfalter, 2017, p. 2), (Abbate & Parker, 2015), (Tarondeau & Agid, 2010, p. 7) – these being fundamental notions on which we will subsequently base our analysis of the three European institutions. The globalisation of opera has become a contemporary phenomenon reflected both in the international popularity of these institutions (Opera Base, 2022), as well as in the budgets reached by this cultural-artistic sector (Io, 2019), both before and after the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic (EY Consulting, 2021). The fluid shift from what was originally considered *superior culture – high brow culture* (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 14), has become in the last decade an art that is increasingly open and close to the general public (Croitoru, 2017, p. 6).

Chapter V. Communication and promotion of Opera theatres

The penultimate theoretical chapter approached the communication and promotion of performing arts institutions, looking at the evolution of their advertising and PR strategies, from the first performances' posters that appeared in the 1600s, to the digital presence of today. We now also highlight the main promotion and marketing strategies of a theatre, from defining and building a theatre's image, to communicating its artistic programme, knowing its publics, analysing the audiences and developing artistic communities (Senelick, 2018; Bonet & Schargorodsky, 2017; Tamburri, & Munn, 2019; Santa María Muxica, 2018; Chang & Liu, 2018; Juncker, 2015; Latulipe, Carroll, & Lottridge, 2011; Luo, 2002; Thorsten, Hennig-Thurau & Hansen, 2000).

In the context of the discussion about promotion, the attention of theatres has been turning in recent years mainly to the *online environment* and *social networks*, a virtual space in which these classic institutions have shaped a vibrant, modern image for themselves, as true trendsetters of their industry, with the benefit of an international audience that has become the global community of these cultural brands. Social media are closely examined with a particular focus on *Facebook platform*, the most popular and frequently used platform by the opera institutions studied in this thesis. This new digital image of opera has also materialised through virtual states created by theatres, available to

audience-users around the world. These create a new immersive artistic experience as well as a co-partnership between theatres and online users, who in turn become creators alongside the institutions themselves, as well as next to artist-celebrities who come *SMI – Social Media Influencers* (Balaban, 2021a; Agostino, Arnaboldi, & Calissano, 2019; Santa María Muxica, 2018; De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017; Crossick & Kaszynska, 2016), as part of the modern theatre that “bring art *to* the community, promoting art *in* and *for* the community” (Lewis, 1990, p. 114).

The last part of this chapter also includes a close look at crisis communication, which we consider fundamental in the context of the COVID-19 Pandemic that has impacted the creative industries over the last two years. The chapter concludes with key issues in creating a positive, transparent and valued image for performing arts institutions.

Chapter VI. Research methodology

The theoretical component concludes with the *methodology design*, as this chapter is structured on the two empirical elements of the study: the *qualitative* and *quantitative component*. These punctually follow the three research methods applied in the empirical study: the *qualitative document analysis*, *semi-structured interviews with experts* and *quantitative content analysis* – which will help us in understanding and explaining the topic of this study, answering the six research questions.

Among these, the first method, the *document analysis* provides us with an in-depth study applied to the three mentioned opera institutions, by means of documents that offer a diversity of information, details and data categories, allowing us to observe and understand the process of branding and construction of the three brand identities – through an analysis grid containing ten referential categories.

The *semi-structured interviews* were addressed to a total of fourteen experts in communication, PR branding and cultural-artistic management, with long experiences in the field of the analyzed cultural entities – who shared their opinions and expertise through a semi-structured interview grid based on ten discussion themes.

The empirical study concluded with the quantitative content analysis of online content applied to the Facebook platform. In line with the current global context influenced by the COVID-19 Pandemic, the communication and resilience strategies of the three opera institutions were tracked on the most popular social network used by them, Facebook (Statista, 2021). A total of N=851 posts were analysed, representing Opéra National de Paris – ONP (n=264), Teatro alla Scala di Milano - TSM

(n=294) and the Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca - ONRCN (n=293), based on the analysis grid including thirteen items representative of the communication strategy of these institutions and the dynamic of engagement with their audiences. Their communicational and identity evolution was analysed during three representative periods: a.) *The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic period* (April-May 2020): coinciding with the sudden closure of the performing arts institutions and the transfer of their entire activities online; b.) *The interval of adaptation and pivoting* (January-February 2020): context of a new European-wide lockdown and refinement of resilience strategies; c.) *The period of relaxation of restrictions and resilience strategies* (June-August 2021): reflects the resumption of live performances and direct interaction with audiences.

The empirical research

Following the theoretical chapters, the empirical research is presented in chapters VII, VIII and IX, which offer the results of the *document analysis* applied to the Paris Opera, La Scala Theatre in Milan and the Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca; the results of the *semi-structured interviews* conducted with fourteen experts in the fields of cultural PR, brand strategy and cultural-artistic management; and the results of the *quantitative content analysis of online communication via the Facebook platform* applied to the three institutions over the three significant periods of time mentioned earlier.

Chapter VII. Research results: The qualitative document analysis

Looking across the spectrum of features specific to the qualitative research method of document analysis, this chapter is devoted to an in-depth study of the identities of three referential opera companies, chosen for their relevance to the topic of this thesis: *Opéra national de Paris*, *Teatro alla Scala di Milano* and the *Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca*.

