

**PERCEIVED VALUE OF THE OPERA EXPERIENCE IN THE REAL AND VIRTUAL SPHERES:**

**DIMENSIONS THAT MAKE THE DIFFERENCE**

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3 whether it is relevant to develop this recent broadcast mode. This channel can help them renew  
4 and broaden their audiences. But it raises many questions, among which the ability of streaming  
5 to preserve the key elements of the ‘in situ’ experience. Opera houses therefore need to  
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7 differences. Through a qualitative approach, based on the analysis of introspective reports of  
8 opera experiences, eight in opera houses and eight in streaming, we compared ‘in situ’ and  
9 online experiences and their impact on the effectiveness of streaming for opera houses. We  
10 identified five dimensions (affective, aesthetic, functional, emotional, epistemic, social), stable  
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12 differences. The results prompt opera houses to rethink their strategies for the future.

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## **Abstract**

Streaming poses a great challenge to opera managers, who are increasingly wondering whether it is relevant to develop this recent broadcast mode. This channel can help them renew and broaden their audiences. But it raises many questions, among which the ability of streaming to preserve the key elements of the ‘in situ’ experience. Opera houses therefore need to understand the nature of the dimensions of the perceived value in both channels and their differences. Through a qualitative approach, based on the analysis of introspective reports of opera experiences, eight in opera houses and eight in streaming, we compared ‘in situ’ and online experiences and their impact on the effectiveness of streaming for opera houses. We identified five dimensions (affective, aesthetic, functional, emotional, epistemic, social), stable between the two universes, within which we found numerous similarities but also significant differences. The results prompt opera houses to rethink their strategies for the future.

Keywords: experience, perceived value, online, streaming, performing arts, opera

## **Introduction**

Online streaming of performing arts has experienced an unprecedented growth during the multiple lockdowns resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Moving online allowed opera houses to stay in touch with their audiences and sometimes provided them with an additional source of revenue. Although most of them have now returned to their previous operating mode, they must take into account the lessons learned from this crisis when designing a development strategy for the foreseeable future. The increase in online streaming was a way to respond to

1 the extraordinary circumstances created by the pandemic. It is now necessary to assess the  
2 relevance of an enhanced reliance on this broadcast mode.

3 Online streaming is a great challenge for opera houses. On the one hand, this new channel,  
4 which has been rather disruptive for this very traditional sector, offers opera houses a  
5 development path and a way to achieve one of their main goals: renew their audience and  
6 broaden it (Kemp and Poole, 2016), even beyond the physical venue from which lots of fans  
7 are far. Online streaming services in the cultural sector have an enormous potential in terms of  
8 attracting new audiences, renewing and rejuvenating the cultural target, as well as in  
9 complementing and developing alternative forms of cultural consumption, distinct to live  
10 performances (Borghi et al., 2012; Villanueva, 2016). Streaming is an opportunity for opera  
11 houses for reaching audiences who may have proximity, financial or time constraints when  
12 deciding whether or not to attend a live performance. It also allows opera fans to enjoy seeing  
13 other artistic programmes different from those of their own city.

14 On the other hand, opera houses need to carefully assess the costs and benefits associated  
15 with the development of a streaming offer. They therefore need to understand the streaming  
16 experience better before they decide to develop this channel further. They first want to make  
17 sure that they can use this channel without losing the key dimensions of the ‘in situ’ experience.  
18 The crux of the matter is whether streaming offers a unique experience just as live performance  
19 does (Luo, Hu and Guo, 2021). Besides that, if streamed opera can serve as a lever for drawing  
20 in new audiences to opera houses – an aspiration which remains to be seen –, it would be  
21 important to understand how opera spectators might switch between channels and in particular  
22 how streaming would prompt opera viewers to attend a show in an opera house. More generally,  
23 opera houses are wondering if streamed opera is a competitor or a complement to ‘in situ’ opera  
24 (King, 2018; Mueser and Vlachos, 2018). These issues are crucial for performing arts  
25 institutions.

Literature on multichannel, cross channel and omnichannel strategies is extensive in the retail sector (e.g. Carlson, O’Cass and Ahrholdt, 2015; Collin-Lachaud and Vanheems, 2016; Dholakia, Zhao and Dholakia, 2005; Verhoef, Kannan and Inman, 2015), which is the maximum exponent of digitalisation (Hagberg, Sundstrom and Egels-Zandén, 2016). This is not the case in the cultural sector, where the products are highly experiential, and in which aspects of social interaction, social esteem, self-esteem, and self-realisation come together (Conway, 2012). Yet, this field has been disrupted by digitalisation as well (Aguiar and Waldfogel, 2021). Customers can now indeed consume some cultural products physically and/or digitally, on multiple devices and platforms. Research has addressed multichannel strategies in music (e.g. Belvaux and Labbé-Pinlon, 2009), sports (e.g. Winfree, 2009) and very recently in the performing arts sector (Peukert, 2019), but not in the field of opera.

Thus, the aim of our research is to analyse, in a comparative perspective, how opera is experienced in an opera house and how it is experienced in streaming, in order to understand the key elements of these experiences, their common points and their differences. We will do so through the notion of perceived value.

We therefore raise the following research questions:

- What are the dimensions of the perceived value of the opera consumption experience? In an opera house? In streaming?
- Can we identify certain dimensions as distinctive and differentiating characteristics of each type of experience?

