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Searching for an excellent strategy, communication, and CRS for the Opera Theaters, A benchmarking study

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to compare a series of cases of excellence: La Scala of Milan and three other excellent theaters and explore the application of strategy and corporate social responsibility (CSR) and communication of entertainment organizations. The results analyze, by benchmarking methodology, the best practice and standards for improvement the communication strategy to reach a wider audience and apply CSR strategies.

Questo studio si propone di confrontare una serie di casi di eccellenza: La Scala di Milano e altri tre teatri d'eccellenza ed esplorare l'applicazione della strategia, della responsabilità sociale d'impresa (CSR) e della comunicazione delle organizzazioni dello spettacolo. I risultati analizzano, attraverso la metodologia del benchmarking, le migliori pratiche e standard per migliorare la strategia di comunicazione per raggiungere un pubblico più ampio e applicare strategie di CSR.

Keywords: Excellence, Théâtre, Benchmarking, Corporate Social Responsibility.

1 – Introduction

This benchmarking study aims to compare a series of cases of excellence of Italian Opera Theaters.: La Scala and three other excellent theaters (La Fenice of Venice, Regio of Turin, and Massimo of Palermo) and explore the application of social responsibility and communication. The goal is to understand how to help theaters, dance companies, and other artistic organizations to better manage their business and reach a wider audience (Bollo 2012; Kotler 1979; Kotler et Scheff 1997; Bentoglio 2003; Kaplan & Norton 1992, 1996, 2001, 2004 a,b; Mella 1997, 2005, 2012, 2914, 2015, 2018, 2021, 2025; Gazzola e Mella 2003, 2006, 2021,2014; Riva 2006, 2007, 2012; Paine 2002; Pilotti 2003, 2011, 2017 2019; Riva & Pilotti 2021,; Gazzola et.al 2020; Payne & Frow 2005 Pilotti, & Rinolfi 2022a,b). There is a gap of research based on lack of benchmarking study on

case of excellence in Opera Theaters. This paper aims to analyze the following relevant questions:

RQ1: *What are the main strategies for excellence and sustainability in the Opera Theater?*

RQ2: *What are the main differences between La Scala and other excellent theaters?*

The structure of the paper consists of several sections; following the introduction, the second section offers a literature review, the third section outlines the methodology used in the research; the fourth section introduces the benchmarking analysis, and the fifth section examines the findings of the analysis and their significance; the last part summarizes the key results and provides a conclusion.

2 – Theoretical background

There are several contributions to the role of communication in the theatre sector as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 – Analysis of the literature (Source: our elaboration)

	Publication	Focus
1	Argano L., Bollo A., Dalla Segà P. (2018), <i>Organizzare eventi culturali – Ideazione, progettazione e gestione strategica del pubblico</i> , Borgoricco (PD), FrancoAngeli	Communication
2	Kotler, P., Scheff, J. (1997), <i>Standing room only: Strategies for marketing the performing arts</i> , Harvard Business School Press, Boston	General communication
3	Pilotti, L. (2003), <i>Conoscere l'arte per conoscere marketing, identità e creatività delle risorse culturali verso ecologie del valore per la sostenibilità</i> , Cedam	General communication
4.	Bentoglio, A. (2003), <i>L'attività teatrale e musicale in Italia, Aspetti istituzionali, organizzativi ed economici</i> , Carrocci Editore	General
5	Bollo A. (2012), <i>Il marketing della cultura</i> , Edizione Kindle, Carocci Editore	Communication
6	Kotler, P. (1979), "Strategies for introducing marketing into nonprofit organizations", in <i>Journal of Marketing</i> , 43, 37–44	Communication
7	Spranzi, A. (1996), <i>Economia dell'Arte</i> , Cescom, Università Bocconi, Milano;	Communication

The critical success factors of the theater sector have been the subject of several studies whose importance has shown in Table 2.

Table 2 – The critical success factors of the theater sector. (*Source:* elaboration from Cuadrado, Saura, Decals, 2000).