The two Western institutions were chosen because of their position as symbolic and referential works in the European and international cultural landscape, being two of the oldest, most prestigious, appreciated and long-lived institutions in the history of opera. *The Paris Opera*, with a history of more than 350 years, and *La Scala Theatre in Milan*, which recently celebrated its 245th anniversary, have become true cultural brands that have established themselves throughout their history through their artistic excellence and unique cultural heritage, always coupled with modern and visionary perspectives. These are reflected in their artistic products, both classical and avant-garde, in their

promotional strategies, in their ever-full concert halls with thousands of national and international spectators, and in all the activities that lead them towards an equally bright future.

In turn, the *Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca* is the first opera institution founded in our country, which has become iconic and equivalent to the classical operatic and choreographic tradition in the local cultural landscape. During its 102 years of existence – although more modest in age than the two Western institutions – the Cluj Opera has fulfilled a series of roles, which give it its undeniable uniqueness: from its pioneering role and introduction of this artistic genre in Romania, to educating the national public in the world opera tradition and creating the first launching stage for Romanian composers and artists, to staging the most innovative and unconventional contemporary productions. All this is achieved through a syncretism both artistical and identitarian, which attracts the interest of spectators of all ages, who sell out tickets for every performance presented.

Although classical by tradition and number of years, all three institutions have managed to become a link between past, present and future art, they have constantly created and recreated their identities and image in order to remain permanently current, relevant and desirable, they relate to the contemporary by constantly looking to the future. They evolve and adapt to societal changes and crisis situations, while connecting artists and audiences through a particular emotion that brings together classicism and modernity in a perfect synergy, through a fresh and captivating air, but also through the image of identities that are always one step ahead, like true trendsetters of their own field. Aspects of each of the three identities are analysed and discussed throughout this chapter.

The document analyses applied to the three institutions helped to understand this fluid evolution and the defining features of the identity of such a cultural-artistic brand. In order to observe all the facets of these identities, the document analyses were structured on an analysis grid consisting of ten categories: *historical milestones in the formation of the institution and the brand; mission; vision; values; organisational structure; identity characteristics; target audiences; communication and promotion strategies; online communication; alternative artistic projects.*

Opéra national de Paris

The first opera house founded in France and one of the oldest opera houses in the world, the Paris Opera has a history that dates back to 1669 and has established its international role in the arts field. This iconic institution is defined by its cultural heritage, which it preserves with fidelity and dedication, reinterpreting it through visionary and modern artistic creativity.

Under the slogan “*Moderne depuis 1669*” (engl. *Modern since 1669*), the institution that recently celebrated its 350th anniversary affirm its openness to the evolution of creation and art in order to bring the classicism of opera into the contemporary. The French institution is guided by a set

of precise principles that have shaped its identity, personality and brand throughout its existence. The *mission* of the Paris Opera is artistic creation and the preservation of the cultural past in the collective memory through constantly updated means. The institution's *vision* extends this credo by combining classicism with the modern, both artistically and communicatively. The fundamental value of this Opera is *excellence*, which it renders in every project it implements.

In terms of its organisational structure, the Paris National Opera is a public theatre institutions, with a majority government funding, and at the same time it has to supplement its budget with its own income and the support of patrons and corporate partners, referential in their own industries and eager to associate their name with the French opera.

The Paris Opera's identity is shaped by its artistic *products* – opera and ballet productions presented by the institution's artists and numerous guest artists, including some of the industry's biggest international names. The events are staged in two *ambients* and *venues*: Palais Garnier and Opéra Bastille, building that differ both architecturally and in the style of the performances staged there, from classical to avant-garde. The two stages convey, through their artistic products, a *behaviour* based on attention and involvement – both towards external and internal audiences, with the intention of establishing real, auncy and faithful connections.

The Paris Opera's *target audiences* fall into two prominent categories: middle-aged audiences, loyal to the genre and the institutions, and young audiences whom the opera has attracted with unconventional artistic initiatives and that it wishes to retain. Cultural tourism is also central to the audience structure, 20% of which are foreign spectators attracted by the reputation and posters of French opera.

From a communication point of view, the French Opera is the most present and popular in its interaction with the general public of the three institutions analyzed. If the early 1800s documented it as the theatre that launched promotion through revolutionary advertising media at the time, the institution's current strategy is characterized by the same innovation and the status of a trendsetter for its entire industry. With the same visionary outlook, in the early 2000s it became the third institution in the world to project its performances in cinemas, in order to broaden public accessibility to its cultural products. Its *current communication strategy* is based on digital platforms, which have given it a new coherence and voice, aimed at establishing an even closer relationship with its international audiences and users.

A central position in the institution's online communication strategy is occupied by *social media platforms*, with the Parisian institution the most popular of the three opera companies studied, with 498.072 followers on Facebook; 421K on Instagram and 260,5K – Twitter. Its social media

communication is characterised by constancy and engaged presence, in relation to users who in turn respond enthusiastically to all the institution's online initiatives.

On the virtual front, the Paris Opera has launched an international premiere with the concept of a virtual stage - *3e Scène*, the institution's third stage, which invited online viewers from around the world to a platform offering broadcasts of a variety of recordings from its older or more recent archives. Since 2015, this "place of creation, culture and discovery" (Opéra national de Paris, 2022a) has achieved unprecedented success, attracting international users who would otherwise find it impossible to access events to the stature of the Paris Opera. The expansion of this virtual scene was impressive during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the content analysis of online communication via the Facebook platform reveals in detail, in the last part of our empirical study. An important role in the digital presence of the French institution is occupied by the *Aria mobile app*, which suggestive motto is: "*There is nothing classical about opera*" (Opéra national de Paris, 2022a), reconfirming the belief of the "modern opera of 350 years".