We will carry out our research in three languages on an international scale (respondents come from six different countries), using an ethnomarketing methodology, based on the analysis of reports of opera experiences, in European opera houses (from five different

countries) and in streaming, respectively. The results will help opera houses managers decide whether or not they should further entrench streaming.

Our work begins with a theoretical framework in which the experience in the performing arts, the evolution from the real (offline) experience to the virtual experience and the customer experience perceived value are defined and analysed. Next, we present the research methodology and the findings, before exposing the discussion, the managerial implications and the limitations. Finally, conclusions of the paper are set forth.

## **Theoretical framework**

### *From the real (offline) experience to the virtual experience.*

The concept of experience has also undergone profound changes over the last fifteen years or so due to the boom in digital technologies (Lamberton and Stephen 2016), including the Internet - now broadband - in homes, the advent of social networks or the development of tablets and smartphones that benefit from 4G (and soon from 5G) and allow users to perform the same tasks as they do on their computers, both on the move and at home. The same product can now be consumed through different interfaces (Barwitz and Maas, 2018); consumers move from one channel, virtual or real, to another (Collin-Lachaud and Vanheems, 2016). In addition, consumers interact with each other through social networks, and consumers' experiences are influenced by their peers (Roederer and Filser, 2015). Among others, the mentioned evolution has induced the union of offline and online channels through which the company can access the consumer and offer its value proposition (Saghiri et al., 2017). Multichannel refers to the selling of products/services via multiple distribution channels without interaction between them (Anderson et al, 2010). It has evolved to omnichannel, which integrates all the available distribution channels involved in the product/service purchase (Beck and Rygl, 2015). In this

sense, omnichannel represents a paradigm shift where customer initiates the interaction and the retailer controls the integration of the distribution channels (Beck and Rygl, 2015).

The conceptualisation of the consumer's online experience has recently included affective aspects (Michaud-Trevinal and Stenger, 2014; Rose et al., 2012) in addition to the cognitive aspects that were traditionally considered and that allow the analysis of the online shopping experience. Although research has made considerable progress on the consumer experience in the digital sphere, it has focused on specific areas such as the digital environment and atmospheric variables, their antecedents, or consequences (Rose, Hair and Clark, 2011); more studies are needed to address this experience holistically (Bilgihan, Kandampully and Zhang, 2016). Lamberton and Stephen (2016) advocate a better understanding of the omnichannel worlds. Understanding how consumers interact with the firm across different channels, both physical and virtual, is critical for the firm to create a holistic consumer experience (Bilgihan, Kandampully and Zhang, 2016).

Furthermore, both empirical and theoretical works on the online experience often refer to models established in the off-line world (Bolton et al., 2018). Consumers may not react in the same way in a virtual space as in a real one (Bilgihan, Kandampully and Zhang, 2016; Bleier, Harmeling and Palmatier, 2019). It is therefore necessary to investigate its relevance in the virtual world (Martin, Mortimer and Andrews, 2015). We can thus wonder about the stability of the dimensions of the experiential perceived value from a real experiential context to a digital experiential context.

### *Experience in the cultural sector*

This question of the dimensions of the offline and online experience now also arises in the cultural sector - be it for museums, heritage, or performing arts, including opera -, which

has been deeply impacted by the digital revolution and the new technologies (Bellini et al., 2020; Ben Nasr, Hallem and Lagier, 2017).

Offline customer experience in the field of culture and leisure has been considerably studied since the seminal article by Holbrook and Hirschmann (1982). Specifically, in the field of the performing arts, academic research on the experience has investigated festivals (Collin-Lachaud, 2010; Pulh, 2002; Sohier and Brée, 2014), concerts (Carù and Cova, 2005; Derbaix and Derbaix, 2010; Massa, 2014; Mencarelli, 2008) and sports events (Bourgeon-Renault and Bouchet, 2007; Derbaix et al., 2010). In the field of opera, customer experience *per se* has been scantily studied; research has mainly focused on customer satisfaction (Hume, 2008; Jobst and Boerner, 2011), perceived quality (Boerner and Jobst, 2008), and servicescapes (Tubillejas, Cervera and Calderón, 2020).

On the other hand, literature on the digital experience, which is now at the core of the questioning of cultural institutions, is scarce. In the field of museums, Ben Nasr et al. (2017) and Jarrier and Bourgeon-Renault (2020) studied how a mobile app and an interactive mediation tool (respectively) influenced the customer experience, while Evrard and Krebs (2017) analysed, through a specifically developed scale, if two museum experiences, one lived physically in the Louvre, the other one lived on its website were complements or substitutes. In performing arts, research investigated theatre and live performances broadcast in a cinema (e.g. Bakhshi et al., 2010; King, 2018; Mueser and Vlachos, 2018). Finally, Bellini et al. (2020) studied the drivers of satisfaction in a virtual cultural experience. No research has analysed the experience of performing arts in streaming.

### *Customer experience perceived value*

To study the customer experience, online and offline, we chose the notion of perceived value as conceived by Holbrook (1999). It is particularly adequate for products with high

emotional value (Gallarza et al., 2017). Indeed, it allows us to understand the consumer experience and its characteristics (Holbrook, 1999; Rivière and Mencarelli, 2012); it places the researcher in the core of the experience, to provide a holistic vision (Mencarelli, 2008). Besides, perceived value has been mobilised by several pieces of research on the consumer experience in performing arts (e.g. Derbaix and Derbaix, 2010; Mencarelli, 2008; Pulh, 2002; Sohier and Brée, 2014), some of which have attempted to identify its dimensions.