Variables	Importance
Programming	4.51
Communication	4.30
Coordination of activities	4.29
Prestige of the venue	4.20
Keeping audience needs	4.12
Professionalism of staff	3.87
Information about the sector	3.80
Quality of facilities	3.79
Analysis of results	3.71
Information about the audience	3.47
Awareness of the marketing environment	3.46
Defining target population	3.45
Location and accessibilità	3.41
Box-office	3.35
Audience research	3.17
Relational activities	2.95
Range of prices	52.93
Price determination	2.80
Peripheral services	2.30
Establishing objectives	2.07

There are important relevant studies on the field of CRS and ESG rating (Gazzola e Mella 2003, 2006; Pilotti & Ridolf 2022a,b, Freeman & Reed 1983; Tencati, Perrini & Pogutz 2004; Tettamanzi & Minutiello 2022; Perrini & Vurro 2010 Perrini et al.; Donaldson & Preston 1995; Driessen & Koll 2015;; Atkinson et al. 1997; Preite 2000, Carrol & Buchholtz 2008) (see Table 3).

Table 3 – Relevant studies on CRS and ESG (source our elaboration)

	Authors	Theoretical perspective Methodology
1	Porter and Kramer “Creating shared value”. (2011)	Integration of business with the development of society Analysis of cases of companies and individual value chains Integration between the well-being of society and business development
2	Porter, Van Der, “Green Competitive”. (1995)	The problem of Ecological Sustainability Pollution Analysis of sectors and environmental problems Need to rethink ecological processes Analysis of sectors and the best innovative strategies Various sectors Virtuous companies
3	Porter and Kramer “Strategy & Society”. The Link Between Competitive Advantage and Corporate Social Responsibility”. (2006)	Importance of integrating competitive advantage with Sustainability Identify internal activities and external dimensions for development Integration: competitive and social dimension Importance of social reporting Role of Managerial Choices Companies and analysis of cases of excellence
4	Porter and Kramer “The Competitive Advantage of Corporate Philanthropy”. (2002)	In the long term, integrate Social and economic aspects Analysis of business purpose and positive actions Analysis of the process steps Four-step process Large companies Predominantly American bodies Excellence Cases (Cisco)
5	Porter and al. “Measuring share value”. (2011)	Measurement systems of sustainability Analysis of the main indicators Methodology for development analysis Index integration Economic and Social
6	Kania and Kramer “Collective impact”. (2011)	Common agenda, measures, collaboration, communication Analysis of development conditions Method for achieving development impact (5 factors) General Global

The analysis of the value chain permits to determine the action to improve the performance (Pilotti 2003, 2011, 2017, 2019; Mella 2005, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2021; Riva & Pilotti 2017, 2019a,b, 2020, 2021; Riva 2006, 2007, 2012; Gazzola & Colombo 2014; Gazzola & Mella 2003, 2006, 2017; Gazzola et al. 2020).

There is the need for a comparison of the main theaters (Paine 2020; Payne & Frow 2005).

3 - Methodology

This study used the benchmarking methodology (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Riva & Pilotti 2011) that permits to comparison some organization (see Figure 1). Benchmarking is the tool that allows us to do this: compare the organization with the best in the sector. In this case we compare the theater La Scala with other important theaters.