The Opéra national de Paris brand also signs a series of *alternative artistic initiatives* that have added to its popularity and appreciation over the last few years: among these, the „*Opéra d'été*” project (engl. *Summer Opera*) offers summer micro-seasons projected outdoors in central locations of the city, offering free access performances to the whole community. On the same principle of sharing culture in a unique way, the annual program „*Tous à l'Opéra!*” (engl. *All at the Opera!*) offers the general public free access to: performances, guided tours of the opera buildings and backstages – to capture the entire creative process, masterclasses with artists for children and themed presentations of the crafts that make up the Paris Opera's performances, as it is the only European institution to faithfully maintain all of its initial creative workshops, from costume design to sculpture and set painting, under the popular „savoir-faire” concept. All those eager to delve deeper into the world of this institution are also invited to do so at the *Opera Box*, a musical booth located in front of the Garnier Opera during the summers, which offers interactive and immersive artistic experiences to passers-by, who are also drawn to later see live performances. Unexpectedly, the Paris Opera not only produces art, but also honey – a novel and unique initiative for an opera house, which houses beehives on the rooftops of its two buildings, this is one of the CSR projects through which the institution shows its support for nature and the ecosystem.

The Paris Opera is the iconic opera house of Europe, the longest-lived and one of the world's most innovative and surprising cultural and artistic institutions. Conceptually and artistically modern since 1669, it is the first French performing arts institutions to print posters, and has become synonymous with world premieres by the most acclaimed Western composers as well as the most daring and visionary contemporary productions. It is the institution that created the world's first

virtual stage, bringing artists together with audiences around the globe in a unique formula for digital media advertising.

Teatro alla Scala di Milano

Teatro alla Scala di Milano is, for Italians, the “birthplace of the impressive tradition of Italian opera (*la grande opera italiana*)” (Lucini et al., 2015), and for the world it is the universal opera epicentre. The institution that has enshrined the names of the most important composers and artists of all time has been creating and sharing culture since 1778, giving it a contemporary allure that is attractive to international audiences.

The historical longevity of this institutions is a guarantee of its artistic value and at the same time the foundation of a permanently updates identity, for which cultural heritage is translated into innovative strategies, means and tools. La Scala thus affirms itself as both the fundamental benchmark of its industry and a trendsetter for the cultural and creative industries.

The personality of this institutions is defined by its *mission* to create and maintain „*La Scala experience: unique and inimitable*” (Teatro alla Scala di Milano, 2021a), as the theatre mentions, focusing its attention on preserving the cultural heritage, singular in the world, that continues to shape the future of this over two-century-old institution. Beginning with this mission, Scala’s *vision* is that of a landmark institution and place of creation for some of the greatest musical masterpieces, shared with today’s audiences through modern, widely digitalized means and strategies. In this context, the values that underpin this brand and excellence, tradition, positive reputation, and loyalty to its audiences, which it keeps very close – these defining elements have sustained the evolution and fame of the institution to date, and promise the same continuity in the future.

In terms of its *organisational structure*, the Milanese theatre is a public performing arts institution, largely self-financed and with a modest contribution from the Italian state. This organisational situation determines the particular attention paid by the institution to its artistic products and the cultural programme presented, which must attract maximum audience participation in order for the theatre to meet its financial objectives. An important role is also played in this institution, as in the case of the Paris Opera, by the local spectators who have become patrons – supporters who help the theatre’s activities through regular donations, thus continuing the tradition begun by the Italian aristocracy at the beginning of La Scala’s history.

Under the slogan mentioned earlier, *La Scala experience: unique and inimitable*, the Milanese institution shaped its identity around the four key vectors in a coherent and consistent manner. La Scala’s *products* represent musical and choreographic performances belonging to Italian and

international artistic culture, bringing together the classical “la grande opera” creations with modern and innovative stagings. The *ambience* of the institution is defined by the grandiose building of the Theatre, the impressive edifice that hosts all artistic events as well as guided tour programmes. Also, under the aegis of the institution, the brand includes *The Theatrical La Scala Museum*, which hosts historical expositions and receives thousands of daily visits; *Il Foyer Restaurant* – inviting the public to a special culinary experience in the La Scala ambience; *La Scala Shop*, with an artistic profile; as well as *Accademia La Scala*, the *Filarmonica della Scala* and the editorial office of *La Scala Magazine*, which is the official publication of the theatre. All these entities are part of the *monolithic identity* of La Scala Theatre. The *behavioural vector* of the institution’s identity indicated an attitude of appreciation and valorisation of its own cultural tradition and of the house’s artists; and towards the external public it approaches a close, transparent and constantly involved behaviour.

The *target audiences* of the Milanese institution include, in a 50% percentage, loyal spectators, opera connoisseurs and fans of cultural events, which they attend constantly. A second category that attracts major attention to Teatro alla Scala is the young audience, which has seen a 20% increase over the last season, according to the institution’s official reports. Another representative category of this institution’s audience is the international public, attracted by the cultural tourism in the Italian metropolis – according to official data, they represent 30% of the total public present at the theatre’s performances, and their growth reached 90% during the last season.