Nowadays, no consensus has yet been reached on the measurement of perceived value, which remains a major issue for both researchers and firms (Gallarza et al., 2017; Leroi-Werelds et al., 2014). Thus, the number and nature of its dimensions vary according to empirical work and the consumption context (Gallarza et al., 2017; Rintamäki and Kirves, 2017). There is no unique multi-dimensional universally accepted scale to measure perceived value (Gallarza, Gil and Arteaga, 2020), and further work adapted to particular contexts is needed. The heterogeneity of dimensions, however, demonstrates the ability of value to describe the specificity of any consumption context (Gallarza, Ruiz and Schlosser, 2020).

Perceived value has been scantily studied in the field of streaming. However, Oyedele and Simpson (2018) have identified four dimensions of the perceived value of streaming applications: cognitive effort, practical value, monetary value, and social value. Chen, Liu and Chiu (2017) identified four types of perceived benefits of streaming music: functional, experiential, financial, and psychosocial.

The literature review thus shows the absence of studies that comparatively analyse opera performances in theatres and in streaming. Moreover, while literature on the perceived value of experience is substantial in the field of performing arts, it is not as extensive when it comes to opera (e.g. Tubillejas, Cervera and Calderón, 2020) and non-existent for streaming opera.

## **Methodology**

For our exploratory research, we adopted a qualitative approach, the most adequate for obtaining in-depth data on consumer experience (Carù, Cova and Pace, 2014; Collin-Lachaud and Vanheems, 2016), and all the more appropriate that the field has not been much investigated (Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993), which is the case for both opera and streaming. More specifically, we have chosen the method of introspective reports (Carù and Cova, 2003; Collin-Lachaud and Vanheems, 2016; Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2009; Roederer, 2008). Carù and Cova (2008, p.169) define these narratives as “discourses with a clear sequential order that connect actions in a meaningful way for a specific audience”. They occur “when a subject tells someone (about) [...] an episode of [...] [their] lived experience” (Bertaux and De Singly, 2010, p. 35). This technique gives the researcher an effective access to a customer’s experience and internal states (Carù, Cova and Pace, 2014), that he can study over time (Bertaux and De Singly, 2010). Introspective reports place the consumer at the core of the lived experience, which also links to the consumer’s past experiences (Fornerino, Helme-Guizon and Gotteland, 2008). They bring into relief the events that are important, singular or surprising to the spectator (Özçağlar-Toulouse, 2009). This type of data collection, which has already been used to study the experience of live concerts’ spectators (Carù and Cova, 2003; Fornerino, Helme-Guizon and Gotteland, 2008), is facilitated by the increasing propensity of individuals to talk about themselves (Badot et al., 2009; Carù, Cova and Pace, 2014). We have chosen to collect these reports in writing rather than through face-to-face interviews because the difficulty of quickly organising meetings shortly after a performance soon became apparent; this was specially the case for streamed opera viewers, who are located in different places, cities and countries. Besides, it avoided the possibility of the respondents being influenced by the presence of an interviewer.

The sample of respondents is comprised of opera consumers from six different countries. To make up the sample, we invited, by email or by *Twitter* private messages, people

1 that we identified as ‘in situ’ or streamed opera consumers to participate in our research. We  
2 also published a post on *Facebook*. While this remains a convenience sample, as is often the  
3 case in qualitative research (Lee and Hyun., 2016; Park, Sha and Olmsted, 2016), we have  
4 sought to achieve a good degree of variety in the profiles, particularly in terms of age range, the  
5 number of operas consumed annually, and the opera chosen for the report, which we believe to  
6 be the most important given the focus of our research (Park, Sha and Olmsted, 2016) (Table 1).  
7 Eight personal written reports were collected for the ‘in situ’ opera experience and eight for the  
8 streaming opera experience, which represent a total of 43 pages and an average of 2.7 pages per  
9 report.

10 *[Table 1]*

11 We sent respondents a response file with instructions to read before writing their report  
12 (Carù and Cova, 2003). We asked them to recall and talk about their most recent experience of  
13 opera, whether in an opera house or in streaming, in as much detail as possible, telling what  
14 they had thought, done, and felt before, during and after the opera (Fornerino, Helme-Guizon  
15 and Gotteland, 2008; Jarrier, 2015; Wallendorf and Brucks, 2003). Respondents could organise  
16 the report at their convenience. The only constraints we gave them were to write their report in  
17 the first person (Fornerino, Helme-Guizon and Gotteland, 2008; Jarrier, 2015; Roederer, 2008),  
18 chronologically, and to try, as much as possible, to relate what they did to what they felt, both  
19 positively and negatively. We also encouraged them, when they had not yet seen the  
20 performance, to send back their report within the 48 hours immediately after the performance,  
21 which would ensure that we had access to as much detail as possible and with a minimum of  
22 memory distortion (Wallendorf and Brucks, 1993).