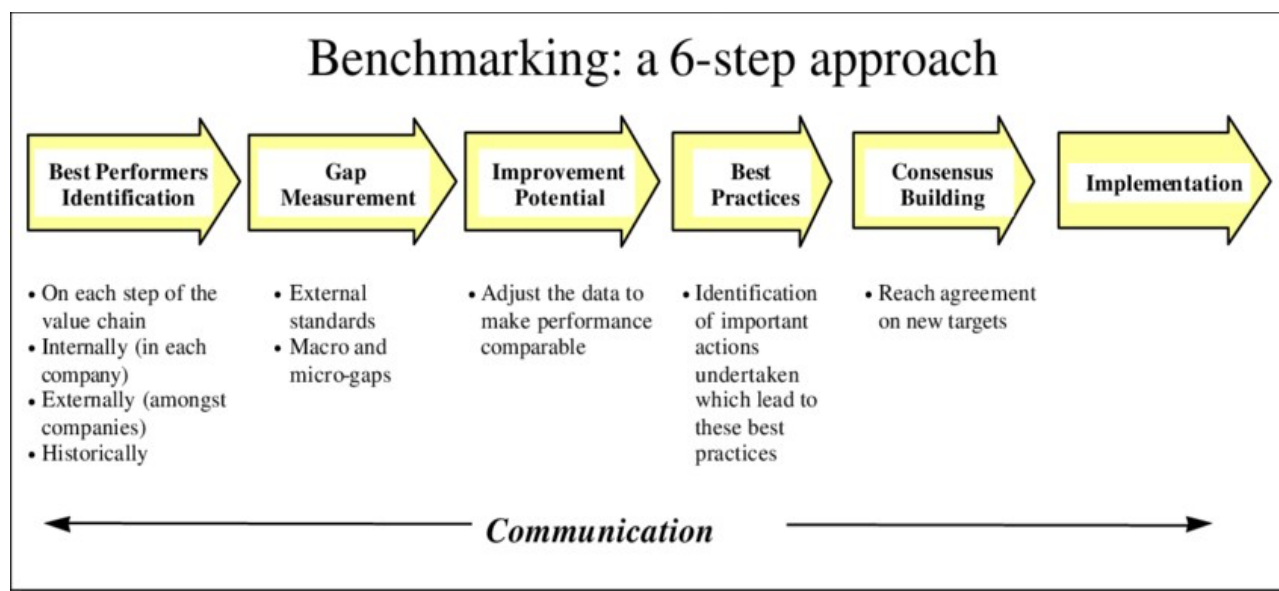


Fig. 1 – The benchmarking process (Source: elaboration from Camp)

In this way, their strengths, and their winning strategies are identified. The comparison of the theaters is based on different aspects (see Table 4):

Table 4 – Possible areas of comparison (Source: our elaboration)

Area	Key questions
History	How did the theater develop?
Sustainability	What is the sustainability strategy?
Audience shares	How many spectators do they have?
Funding	Who supports them financially (public or private)?
Economic aspects	What are the revenues and costs?
Theatre image	How is it perceived by the public?
Production quality	What type of shows do they offer?
Strengths and weaknesses	What do they do well and what can they improve?
Organization	
Economic situation	Are they profitable?
Show management	How are they chosen?

We use both primary and secondary data (see Table 5) (Eisenhardt and Martin 2000; Glaser and Strauss 1967) in this benchmarking studio.

Table 5 – Secondary data used in this research (*Source: our elaboration*)

Main secondary data	Focus
<p><i>Annual report</i></p> <p>La Scala of Milan - annual report (2020-2024)</p> <p>La Fenice of Venice - annual report (2020-2024)</p> <p>Il Massimo of Turin - annual report (2020-2024)</p> <p>Regio of Palermo - annual <u>report</u> (2020- 2024)</p>	Focus economy and financial situation
<i>Statuto</i>	Focus global aim
<i>Codice etico</i>	Focus ethic aspect
<i>Modello di organizzazione e controllo di gestione</i>	Control strategy
<p><i>Bilancio sociale</i></p> <p>La Scala of Milan - social report (2020-2024)</p> <p>La Fenice of Venice - social report (2020-2024)</p> <p>Il Massimo of Turin - social report - (2020-2024)</p> <p>REGIO of Palermo comune - social report (2020- 2024)</p>	Communicate to stakeholders
<p><i>Data on web site</i></p> <p>La Scala of Milan</p> <p>La Fenice of Venice</p> <p>Il Massimo of Turin</p> <p>Regio of Palermo</p>	Global information

4 – The four Theaters analyzed in the benchmarking studio

In the world there are many excellent theaters (see Table 6).

We have chosen the four most excellent in Italy based on classification Tramundi (Martinelli 2024) and Rivista Italia.