The *communication and advertising strategies* implemented by La Scala aim to transform its image in the collective mind from that of a classical landmark institution to a *dynamic* artistic symbol characterized by *emotion, involvement and unique cultural experience*. The aim is always to transfer and counter-transfer deep and emotional communication between artists and the general public. In terms of the communication channels and tools used, La Scala is the institution that continues to place a strong emphasis on traditional means of communication compared to the other two companies analyzed. The press releases issued regularly to the media, the indoor and outdoor materials (which still faithfully follow the look of the first Milanese theatre’s posters), the frequent press conferences that present new artistic initiatives – all these indicate the value and consideration given by La Scala to the image that established the theatre in previous centuries, and which it still considers defining for its identity. This does not, however, exclude the institution’s openness to *online communication*, whose strategies rely in particular on a constant, authentic and sustained presence on *social networks*. These attract significant popularity for the Italian theatre, which registers 424.210 fans on its Facebook page; 316K Instagram followers; and 309,5K followers on Twitter, ranking La Scala just behind the Paris Opera in terms of popularity – the most liked of the three institutions. Scala’s digital

position and its appeal to online users was also reflected in the record reach achieved in 2019, when the Milanese theatre ranked among the world's top opera institutions on social media platforms.

La Scala's innovative spirit is also visible in its *cinema streaming projects*, as the Italian opera is the world's first to launch the initiative of streaming its own performances in cinemas. The inspiration started in Milan in 2012, and was subsequently quickly taken up by the Paris and Sydney Operas. The project continues to this day, offering both a unique experience for art lovers and a more affordable alternative for the general public.

The Italian opera's increasingly distinctive visionary identity is also highlighted through *alternative, less conventional artistic projects* for the cultural institution. Among these, the most recent one, which enjoys particular popularity, is the open-air micro-show "*La Scala in Città*". This was launched in the summer of 2021, continued in the current year 2022, out of a desire to re-establish the close connection with the city community and the wide public after the difficult period of the pandemic. The audience's response to all these events has been impressive, with the theatre successfully expanding its boundaries, repertoire and audiences, reaffirming the inclusive power of the arts. La Scala's range of alternative projects also includes guided tours inside the theatre – revealing the creative process behind the scenes, from the soloists' rehearsal rooms, to the orchestra pit, choir room, ballet studio, costume salon and technical backstage – all telling the story of the theatre founded in 1778. Added to these, the theatre also schedules visits to the *Laboratori Scala Ansaldo*, the institution's production workshops, where the public will come into direct contact with an impressive collection of crafts produced by the theatre's teams, some dating back to the very first La Scala performances, which the public is invited to see for themselves and actively participate in the creative process behind the Italian theatre's shows. Teatro alla Scala is undoubtedly the iconic theatre of world lyricism, with a classical essence and a contemporary vision, authentically developed and with an undiminished appreciation for the cultural heritage that makes this brand unique.

The Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca

Founded in 1920, The Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca is the first opera institution created in our country, representing a cultural-artistic achievement of national impact. Through it, Romanian culture came into contact with international operatic classicism and its Western influences, becoming an example for later Romanian institutions of artistic profile and a cultural epicentre for the general public.

The meticulous institutional organization, its wide repertoire and the artists trained here, who became ambassadors of operatic art at international level, have shaped the identity of the Cluj-Napoca institution during its centenarian history. The *mission* of the opera is to gain and maintain its place

among the cultural institutions of European standing, with the aim of attracting, training and educating the musical-artistic taste of various categories of public. At the same time, as the first institution of its kind creating in Romania, it has played a major role in educating the public, which was then too unfamiliar with lyrical genre. Its *vision* states opera as a syncretism of all arts, with the aim and power to bring people together. This belief is also reflected in the values of the institution: artistic excellence, appreciation and preservation of local art.

From an organisational point of view, the Cluj Opera is a public opera theatre with its own production of performances. Unlike the two Western Operas, it benefits from full government funding through the Ministry of Culture, without being conditional on its own income, but attentive and proactive in attracting its own funds to broaden its production possibilities.

The analysis of the main pillars of the Cluj Opera's identity indicates the existence of a wide range of artistic *products* produced by the Opera – through opera, operetta and ballet performances from the universal repertoire, presented both on its own stage, in alternative venues, and on national and international tours. The *ambience* of this institution is created by the performance hall, created in the structure of the Austrian theatres – the original artistic examples of the Cluj opera. This space rich in history and cultural achievements is carefully preserved by the institution and is regarded as a source of local and national pride. The institutional *behaviour* is characterised by total involvement in the creative process and in the relationship with internal audiences, as well as by a close, authentic and transparent relationship with all categories of public. These identity vectors have led to a threefold increase in the level of participation in events supported by the Cluj institution, as well as an expansion of artistic and corporate collaborations, both nationally and internationally, which complements the positive reputation of the local opera.

The majority of the institution's *target audience* is middle-aged, loyal opera and ballet publics who are both connoisseurs and conservative in their preferences. At the same time, the last five years have shown a considerable increase in the percentage of *young spectators*, who represent a priority segment for the Cluj Opera – like the other two institutions analyzed. Thanks to the alternative projects initiated, it is also noticeable the attractive of occasional spectators – with a great potential for future loyalty.

The *communication strategy* of the Cluj Opera has been anchored, for a long period of time, in the classical methods of promotion, in line with the mature audience that was specific to it in the previous decade. With the broadening of its creative outlook and expansion of its audience categories, the institution turned to an online-based promotion strategy. Its image has thus evolved visibly over the last decade thanks to digital media and extensive social media interaction, an approach that has given its identity a new, modern, contemporary and fresh look. At the same time, online platforms

proved to be a saving solution during the COVID-19 pandemic with the Romanian institution relying on them to maintain its closeness to the public – aspects studied in detail in the *Quantitative Content Analysis of online communication via the Facebook platform* (Chapter IX).