23 We assigned a code to each report, preceded by the letter R for ‘in-house’ opera  
24 experience reports and the letter V for streaming opera experience reports, and then integrated

all of the narratives into a single research project within the qualitative data analysis software *Atlas.ti* 8.4.24. Compared to manual processing, such software facilitates and accelerates the management of a large amount of data - available at the same place - and its analysis, in a reliable manner. Thus, it allowed us to organise the data and navigate through it. We were also able to easily create, manipulate and organise the codes. *Atlas.ti* makes it particularly convenient to merge codes or break them down them into several codes, or to create group codes (second order codes); it automatically allocates or reallocates the quotes in the new categories whenever a change of codes is required. The software also facilitated our interpretation of the data (Friese, Soratto and Pires, 2018; Sinkovics and Alfoldi, 2012), by allowing us to formulate complex queries thanks to the query tool, produce reports and furthermore provide us with code frequencies. Another advantage was that the code co-occurrence table helped us identify patterns and relationships between the codes.

First, we carried out a “skim reading” of the introspective reports in order to understand in depth how the respondents perceived their opera experience. We then started coding and analysed the reports, both intra-textually and inter-textually, following the methodology recommended by Lune and Berg (2016). We then searched, in a categorisation phase (Spiggle, 1994), for recurring semantic patterns, which allowed us, after reduction, interpretation and labelling, to produce a list of 23 primary codes in the case of ‘in situ’ opera and 19 codes in that of streamed opera. These codes were then reorganised thematically (axial coding) in second-order codes, based on previous works on multidimensional scales of perceived value we had identified in our literature review, and in the field of performing arts particularly. We obtained a total of seven second-order codes/categories in both universes. In this abstraction phase, we went from empirical grounded categories to more conceptual constructs (Spiggle, 1994). Four categories corresponded to perceived value dimensions already existing in performing arts

literature. The three last categories were grouped in a third-order code to form a 5<sup>th</sup> dimension, also existing in the aforementioned literature (Figure 1).

### **Findings**

The analysis of the personal reports allowed us to identify the similarities and the differences between the valuation sources of the opera experience, in an opera house and in streaming, be it in their nature (Table 2) or in their intensity (Figure 1).

#### **Common main dimensions to both ‘in situ’ opera experience and streamed opera experience**

First, the five main dimensions of the perceived value, previously identified in the performing arts perceived value literature, that emerged from our research, are stable between the real sphere and the virtual sphere: whether the opera is experienced in an opera house or in streaming, all value sources can be classified into affective sources, aesthetic sources, functional sources (that can be classified in three sub-categories: quality of the show, show environment and organisation), epistemic sources or social sources. Besides, in both universes, the intensities of the first four dimensions are distributed in a relatively equivalent way and functional value largely prevails. However, the social component of the perceived value is much less significant in streaming than in the real universe.

[Table 2]

[Figure 1]

Within the dimensions of the opera experience perceived value, some value sources are common to both experiences.

#### **Value sources common to both ‘in situ’ opera experience and streamed opera experience**

## Common Affective value sources

Thus, whether in an opera house or in streaming, like sports events spectators (Kunkel, Doyle and Berlin, 2017), respondents derive enjoyment from feeling emotions (V4: *“I felt a great emotion [...], it gave me a lot of joy and made me happy, as if I were a member of the party”*; R4: *“But this time there was something in the air and I literally collapsed in tears - sobbing”*). As it is the case in movie or sport shows experiences (Aurier, Evrard and N’Goala, 2004; Derbaix et al., 2010), it is also important for them to immerse themselves and feel empathy for the characters, sometimes even for the artists (V4: *“I’ll tell you an anecdote: this opera was created 101 years before I was born, and the name of the protagonist is V4, and my name is also V4. At one point in my life, I had a lover named Alfredo, just like the main character;”* R3: *“Poor Rusalka, she is so unlucky, she is abandoned like an old sock by this dumb tenor”*). The emotions an opera triggers are all the more intense when the spectators feel immersed in the opera (Carù and Cova, 2006; Fornerino, Helme-Guizon and Gotteland, 2008), thanks to the quality of the production in particular (R2: *“Another problem was the production! [...] The characters were lifeless, boring and I didn’t care about them”*; V8: *“The light and shadow effects are much more present than in Act I, which really immerses the spectator in the atmosphere [...of this new act and gives him the impression of being in the opera house”*). Streamed opera viewers and ‘in situ’ opera spectators value emotions equally, even if they do not enjoy the performance through the same channel. The feeling of immersion seems greater in the case of streaming, where most reports show a more developed empathy for the characters, sometimes close to identification; streamed opera respondents feel like they were part of the story (V4: *“it made me happy, as if I was part of the party”*). This phenomenon could mean that streamed opera viewers compensate for being away from the opera house and the silent and dark atmosphere it can provide by a stronger connection with the plot and the characters. The stage close-ups or the details of the orchestra and more generally the way the streamed

1 opera is directed can help them build that connection (V8: “[the images] allow you to project  
2 yourself immediately into the opera house and then into the story”). Some streamed opera  
3 viewers however regret that they remain in their everyday environment (V3: “It’s very difficult  
4 to just watch the broadcast without interruptions since work-related emails and phone calls  
5 ignore the fact that I’m really enjoying an opera”).

6 On the other hand, enjoying an opera is a way for spectators to relax and escape, as  
7 previous research on perceived value of cultural consumption experiences showed (e.g.  
8 Mencarelli, 2008) (V2: “It was a gloomy Sunday... but *La Bohème* always puts me in a good  
9 mood”; R3: “I’m always surprised to see how cut off from the world we are during an opera  
10 performance”). However, streaming viewers value these benefits less intensely. This  
11 phenomenon could be explained by the fact that the opera experience is apparently debunked  
12 in the virtual sphere. Spectators also like to be surprised (V5: “The second was perhaps the  
13 quietest and least surprising”; R2: “For an opera lover like me, the excitement that come with  
14 season announcements is similar to that of a child on Christmas Eve and opening the season  
15 brochure feels like unwrapping presents”).