Table 6 – The most important Opera Houses in the world (*Source: our elaboration from Tramundi 2024*)

PLACE	THEATER
ITALY	<p>La Scala, Milan</p> <p>Teatro Fenice, Venice</p> <p>Teatro Massimo, Palermo</p> <p>Teatro Regio, Turin</p> <p>Teatro San Carlo, Naples</p> <p>Arena, Verona</p>
EUROPE	<p>Wiener Staatsoper, Vienna, Austria</p> <p>La Monnaie de Munt, Brussels, Belgium</p> <p>Opera de Paris, France</p> <p>Berliner Staatsoper, Berlin, Germany</p> <p>Royal Opera House, London, England</p> <p>HetMuziekgebouw, Amsterdam, Netherlands</p> <p>Oslo National Theatre, Oslo, Norway</p> <p>Marinskij Theatre, Saint Petersburg, Russia</p> <p>Gran Teatre du Liceu, Barcelona, Spain</p>
REST OF THE WORLD	<p>Sydney Opera House, Sydney, Australia</p> <p>Tokyo National Theatre, Tokyo, Japan</p> <p>Metropolitan Opera, New York, USA</p>

We analyze four Théâtre d’Opera: La Scala of Milan, La Fenice of Venice, Il Massimo of Palermo, and Il Regio of Turin.

4.1 – Scala of Milan

La Scala is a place where tradition meets innovation. In 1778 La Scala was designed by Giuseppe Piermarini. The neoclassical is a masterpiece of elegance and proportions.

The atmosphere is solemn and formal, but at the same time vibrant and full of expectations. In the 19th century, it became a point of reference for European opera music, hosting world

premieres of works by Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi. Early 20th century it experienced a period of great splendor, with the artistic direction of Arturo Toscanini. In 1943 it was bombed and seriously damaged. After the post-war a long reconstruction process began, marked by concerts on rubble and the reopening in 1946. In the 21st century it establishes itself as a cultural institution of international importance, promoting classical music and dance.

4.2 – *La Fenice of Venice*

La Fenice has risen from its ashes several times, most recently after a devastating fire in 1996. It is particularly linked to the Italian repertoire, with a special focus on the works of Rossini and Verdi. The atmosphere is magical and enveloping, thanks also to the position of La Fenice on the Grand Canal.

4.3 – *Il Regio of Turin*

The neoclassical building of the Regio in Turin is one of the largest in Italy and has a rich history.

Giuseppe Verdi had a strong bond with Turin, where he debuted many of his works.

The Regio in Turin offers a very wide repertoire, ranging from opera to ballet, from musical theatre to jazz. The atmosphere is elegant and refined, with a touch of majesty.

4.3 – *Il Massimo of Palermo*

The Regio of Palermo is one of the most important theatres in Southern Italy. It has a long history, dating back to the 18th century, and has hosted great names in opera. The architecture is rich in decorations and stucco, with a more baroque atmosphere than other theatres. The Regio of Palermo offers a varied repertoire, with a particular focus on Italian operas.

5 – Results

In this part, we describe the results of the benchmarking study of Scala compared with the others three theaters. We used four different perspectives: I) general; II) marketing and communication, III) organization; IV) economic and sustainability.

The general perspective analyses some important aspect of the four theaters (see Table 7).

Table 7 – General Prospective (Source: our elaboration)

	La scala (Milan)	La fenice (Venice)	Massimo (Palermo)	Regio (Turin)
FOUNDED	1778	1792	1740	1897
CITY	MILAN	VENICE	PALERMO	TURIN
ARCHITECT STYLE	Neoclassical	Neoclassical	Neoclassical	Eclectic
ACOUSTICS	Excellent	Excellent	Very good	Very good
REPERTOIRE	Opera, ballet	Bel canto opera	Large (focus Italy)	Opera, ballet
SIZE	Medium	Medium	Medium	Large
SEAT	2030	1126	1387	1500

La Scala is a world-famous cultural institution that mainly produces opera, ballet, and classical music concerts. It promotes chamber music: with concert cycles dedicated to this musical genre. The Scala is a permanent choir: that takes part in opera performances and symphony concerts. It manages a theatre museum: which preserves a rich collection of historical relics and documents related to the history of the theatre.

There are some differences in the marketing strategy of the four organizations (see Table 8).

Table 8 – Marketing and Communication Prospective (*Source: our elaboration*)

	La Scala (Milan)	La Fenice (Venice)	Massimo (Palermo)	Regio (Turin)
Maximum Price (average single seat)	250	180	145	160
Minimum Price (average single seat)	25	25	25	30
Sponsor and Corporate Partner	Package offer	Targeted offer	Yes	Yes
Association	“Amici del Loggione del Teatro La Scala”	“Amici della Fenice”	“Amici del Teatro Massimo “	“Amici del Teatro Regio di Torino”
TV digital	LaScalaTV	La Felice online	WEB TV	Streaming for opera e concert
Price Streaming (medio)	2,9-9.99 euro	3-7 euro	different	3-5- euro

The benchmarking of organizational perspective shows some differences and La Scala is bigger than the other theater (see Table 9).