In addition to the performances hosted in the main hall of the opera house, the artists of the institution also carry out a series of *alternative cultural and artistic activities*. Among these, the most resonant and popular is “Opera Aperta” – a unique cultural initiative in Romania, which is an annual open-air festival, attracting unprecedented visibility to the Romanian Opera in Cluj since 2014. The slogan “Opera as you have never seen it before!” captures the essence of this project and is representative of this institution’s newfound identity. A continuation of this project is represented by the “Opera Summer Hub” estival micro-season, which offered live artistic experiences during the more relaxed period of the pandemic. Also appreciated is the alternative project “Opera Days for Young Audiences”, which attracts – since 2016, the attention and participation of families with children and educational institutions. The initiatives offers a unique insight into the story behind the scenes, revealing all the details involved in the production of an opera or ballet performance – from the artistic training rooms, to the production workshops and technical backstage, with the mission of encouraging the education and training of future loyal audiences. All these identity, organizational and communicational components of the Romanian Opera in Cluj define an institution whose initial traditionalism and conservatism have been transformed and reinterpreted over the past years into an entity eager for change, versatility and modernization. Its artistic heritage has been maintained as the core on which the institution has built innovative, open projects, addressed to the general public, through which it has abolished conceptual and spatial boundaries, transforming itself into a European-level opera company, which is emerging as a true brand of the cultural sector.

The essence of this art and of the institutions that represent it was captured, preserved and passed on the future generations by the first lyric institutions, which have shown a secular longevity, an impressive creative force and capacity of adaptation, and are still visible and desirable today thanks to a creative and strongly digitalized communicational. The genre once considered elitist and difficult to access for the general public has managed to change the paradigm of perception by rendering classical music and ballet through innovative, unconventional and attractive projects for contemporary audiences. Opera has redefined the art that established it, building on its rich tradition, cultural heritage and identity, transformed into a modern art, adapted and desirable for contemporary audiences, to whom its offers unique, immersive and sensory experiences both live and online.

VIII. Research results: Semi-structured interviews with experts

The fourteen semi-structured interviews allowed us to interact directly with renowned specialists in the fields of cultural management, cultural PR and the national and international cultural-creative sector, with whom we went through ten themes of discussion representative for this study: *The main elements of the identity of a cultural-artistic brand; Strategies for maintaining and highlighting the identity of a cultural-artistic brand; The role of tradition and heritage in the identity of a cultural-artistic brand; The meeting point of cultural tradition with modernity; The role of communication in the existence and evolutionary path of a performing arts institution; Appropriate and effective communication platforms for opera institutions; Managing communication through social media networks of opera institutions; Objectives of an opera institution's Facebook communication strategy; Post-pandemic COVID-19 resilience strategies for performing arts institutions; Future and evolution foreseen for opera institutions, from an identity and communication point of view.*

The fourteen interviews, which took place between June and August 2022, were conducted in person via the *Zoom videoconference platform*, and gave us the opportunity for direct conversations with national and international interlocutors. Through these dialogues we observed that *the main elements of a cultural-artistic brand's identity (Theme 1)* are considered to be essentialized by its tangible and intangible heritage – the core formed by its mission, vision and values – translated into its name, a representative slogan, visual, behavioural elements and a viable communication strategy, oriented towards a specific target audience. The differentiating idea of such a brand is, in turn, fundamental to its existence, development and memorability, giving depth, relevance, strength and longevity to the identity with which it is associated.

The most appropriate *strategies for maintaining and highlighting the identity of a cultural-artistic brand (Theme 2)* are based, according to the specialists interviewed, on three steps: identifying the defining elements of that identity; maintaining the pillars on which the cultural institution is based; and promoting and highlighting them. At the same time, an essential role is played by the consistency and coherence of management and communication strategies, which ensure both the institution's fidelity to its own identity and the flow and transparency of its communication.

Tradition and heritage (Theme 3) play a central, essential and crucial role in the identity of a cultural-artistic brand, as they are defining and irreplaceable elements in creating and maintaining the identity of a cultural-artistic brand. This “brand heritage” – by its unreplicable and unparalleled nature – is a major asset both in differentiating the brand from its own industry and in establishing an emotional, trusting and close relationship with the target audience. It is equivalent to the experience

and prestige of the brand in question, with a valuable and core message that distinguished the brand and gives it a unique position in the market. At the same time, these two elements, tradition and heritage, serve as a foundation on which a cultural brand develops its value system, the set of principles defining its identity and coordinating its future.

The encounter between cultural tradition and modernity in an opera institution (Theme 4) occurs, for the fourteen experts, at two points of intersection: communication and artistic act. The classical pillars of an opera house – based on artistic heritage, classical repertoire and the artists of past centuries – meet both with modern performance techniques, as well as the contemporary digital media that connect them to today's audiences. Communication thus acts as a bridge across time, linking the legend of the past to the virtual actuality of the present – through innovative strategies, platforms and promotional tools. It is precisely by embracing modernity – artistically, conceptually, communicatively – that theatres with a history of hundreds of years manage to preserve and pass on the values of the past, highlighting them in the present and transmitting them to the future.

A very compelling topic, *the role of communication in the existence and evolutionary path of an opera institution (Theme 5)* is a central and sine-qua-non subject. Communication is fundamental to the existence, development and longevity of such a cultural-artistic brand, both intra-institutionally and in relation to external audiences. Its role also goes beyond the simple presentation and transmission of the cultural act, as communication itself – together with the artistic product – becomes the link between artists and audiences, through the various media and platforms used in the promotion strategy.