#### 16 Common Aesthetic value sources

17 Furthermore, in an opera house and in streaming, like museum visitors (Mencarelli et  
18 al., 2010), audiences enjoy the beauty of the piece and of the show, especially in terms of the  
19 singing, the voices, and the staging (V4: “The protagonist was dressed in a red dress and the  
20 whole living room was magnificent”; R6: “I applauded a lot, especially after the beautiful solos  
21 performed by the singers”). They can also appreciate the beauty of the place, as it unfolds  
22 during concerts (Mencarelli, 2008) (V7: “During the performance, I admired the red and  
23 golden hall of the Zagreb National Opera”; R7: “But the Grand Théâtre is so beautiful! There  
24 are balconies, gilded embellishments, mouldings, red curtains, ... And then it’s small, it’s oval,  
25 it’s intimate”). As it is the case for basket-ball matches spectators (Derbaix et al., 2010), they

1 more generally value the atmosphere of the venue, even when they can only perceive it through  
2 their screen (V3: *"I enjoy watching people come into the opera house since the audience*  
3 *audiences are very different in each opera house as is the interior"*; R7: *"I like that moment*  
4 *when the lights go down, when people finish their conversations and finally stop talking, when*  
5 *you hear some people coughing one last time. Then the conductor's arm rises, all the musicians*  
6 *look at him, everyone holds their breath ... and the arm goes down giving the signal to*  
7 *everyone."*). In any case, if we look at the frequency of the verbatims, it should be noted that  
8 in the case of streamed opera experience, the aesthetic dimension of the opera perceived value  
9 is mostly related to the performance, even if respondents are also sensitive to the venue and its  
10 atmosphere.

#### 11 Common Functional value sources

12 At another level, in both modes of consumption, like in sport shows experiences (Kunkel,  
13 Doyle and Berlin, 2017), people value the quality of the performance and all its components,  
14 be it the piece (V5: *"I loved how the singing and the music complement each other to show*  
15 *anguish, fear and horror"*; R3: *"I admit that I still find the libretto a bit weak so far"*), the  
16 performers (V1: *"The singers were good"*; R6: *"We all agreed that the singers had exceptional*  
17 *voices"*), or the production as a whole (V3: *"It's a fantastic production"*; R3: *"a delight, finally*  
18 *a performance where nothing is out of place"*). The intensity of this value source shows that it  
19 is particularly important for spectators, who also pay attention to acoustics (R7: *"the sound is*  
20 *incredible"*; V2: *"The sound was the thing I liked the least. There were some parts that I*  
21 *couldn't hear very well"*). Besides, subtitles must work, be easy to read and available in a  
22 language they understand. They fully contribute to the experience as they help respondents  
23 understand the piece (Bairstow and Lavour, 2017), often sung in a foreign language, even  
24 though it may be difficult for them to read the texts and watch the scene at the same time. V5  
25 writes for instance, about the opera she watched: *"That's how I realised how important it is to*

1 *have subtitles these days, especially when the opera is streamed*". Similarly, R6, who attended  
2 an Italian opera in Sweden, says "*I don't understand Italian.... I saw that above the stage there*  
3 *was a screen which displayed subtitles.... in Swedish!*".

#### 4 *Common Epistemic value sources*

5 Moreover, whether in a lyric theatre or in front of their screen, enjoying an opera allows  
6 spectators to enrich themselves intellectually, to reflect, to engage in introspection (V5: "*It's*  
7 *an aria which, in addition to giving meaning to the story, allows for self-reflection and is a*  
8 *source of inspiration*"; R8: "*Being able to share what you experienced during the performance*  
9 *helps you rationalise the experience because it makes you reflect on what you experienced*"),  
10 as in the case of operas broadcast in cinemas (Bakhshi, Mateos-García and Throsby, 2010) or  
11 of sports events (e.g. Kunkel, Doyle and Berlin, 2017). This can happen during the performance,  
12 but also before and after, through the reading of critics, the search for additional information or  
13 the writing of a blog. For some people, enjoying an opera is also an opportunity to analyse the  
14 work or the performance (V1: "*The piece is not unpleasant, but not overwhelming either. Some*  
15 *beautiful passages, but the music has a somewhat repetitive side*"; R5: "*The staging was indeed*  
16 *original and quite modern, and above all very dynamic, with the artists acting as much as*  
17 *singing*"). Discovering the piece, the performance or artists is also valued (V1: "*I'm happy to*  
18 *have seen this broadcast which allowed me to fill a gap in my musical culture*"; R3: "*My*  
19 *husband and I are delighted with our discovery*"). Respondents less familiar with opera  
20 appreciate the opportunity to experience a new artform, as do the basketball spectators studied  
21 by Derbaix et al. (2010), for whom games are an opportunity to discover the sport and  
22 understand its rules. As V5 writes, "*It was an experience I really enjoyed watching in streaming*  
23 *[...] because it means I have access to that art for free, which allows me to start to get to know*  
24 *it*". Looking at the verbatims frequency, two epistemic value sources show relevant differences:

analysis is more valued in the ‘in situ’ experience, whereas intellectual stimulation prevails in the virtual sphere. Being in an opera house and physically enjoying all the elements that make up a performance would favour its analysis right down to the smallest of details. Streaming spectators would be more inclined to deep reflection, as they might do when immersed in a book, than to a ‘technical’ interpretation and judgment of the opera and its components. For the opera lover, a streaming opera platform might constitute the equivalent of a library - as is the case in music streaming (Danckwerts and Kenning, 2019) -, an almost infinite source of knowledge and reflection.