Table 9 – Organization Prospective. (*Source: our elaboration*)

	La Scala (Milan)	La Fenice (Venice)	Massimo (Palermo)	Regio (Turin)
Organization	Foundation La Scala	Foundation La Fenice	Foundation Teatro Massimo	Foundation Teatro Regio
President	SALA Mayor of Milan	BRUGNANO Mayor of Venice	LA GALLA Mayor of Palermo	RUSSO Mayor of Turin
Employees	By class, 121 orchestral 100 choirs 77 ballet, 21 teachers, 5 managers,	506 (2024)	370 (2023) By class, 121 orchestral, 100 choirs, 77 ballet,	397 (2024)

	30 executives, 145 clerks, 206 <u>workers</u> stage 93 set designers 37 maintenance services		21 teachers, 5 managers,30 executives, 145 clerks, 206 workers stage 93 set designers 37 maintenance services	
Annual performances	Over 250 Opera 15 Ballet 10 Music 22 Singing recitals 6 Great pianists 4 Chamber music 14 Invitation to the Scala 6 The hospitality of Italian musical institutions 10 Charity evenings 6 Children's shows 7 Meetings 40	Opera and ballet 14 Symphony concerts	8 operas 14 concerts 4 ballets in multiple shifts Opera 8 Concerts 14 Ballet 4	Opera and ballet 12 Concerts 12 Specials 3 operas

La Scala is much more than just a theatre: it is a center of cultural production that contributes significantly to the diffusion of music and dance at an international level.

From the economic and sustainability prospective there are some difference (see Table 10)

Table 10 – Economic and Sustainability Prospective (*Source: our elaboration*)

	La Scala (Milan)	La Fenice (Venice)	Massimo (Palermo)	Regio (Turin)
Average income for event	216.000 euro (2022)	N/D	280 (Concert new year)	N/D
Global income	47.418.551 euro (2023)	34.025.943 euro (2023)	33.754.943 (2023)	8.033.305 (2023)
Profit	45.208 euro (2023)	82.182 euro (2023)	115.840 (2023)	2.990.301 (2023)
Maximum price	250	180	145	160
Minimum Price	25	25	25	30
Sponsor and Corporate Partner	Global	Global	Yes	Yes
Social report	Yes	Yes	280 (Concert new year)	N/D

La Scala has, compared with other theaters, a good global performance and organization structure is bigger and also the production is more consistent.

6. Discussion

La Scala has a long-standing reputation for artistic excellence and a significant presence in the world of opera and ballet. Important is the strategy of marketing and communication of the Scala. The evolution of digital technologies requires a continuous adaptation of marketing strategies and good planning (see Figure 2)

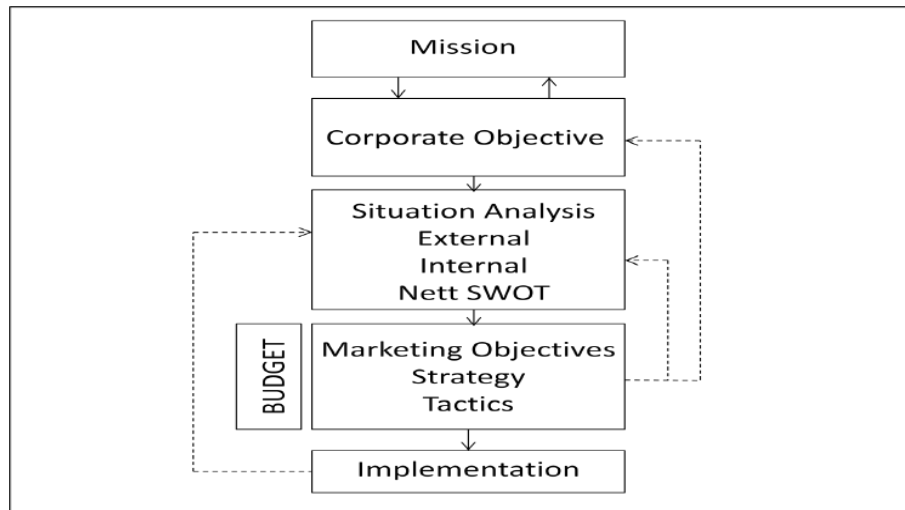


Fig. 2 – Marketing strategy (Source: elaboration from Argano)