Appropriate and effective communication platforms for opera institutions (Theme 6) are, in the opinion of the specialists interviewed, those platforms that resonate with their identity, as well as those on which operas meet the most varied audiences. European institutions in the field have shown a great openness over the last few years to different media and advertising strategies, experimenting with modern platforms and finding solutions to constantly broaden their audiences.

Social media networks (Theme 7) are a major component in the development and implementation of an opera house's communication strategy. They are characterised by constant, transparent and dynamic communication based on constant monitoring and analysis – which ensures the success of an opera on social media. Also, the benefit of interaction with international audiences and cultural exchanges are advantages that institutions have developed in recent years, reaching an unprecedented level of visibility. The emotional exchange in the performance hall, between artists and audiences, is now extended through virtual interactions, where audiences become digital co-producers of their favourite artistic brands.

The objectives of an opera house for its Facebook communication strategy (Theme 8) should be, in the view of the fourteen interviewed experts: coherence and clarity, quality and audience-attractive content, and a solidly constructed and carefully monitored strategy. These goals, along with more particular elements such as: content and message categories, tone, visual identity, positioning, novelty, frequency of publication and personalisation of content – in turn shape the identity of an arts institution and help it to attract its target audiences.

A topical theme of particular interest over the past two years, the *post-pandemic COVID-19 resilience strategies for opera houses (Theme 9)* have the online environment as their main platform. A lifesaving solution to the climax of the health crisis, social media has become a new stage for opera houses around the world. Social networks have enabled performing arts institutions to continue their artistic work as maintain a lively and engaged connection with physically distant audiences, creating genuine artistic communities. For the European operas studied, this crisis represented a moment of rebirth, redevelopment and self-awareness of their own evolution, as well as an opportunity to project the future. The public's adherence to virtual cultural offerings, and the loyalty they show to these institutions, has seen an unprecedented rise. At the same time, it is admirable – in the perception of the fourteen interlocutors – the power and vision with which these artistic brands have adapted to the times and transferred the creative act to digital platforms, demonstrating once again their modern, dynamic and visionary thinking and their belief in an *art open to all*.

The evolution of opera institutions (Theme 10) is perceived through the maintenance of the intersection that has always defined them, that between *past-present-and future*. Institutions with a longevity of hundreds of years have been trendsetters for the entire cultural industry from the beginning, established connections between art and audiences, they have been the source of the world's greatest operatic creations, passed down from generation to generation. More than 400 years after the first opera performance, the institutions that made this concept famous continue to offer the same passion, excitement and energy to contemporary audiences. The digital expansion of recent years has helped opera continue its artistic mission, giving it international visibility and popularity, and access to audiences around the world. Thus, the *past* that set the tone for the genre continues to set the example for the art of the *present*, while inspiring the creation of the *future* – equally committed, ambitious and visionary, with a modern spirit perpetuated from generation to generation.

Chapter IX. Research results: The content analysis of online communication through the Facebook platform

The last chapter dedicated to empirical research, follows the three opera houses discussed in the context of their online communication strategies determined by the COVID-19 pandemic. The international crisis situation has had profound and serious repercussions on the cultural and artistic industry, forcing institutions to reinvent the *reorient their managerial and communication strategies* in a very short time. Their *adaptation, transformation* and *pivoting* have as a fundamental element the *virtual space*, which is studied throughout this chapter. In this context, the three opera houses we studied, *Opéra national de Paris*, *Teatro alla Scala di Milano* and the *Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca*, have faced successive cancellations of performances since the beginning of the pandemic, when they were forced to suspend their entire activity, both towards external audiences and their own staff. The three institutions showed, as can be seen in the *Content Analysis* carried out, an immediate *reorientation* and great *flexibility*, essential in these circumstances.

Resilience strategies were the core elements and the solution to overcome these challenges, applied in the online environment – the one that allowed institutions to stay *close to physically distant audiences* while maintaining their *visibility* and *relevance*. For the three institutions studied, the main platform for these new strategies was the *social network Facebook* – on which the works analyzed are most popular, active and pursued (Statista, 2021).

Following the *objectives* and *research questions* stated at the beginning of this study, and in order to observe the communicational and identity evolution of the mentioned institutions, the content analysis followed the communication through the Facebook platform of the three institutions during three representative periods: a.) *The beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic period* (during the months of April – May 2020): a period that coincides with the sudden closure of all the performance institutions for an indefinite period, forcing them to create unprecedented resilience strategies to restructure their activity, image and interaction with the public; b.) *The interval of adaptation and pivoting* (January-February 2020): dominated by a new lockdown at European level and characterized by the activity of cultural institutions carried out strictly online; c.) *The period of relaxation of restrictions and resilience strategies* (June-August 2021): a time that allows the resumption of live performances in the presence of the audience. These three intervals highlight the evolution and specificity of the Facebook communication of the three institutions, studied through *thirteen categories of analysis* correlated with the objectives of the thesis: *Date of post; Type of post; Specificity and theme; Use of hashtags; Total number of reactions; Number of comments received from users; Number of shares made by users; Presence of “See more” function; Presence of links in*

posts; Presence of emoticons in posts; Engagement from the analyzed institutions; Total number of responses provided by institutions to users' comments; Frequency of posts.