#### *Common Social value source*

Finally, as in the case of movies (Marteaux, 2006), museums (Mencarelli et al., 2010) or sports events (Derbaix et al., 2010), the opera experience, real or virtual, also allows the audience to talk to other people, known or unknown, who may or may not have attended the performance. For the ‘in situ’ opera spectators, these exchanges start before the show and are mostly physical until the end of the performance. Opera attendees can socially interact with their companions, acquaintances or with their seat neighbours in the auditorium (R3: *“I have a lot of Twitter users coming, we’re meeting at the interval under the statue of Nikki de St-Phalle/Tinguély”*). They are also sometimes sensitive to the appearance of the audience (R2: *“[The Schwindfoyer] is one of my favourite places at the opera, it’s so beautiful and perfect for people watching - and that’s something you really have to do at a premiere in Vienna. You see celebrities, wannabe celebrities, strange people and beautiful gowns. And lots of plastic surgery”*). At the end of the opera, they communicate with others remotely, through social medias, blogs or on the phone, mainly to share their impressions about the performance (R2: *“I also told ‘everyone’ about my experience – I tweeted about the performance and also posted a curtain call pic to my Instagram story”*). Opera attendees can keep enjoying – physical - social interactions until a few days after the show. As for streamed opera viewers, they interact

1 socially mostly during the performance. They manage to recreate the moments of conviviality  
2 that ‘in situ’ opera goers get with the people present in the theatre through the live chat provided  
3 by the platform (V3: *“I like the interaction that happens in the live performance (using the chat*  
4 *window)”*). They can also text friends or talk to people physically present in the room (V7: *“I*  
5 *shared my impressions of the opera I was watching [...] with [the friend I was spending the*  
6 *weekend with] during the last half-hour of the performance”*).

7 Within the dimensions common to the ‘in situ’ opera experience and the streamed opera  
8 experience perceived value mentioned above - except for the epistemic value -, some value  
9 sources are specific to one of the spheres.

#### 10 **Value sources specific to the streamed or to the ‘in situ’ opera experience**

##### 11 *Functional value sources specific to the streamed or to the ‘in situ’ opera* 12 *experience*

13 From a functional point of view, streamed opera viewers value the comfort of use of this  
14 broadcast mode (Oyedele and Simpson, 2018) which, without requiring a complex organisation  
15 (V5: *“it’s convenient and can be done at any time of day”*), allows them to watch the opera at  
16 home (most often) and possibly to engage in other activities simultaneously (V1: *“The opera*  
17 *must end around 8.50 pm. I still have ten pages to read to finish the Goncourt, I think I will*  
18 *finish it while following the opera with one eye.”*). They pay attention to the quality of the  
19 stream (V2: *“The quality of the broadcast seemed suboptimal to me”*) and of the image (V6:  
20 *“That’s without considering the quality of the cameras. A wide shot with pixel quality that is*  
21 *worthy of an SF movie from the 80s.”*). Meanwhile, opera house audiences value the comfort  
22 and the configuration of the venue, which should ensure that they can fully enjoy the  
23 performance from their seats (R7: *“This is a modern venue, you sit very comfortably”*), as is  
24 the case for other performing arts or sport events spectators (e.g. Kunkel, Doyle and Berlin,

2017). Streamed opera viewers also appreciate the ease of use of the platform (V6: *"I didn't know this website, I find it very ergonomic, easy to understand"*), as in the case of streaming apps (Oyedele and Simpson, 2018). In a symmetrical way, opera house spectators like to be able to get to the opera conveniently (R8: *"Usually when I go to the opera abroad, I try to book a hotel relatively close by. This allows me to go to the theatre on foot"*) as well as to be able to enter the opera house and circulate easily in it (R6: *"we entered the opera house, and there I found my seat very easily, thanks to the help of the Opera staff"*). Streamed opera viewers mention these aspects related to the material conditions of the experience more often than 'in situ' opera goers. In a nutshell, streaming is a way to attend a show that viewers might not necessarily be able to see in theatres because of geographical or logistical constraints, at little or no cost (V2: *"I love these initiatives of websites like Operavision, which allow us to introduce opera to people who, either because they are far away, or because they don't have enough time, or because they can't afford it, cannot go to the opera (in Spain, it's expensive)"*). Mention must be made that 'in situ' opera spectators indeed pay attention to the price of the ticket (R2: *"Not having to pay hundreds of euros for a seat in the stalls is not bad either"*) and to the services offered (R5: *"I queued for a while in a draught (the theatre door is always open) to go to the ladies' room"*).