The public is increasingly informed and demanding and expects a high-quality cultural offering. The various actions that make up the strategy must be coordinated with each other to maximize their effectiveness. A good strategy increases the probability of success and having a clear and well-defined plan helps to make better decisions and avoid mistakes based on relationship marketing (Figure 3).

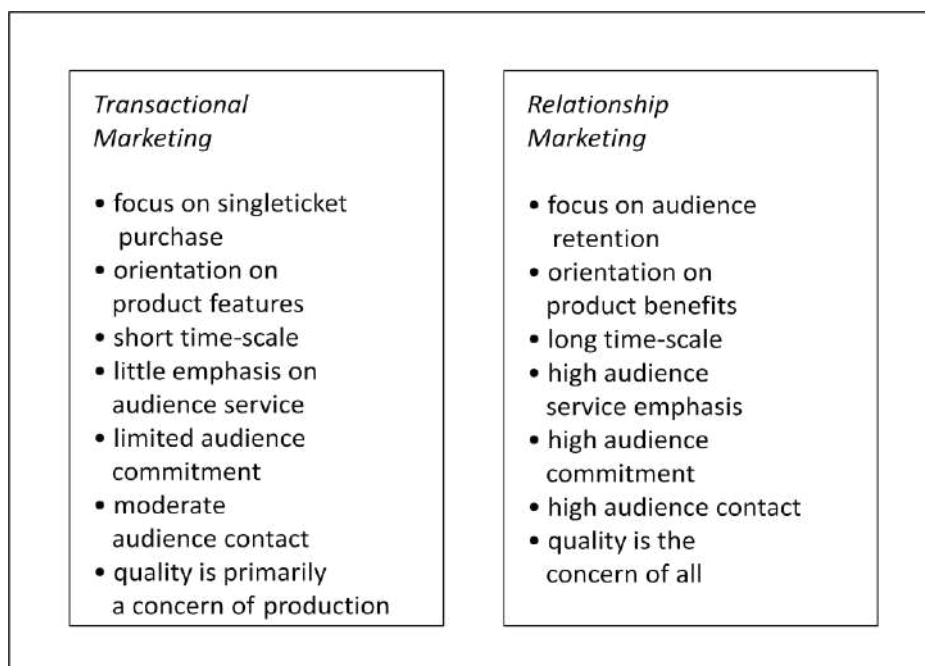


Fig. 3 – Paradigm shift in marketing From attention to the transaction to attention to relationships with consumers (Source: elaboration by Kotler)

The atmosphere of the theater and the furnishings are aimed at creating a positive experience. By coordinating actions, waste of resources is avoided, and results are optimized. A well-constructed strategy can adapt to changes in the context, making the organization more resilient.

La Scala's audience is traditionally composed of opera and high culture public. However, the theatre is actively seeking to broaden its audience, also targeting younger audiences and those approaching opera for the first time.

7. Conclusion

La Scala uses a wide range of communication channels, both traditional and digital. In addition to institutional channels, such as the website and social media, the theatre collaborates with media partners, organizes launch events, and uses direct marketing tools.

7.1 The first research question

Concerning the **first research question: RQ1: "What are the main strategies for excellence and sustainability in the Opera Theater?"**

A-First, some are the critical success factors (see Table 11) important for the evolution of performance.

Table 11 – The critical success factors (*Source: elaboration*)

	Critical Success Factors
1	Communication
2	Prestige of the venue - Quality of facilities
3	Professionalism of Staff
4	Analysis of Results
5	Programming - Coordination of activities - Establishing objectives
6	Location and Accessibility
7	Flexibility of box-office
8	Relational Activities - Peripheral Services (Bar,..)
9	Information about the Audience - Range of Prices -Price determination
10	Corporate Social Responsibility action

An important strategy is establishing partnerships with other cultural institutions, and companies, to create synergies and reach. The customer experience is at the heart of marketing

strategies. It is important to offer a series of additional services, such as guided tours, special events, and exclusive products, to make the theatre experience even richer and more memorable.