a.) The first analyzed interval totals 279 posts, which places this period in second plan numerically, among the three studied intervals. The period between **April – May 2020** is characterized by an unexpected shift from extensive artistic activity with live performances, national and international audiences attracted to the three institutions – to a general lockdown and social distancing from all categories of public, internal and external. The interval is one of *great vulnerability* for the three opera houses, which they manage however to surpass – through *virtual resilience strategies, rich online communication* and the proposal of a *varied series of digital artistic programmes*. This is the range in which the *Romanian Opera (z)* is the most active, with a number of 112 posts, followed by *La Scala Theatre - y* (n=106 posts) and the *Paris Opera - x* (n=61 posts). In terms of the *type of posts*, in this range, posts with video content predominate (53,8%), followed by posts with photos (46,2%), excluding posts with plain text or audio. The online resilience strategies of the three institutions address a *wide range of themes and virtual artistic proposals: promoting their online performances* (in 49,8% of the total number of posts in Interval 1, for the three operas) almost entirely replacing *live events* (1,8% of posts in Interval 1 – published in the uncertain prospect of the resumption of live activity in the summer months of 2020). During this first interval, the analyzed institutions also attach considerable importance to *posts with alternative artistic projects* (48,4% - a percentage which almost equals the promotion of online shows). Offsetting online streaming, alternative posting manage to attract the attention and interest of Facebook users in a particular way, establishing an engaged and constant interaction through novel ideas: *live streamed masterclasses* with soloists and ballet dancers, interviews with the institutions' artists, *virtual tours of the operas*, presentation of the *backstage and behind the scenes* work of an opera house – all of these are alternative artistic proposals through which the companies maintain the attention and interest of Facebook users. In turn, the latter demonstrate their attachments to the three institutions through a significant number of virtual *reactions* (The Paris Opera attracts 67,7K total likes; La Scala Theatre - 51,2K likes, and the Romanian National Opera - 25,5K likes); *comments* (6.516 comments – for ONP; 2.786 comments – for TSM and 1.150 comments – for ONRCN); and *shares by users* (8.146 shares – TSM; 2.914 – ONP; 1.599 – ONRC).

b.) The second analyzed interval, from **January to February 2021**, captures the institutions in a new European lockdown and with the theatres still closed, but equally present and involved in the online space. One year after the pandemic outbreak, the three opera houses have strengthened their resilience strategies and developed those components that have been most successful among users during *Interval 1*. In addition, the distinguished feature and advantage of this period is the

possibility of supporting *artistic activities with a small number of artists on stage but without an audience present in the performance halls*. This new and more permissive rule is of great benefit to the three institutions, which now have the opportunity to complete their video archive and do live streamings for audiences watching online.

During this period, a total of 203 Facebook posts are published, representing the lowest number of posts among the three analyzed periods. The Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca *z* ($n=88$) holds the supremacy in the hierarchy of posts during this interval, followed by La Scala Theatre in Milan *y* ($n=68$) and The National Opera in Paris *x* ($n=47$), but despite the lower number of posts, their content reflects a better targeting and knowledge of users' preferences, with the three institutions focusing on those topics that have aroused the most interest for the online public, during *Interval 1*.

The predominant posts are now in photo content (69,5%), as they thematically focus on promoting *online performances* – the most common posts theme during this interval, as well (80,8%), to the delight of the global audiences who have free access to high quality artistic performances. These posts are complemented by *alternative themes* (17,7%), also addressed by the three operas during the first interval (through online interviews with artists, virtual tours, behind-the-scenes curiosities and artistic workshops, interactive digital activities for young viewers, etc) – representing attractive topics for the general public. Only 1,5% of the total number of posts, during this interval, refer to *live performances*, optimistically promoting the artistic programme the institutions have designed for the summer months of 2021. The users' interest towards all these posts is reflected in the high number of online *reactions of appreciation* (66 K likes – TSM; 36,6 K likes – ONP and 8 K – ONRCN); *comments* (6.824 – TSM; 1.778 – ONP; 287 – ONRCN) and *reshares by users* (12.846 – TSM; 2.417 shares – ONP; and 1.575 – ONRCN).

c.) The third analyzed interval puts the three studied institutions in a different light, as they now enjoy – during the months of **June-August 2021** – the *relaxation of restrictions and the resumption of live activity in the presence of the public*. This new paradigm completely changes the approach and themes of Facebook posts, now dominated by optimism, future prospects and the excitement of seeing their performance hall once again. In line with this context, this third interval totals 369 posts, which is the maximum number of posts among the three analyzed periods. The *Paris Opera* achieves the most of these - *x* ($n=156$), followed by *Teatro alla Scala in Milan* - *y* ($n=120$) and *The Romanian Opera din Cluj* *z* ($n=93$).

In contrast to the first two intervals studied earlier, the focus here is on *live performances*, which are promoted in the majority (69,6% of all Facebook posts). They are followed by posts promoting *alternative artistic activities* (22,8%), such as guided tours now conducted live, or

exhibitions hosted in collaboration with the three opera houses. In a considerably smaller percentage compared to the previous two intervals, there are sporadic mentions of *online performances* (7,6%), which the Milan Theatre and the Paris Opera continue to offer for their international communities that they have managed to enrich online during the critical times of the pandemic crisis. The Facebook communication during this period triggers particular enthusiasm among users, reflected in the number of reactions, comments and posts' reshared (ONP: 77,9K likes, 1.847 commentaries and 12.421 reshares; TSM: 69,5K likes, 2.026 comments and 5.078 reshares; ONRCN: 14K likes, 565 comments and 1.677 reshares).