#### *Social and affective value sources specific to the 'in situ' opera experience*

On another level, the characteristics of the streamed opera experience does not allow the viewer to enjoy some social and affective benefits that the 'in situ' opera patrons can get because they are physically present in the opera house. Thus, as in the case of street festivals (Pulh, 2002) or basketball games (Derbaix et al., 2010), enjoying an opera is also an opportunity for opera attendees to commune with those present (R8: *"You could see that the two singers also enjoyed the performance and that they shared [their enthusiasm] with the audience"*). During the performance, everyone becomes part of the same community (Villanueva and

Lacasa, 2017). Being in a full house particularly contributes to this phenomenon, where the communion includes all the theatre's spectators and sometimes even the artists. Often directly linked to the emotions provided by the artists or to their technical performance, the applause constitutes the climax of this communion, which is characteristic of 'in situ' opera and that streamed opera viewers who are also familiar with opera houses miss. As V5 sums it up: "*I missed some things that are only experienced in an opera house, such as the applause at the end of the opera, which is a beautiful moment when actors and directors connect with the cheering audience*". This social communion value, which requires the physical presence of other spectators, can explain that the social dimension of the opera experience perceived value is more intense in the real sphere than in the virtual sphere. Besides, the 'in situ' opera experience brings pleasure to opera attendees long before the performance begins and even before their arrival at the theatre (Roll, Emes and Horst, 2017). In an opera house setting, the spectators can appreciate the exceptional and even magical nature of the performance and/or the place where it takes place (R4: "*But sometimes [...] there is an indescribable magic in the air. This is what happened recently in Zurich's Rigoletto*").

## **Discussion and managerial implications**

By identifying the opera experience valuation sources in lyric theatres and in streaming, this piece of research contributes to the findings on perceived value and its inherent dimensionality (Gallarza, Gil and Arteaga, 2020), particularly in the virtual domain, which has been scantily studied (Carlson, O'Cass and Ahrholdt, 2015), and in performing arts. In particular, our paper enriches literature on the perceived value of streaming, which is a very recent distribution channel, in retail and even more in performing arts. The results have allowed us to consolidate the existing knowledge in this field.

1           In the case of the ‘in situ’ opera experience, the dimensions of the perceived value that  
2 we identified in our research correspond to those previously highlighted in studies carried out  
3 in other performing arts. One dimension, ‘status’, stressed by Pulh (2002) and Derbaix (2008)  
4 in the context of street festivals and performing arts respectively, has not emerged, however.  
5 This result can seem quite surprising, given that opera is a highbrow art, which some spectators  
6 attend to achieve social status and to differentiate themselves from others (Derbaix, 2008). It  
7 might be due to the profile of the respondents, who are all used to attending operas, sometimes  
8 very frequently. The ease of organisation is not valued either, whereas it is the case for the  
9 experience of festivals (e.g. Sohier and Brée, 2014) or concerts (Mencarelli, 2008). A piece of  
10 explanation could be that the ‘in situ’ opera experience is complex to organise, for multiple  
11 reasons including its duration, the difficulty of getting tickets or the need to book tickets many  
12 months in advance. On the other hand, we have identified the value sources of the opera  
13 experience in streaming, which is a particular case of online experience. They are all close to  
14 those identified by Maubisson, Bourliataux and Doueiry (2019), Singh et al. (2021) and Shen  
15 (2021) in their work on perceived value of music streaming, entertainment streaming, and video  
16 game streaming respectively. Our research therefore shows that the conclusions of these authors  
17 are applicable to the performing arts sector.

18           This piece of research also enriches multi-channel and cross channel literature, since  
19 opera, that is now offered both physically and virtually, has become a multi-form offer (Elberse,  
20 2010), as is now the case for press or streamed music or movies. It provides indeed a better  
21 understanding of the similarities and the differences between the perceived values of the real  
22 experience and of the virtual experience. It thus appears that opera experience value sources  
23 that are identical in the real and virtual spheres are those directly linked to the show itself: an  
24 opera would be valued according to the same criteria whether the spectator experiences it in a  
25 physical opera house or on a screen. An opera, even disembodied, can thus remotely bring

1 emotions to the streaming viewer, who manages to immerse himself and feel empathy for the  
2 characters without being in a dark and silent auditorium. It can be the source of social  
3 interactions for the spectator at home, even if they only happen during the broadcast. However,  
4 the common criteria do not always have the same importance for the spectator, depending on  
5 the sphere considered. More generally, while value sources common to 'in situ' and 'streaming'  
6 experiences are more numerous than those specific to one consumption mode, they can make a  
7 difference between the online and offline experience through their intensity. Thus, the opera  
8 experience is less social in the case of streaming and doesn't allow to relax and escape as much  
9 as in an opera house. On the other hand, it seems to provide more intellectual stimulation and  
10 deep reflection than the 'in situ' experience.

11         The value sources specific to one sphere are those which depend directly on the  
12 consumption channel, i.e., the opera house and its audience in the real sphere; this contrasts  
13 with the fact of being in one's daily and familiar environment in front of a screen in the virtual  
14 sphere. Indeed, beside the functional characteristics proper to each channel, some aspects such  
15 as the pleasure the ritual of preparation brings or the sensation of living a magical moment  
16 cannot be reproduced in the case of a streamed experience. As for social communion it  
17 absolutely requires the presence of an audience and companions in an opera house.

18         From a managerial point of view, knowing how the opera experience is valued give  
19 opera houses numerous levers to develop streaming. Mention must be made, however, that  
20 while the quality of the performance appears to be particularly important for opera spectators,  
21 this component does not offer much leverage to cultural managers, who cannot have any  
22 influence on the intrinsic elements of the performance, with two exceptions: surtitles and  
23 subtitles. The results obtained lead us to propose the following areas of recommendation to  
24 opera managers.