La Scala often offers themed seasons, which allow for a deeper understanding of a particular historical period or composer, attracting the interest of a wider audience based on the valuation of the culture (see Figure 4)

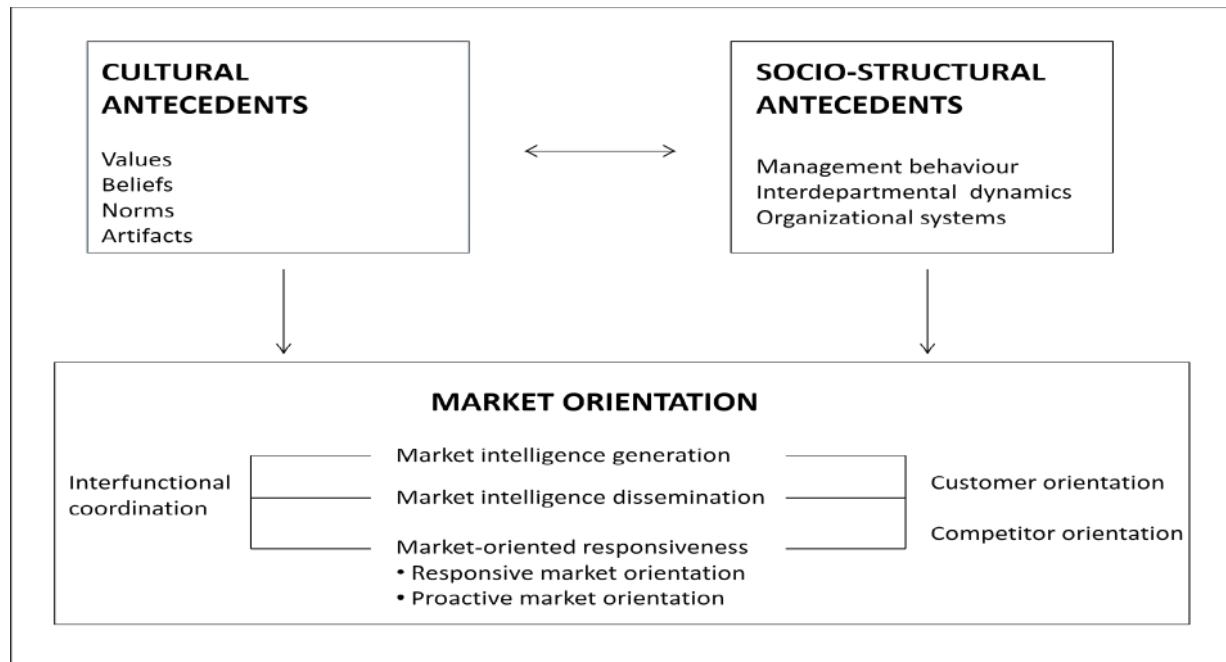


Fig. 4 – Marketing oriented to the culture (Source: elaboration from Kotler)

La Scala performances are broadcast live in cinemas and via streaming, making opera accessible to a wider audience. It organizes educational projects aimed at schools and universities, to bring young people closer to opera and classical music. Collaborations with contemporary artists: The theater collaborates with contemporary artists to create innovative and surprising productions, attracting the attention of a younger audience.

It organizes special events, such as concerts, exhibitions, and galas, to celebrate important anniversaries. The marketing of Teatro Alla Scala faces several challenges, such as competition from other cultural events, the evolution of cultural consumption, and the need to adapt to new technologies. At the same time, the theatre has numerous opportunities to consolidate its role as a reference cultural institution and to reach new audiences.

B-Second, the strategy of marketing of La Scala is an example of how a highly prestigious cultural institution can use communication and promotion tools to enhance its history and identity while remaining open to innovation (see Table 12).