These results were complemented by descriptive statistics, which helped us to observe a number of significant differences between the three institutions (such as the specifics of their posts, the topics addressed in online communication and the style of interaction with users – distinct aspects given precisely by the particularities of each of the three studied institutions). There were also many common elements, the most relevant of which was a strong interest in constant and frequent communication via the Facebook platform and engagement with their online audience.

Chapter X. Conclusions, research limits and future research perspectives

Our paper concludes with general conclusions and answers to the research questions, along with mentioning the limitations of the research, as well as perspectives on future research directions. The present study, through its two dimensions – qualitative and quantitative – has provided a comprehensive view of the discussed topic, that of the evolution and *adaptation of the identity of the first European opera houses, tracing their journey from conservative cultural institutions to contemporary visionary brands*.

The empirical research was conducted with the aim of observing, understanding and explaining in detail the cultural phenomenon of opera, including *three sociological study methods: document analysis, semi-structured interviews with experts, and quantitative content analysis of online communication applied to the Facebook platform*. These aimed to answer the *six research questions* that have guided this study:

The first research question, **Q1. What are the constitutive elements of the identity of a cultural-artistic brand?**, sums up the totality of tangible and intangible elements that define that brand. From the mission, vision and values affirmed by the entity – which constitute the core of the identity, to the four fundamental vectors: the cultural-artistic products and services offered; the institution's communication (internal and external), its environments and its behaviour. These shape the

institutional image, the reputation and the differentiating elements through which the institution identifies itself and forms its personality, communicating and promoting it to its target audience.

All these features of a performing arts institution's identity are reflected in creative, often unconventional communication strategies, adapted to the digital age and with a particular influence of social networks. The communication and advertising strategies, dominated by the virtual environment, translate the essence of these institutions' identity, their long history and the unparalleled artistic heritage passed down from generation to generation. The general public now has unlimited access to a centuries-old art, while gaining an active role as co-producers, thanks to social media platforms. The artists' encounter with the audiences, and the exchange of energy and emotion between them, thus goes beyond the armchairs of the performance halls, taking new immersive and sensory forms online, reiterating the mission of an art dedicated to all. These insights helped us answer the second research question **Q2.**, regarding *the materialization of communication in the evolution of a performing arts brand*.

These aspects oriented our research towards the defining elements of the three institutions we chose to study in this work: *Opéra national de Paris* and *Teatro alla Scala di Milano* – the symbol-operas and some of the first and most representative institutions in the world; alongside the *Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca* – the first opera institution founded in Romania, which has the role of initiator and trendsetter for this sector at a national level. The three entities were studied through the qualitative method of *document analysis*, which captured all the particularities of their identities and their path towards the image of cultural-artistic brands. Their study helped us find the answer to the third research question, **Q3.** *What are the steps followed by an opera house in its evolution from a conservative tradition to a future adapted to the contemporary?*, each of the three institutions basing their identity and image on their important artistic heritage, constantly adapted to the contemporary through innovative projects, a modern image and communication strategies adapted to the digital age that attract the general public through the interface of an *art open to all*.

The fourth research question, **Q4.** *To what extent is the identity of an opera house preserved throughout its existence, maintaining a balance between tradition – modernity – and crisis situations encountered?* – is highlighted by the analysis of the three studied institutions. They are true examples of the extraordinary evolution of entities over one, two and three hundred years old histories, which have steadily built their present on the cultural heritage of the past – revered and carefully preserved, which is also the foundation of visionary projects for the future.

The penultimate research question, **Q5.** *How is the communication strategy of opera houses readapted during the COVID-19 pandemic, through the necessary resilience measures, so that they maintain their relevant identity and image?*, is explained through the numerous performances

broadcasted online and via live streaming, virtual masterclasses held by soloists and dancers, online interviews with the institutions' artists, virtual tours of the opera, behind-the-scenes presentations of the work of an opera house, interactive art activities for children available online – all part of the resilience strategies and the new transformation adopted by the Paris, Milan and Cluj-Napoca Operas. During our analysis, these institutions are getting even closer to international audiences, who are invited to discover their artistic agenda, offering authentic yet innovative online thrills.

The study's last research question, **Q6. How did the cultural institutions of the Paris National Opera (ONP), the La Scala Theatre in Milan (TSM) and the Romanian National Opera in Cluj-Napoca (ONRCN) communicate during the COVID-19 pandemic and what was the engagement of the followers?**, finds its answer in the multiple online projects initiated by the three entities, of an artistic or alternative nature, whose central mission was to maintain interaction with users and strengthen the cultural community created by them. The three analyzed institutions demonstrate their power to bring together diverse and varied audiences through art and identities that transcend space and time, both live and online.

Taking into account the steps taken by this study, we believe that it **contributes** with a handbook of best practices, suitable to guide specialists in the field of communication, public relations and advertising, willing to carry out their activity in the cultural-artistic sphere, establishing viable connections between it and the general public.

The **research limitations** of this study are inevitably given by the broad nature of the subject. Its wide scope is influenced by the long tradition of the entities analyzed, which is why our intention was to capture the characteristics of these identities and their core elements from the perspective of communication and PR strategies – which we consider the essence of the process of formation, development and systematic support of an artistic institution's evolution.

Looking towards **future research perspectives**, we believe that the topic of this study remains equally offering for future studies. Given the end point of the current research in 2022, our interest and curiosity is directed towards the future prospects of the digitised cultural-artistic sector and how it will develop in the coming period. The COVID-19 pandemic has irrevocably given a new lease of life to this fields, which has proved profoundly resilient and visionary, constantly redefining itself and setting new trends for its own creative industry – highly attractive for future studies.

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