C- Thirds, the results of the first question are coherent with past research (Mella 2018, 2021; Riva 2006, 2007, 2012; Paine 2002; Riva & Pilotti 2017; Payne and Frow 2005; Preite 2000)

Table 12 – Marketing process (*Source: our elaboration*)

Area	Focus
1/ Scenario: the context of reference	1.1 Cultural consumption in Italy 1.2 Cultural consumption in Europe 1.3 The cultural sector in Italy
2/ Competitive scenario	2.1: competitors 2.2: Best practice in marketing actions: e-business branding 2.2.1: Media: multimedia co-marketing 2.2.2: Internet: new channels of fruition 2.2.3: Educational: public literacy and training 2.2.4: Pricing policy: 'get more for less' 2.2.5: Artistic product: value, evolution and hybridization
3/ Strategic focus	3.1: Vision 3.2: Mission 3.3: Macro-objectives 3.4 :Target: identification and segmentation
4/ Key actions	4.1: Operational methodology: the 'experience cycle' 4.2 Actions in line with the model
5/ Innovate to grow	5: Experience is value
6/ Results	6: KPI and CSF

7.2 – The second research question

Concerning the second research question: **RQ2:** *What are the main differences between La Scala and other excellent theaters?*

A-First, it is possible to analyze the results of the research of the comparative study (see Table 13).

B-Second, *La Scala and the other three theaters use a sustainable strategy based on some action to improve sustainability performance* (see Table 14).

C- Thirds, the results of the second question are coherent with past research (Porter et Kramer 2002, 2006, 2011; Mella & Gazzola 2018; Mella 1997, 2005, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2017; Pilotti & Rinolfi 2022a,b; Spranzi 1996).

The limit of this study is that it is based on a sample of four theaters. Further research should improve the number of the sample and compare more dimensions.

Tab. 13 – Benchmarking Results (Source: our elaboration)

	La Scala (Milan)	La Fenice (Venice)	Massimo (Palermo)	Regio (Turin)
I	MARKETING- - AUDIENCE RESEARCH - INFORMATION ABOUT THE SECTOR			
	φφφφφ	φφφφ	φφφ	φφ
II	STRATEGY PROGRAMMING - COORDINATION OF ACTIVITIES ESTABLISHING OBJECTIVES			
	φφφφφ	φφφφ	φφφφ	φφφ
III	QUALITY OF ACTIVITIES PERIPHERAL SERVICES (BAR, ...)			
	φφφφ	φφφ	φφφ	φφφ
IV	ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE			
	φφφφ	φφφ	φφ	φφ
V	EMPLOYEES			
	φφφφ	φφφ	φφ	φφ
VI	DIMENSION OF ANNUAL PROGRAMMATIC			
	φφφφ	φφφ	φφ	φφφ
VII	SPONSOR			
	φφφφφ	φφφ	φφ	φφ
VIII	GLOBAL INCOME			
	φφφφφ	φφφ	φφ	φφφ
IX	CORPORATE SOCIAL RRESPONSABILITY			
	φφφφφ	φφφφ	φφφφ	φφφφ
X	DIGITAL COMMUNICATION			
	φφφφ	φφφ	φφ	φφ
Levels: [φ low] – [φφ low-medium] – [φφφ medium] [φφφφ] – [medium-high] – [φφφφφ high]				

Tab.14 – Sustainability dimension in the Theater (*Source: our elaboration*)

Dimension	Area
Environmental	<p>Minimizing single-use plastics</p> <p>Materials and resources</p> <p>Energy efficiency</p> <p>Reducing energy consumption during rehearsals and performances</p> <p>Waste management</p> <p>Donating or repurposing unwanted materials.</p> <p>Transportation:</p> <p>Optimizing touring schedules to reduce travel</p> <p>Water conservation:</p> <p>Installing water-efficient fixtures in restrooms and backstage areas</p>
Social	<p>Safe working conditions</p> <p>Promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring and casting</p> <p>Providing opportunities for professional development and developing partnerships with local communities</p> <p>Offering accessible and affordable ticket prices</p> <p>Creating outreach programs and educational initiatives</p>
Governance	<p>Supporting local businesses and suppliers</p> <p>Contributing to the cultural and economic vitality of the community</p> <p>Ethical sponsorship and partnerships</p> <p>Choosing sponsors and partners whose values align with sustainability principles.</p>

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