1                   *Focus on the technical elements of the central offer*

2           First, opera houses should take advantage of the constant technical innovations in the  
3 field of streaming to provide a broadcast of the utmost quality, with a choice of subtitles  
4 understood by the vast majority of their audience. The conditions of the performance seem  
5 indeed to be of great concern for streaming viewers; they are indispensable for them to fully  
6 enjoy the opera. Opera managers must also work on the visual elements of the platform and  
7 focus on the directing of the streamed opera - and invest, if necessary, in highly specialised,  
8 dedicated teams - because it favours immersion and therefore the blossoming of emotions.  
9 These recommendations nevertheless raise the question of how modest structures, who will not  
10 have sufficient means to set up their own platform, could ensure the quality of retransmissions.  
11 Will they settle for mainstream platforms such as *YouTube* or *Facebook live*, with the technical  
12 limitations they imply, or will new platforms rise, that will allow these cultural organisations  
13 to propose, with limited investment, an offer capable of competing qualitatively with those of  
14 the Met, the Vienna State Opera or the Teatro Real?

15                   *Develop social levers via social networks*

16           At another level, given the importance of emotions for streamed opera viewers, opera  
17 houses should accordingly prompt streamed opera viewers to share their feelings through social  
18 networks, not only with the goal to increase the consumption of streamed opera but also to make  
19 opera known to population segments less familiar with that art form. Indeed, streaming could  
20 be a way of reaching new audiences and not only to offer ‘in situ’ opera experts an additional  
21 virtual proposal, as watching an opera in streaming is much cheaper and easier to organise than  
22 going to an opera house. Using specific social networks such as *Tik Tok* might also help opera  
23 houses to reach new and younger audiences, thanks to a format more in tune with those  
24 spectators.

1                    *Offer peripheral services to viewers to enhance their experience*

2                    Nonetheless, opera houses should take into account that neophytes - the youngest ones  
3                    in particular - might not enjoy being in front of a screen for three to six hours. They could  
4                    therefore offer, in addition to streamed opera, shorter original programs, that would initiate the  
5                    newcomers to opera with a more adequate format. More generally, opera houses should provide  
6                    spectators with additional content, that would quench the viewer's thirst for knowledge, given  
7                    the importance of the intellectual stimulation dimension of a streamed opera for them. Like  
8                    entertainment streaming platforms do, they could give detailed information on the opera, on the  
9                    composer, on the artists - aside from their name -. They could also explain the context and the  
10                   production and the director's views, which would be interesting to neophytes and to regular  
11                   opera spectators as well. This information should be interactive and available on demand,  
12                   during the performance, on a click. The viewer would then have the feeling of navigating in an  
13                   interactive encyclopaedia while he watches the opera. The opera platforms could also, at the  
14                   end of the broadcast, recommend operas based on the show viewed, so that the viewer  
15                   immediately knows how he can keep enriching himself intellectually.

16                   As for the social dimension of the streamed opera experience, it could encourage opera  
17                   houses to develop live chats on the platforms, which are only present in very few platforms so  
18                   far. As *Netflix* or *Disney+* do, they could even offer the customers the opportunity to organise  
19                   viewing parties, which would allow a spectator to watch and discuss an opera together with  
20                   friends via a live chat bar. All members of a guest group could rewind, fast-forward the movie,  
21                   or pause it, so that the opera is synchronised for everyone. Besides, it appears that the viewer's  
22                   environment doesn't help him to focus on the performance. Having a quality broadcasting  
23                   system and indeed a dedicated space could be a solution. Opera houses could therefore partner  
24                   with home professionals and Hi-Fi brands to offer customers spaces that favour streaming.

1 In a nutshell, in the fashion of press companies (Rivière et al., 2016), opera houses  
2 should use all the possibilities of digital technologies in terms of interactivity and multimedia  
3 content - starting with the live chat and viewers comments - to offer streamed opera viewers  
4 more than a mere 2D copy of the performance that takes place in the opera house. This would  
5 also be a way of offering added value to streamed opera and position it as an additional proposal  
6 to ‘in situ’ opera, and not only as consumption channel used when consumers cannot go to the  
7 opera house – as was the case during the height of the pandemic -.

8 Last but not least, it is crucial that opera houses and streaming platforms managers take  
9 into account that some streaming viewers show a high level of expertise of opera. If they decide  
10 to develop this broadcast mode, they should therefore reflect on which offer to propose (in  
11 terms of show, options, prices), depending on the spectators they target: a potentially expert  
12 audience, or a neophyte audience that they would like to attract.

13 These various managerial contributions could perhaps be extended or adapted to other  
14 types of performing arts, or even to other sectors that are wondering about the opportunity to  
15 stream their shows.

## 16 **Conclusion**

17 By comparing the value sources of the opera experience in the real and in the virtual  
18 spheres, we have been able to answer some of the opera sector’s questions on the new disruptive  
19 consumption channel that streaming has become. But many others remain. On the other hand,  
20 in order to generate additional revenue by reaching opera lovers that would not have the  
21 opportunity to go to theatres, or who want to increase their consumption of opera, opera houses  
22 will have to reflect on the pay model they want to implement: a subscription model that would  
23 give unlimited access to the whole catalogue, or a ‘pay-as-you-go’ model. More generally, they  
24 could develop a proper pricing grid according to the content of their streaming offer. Their

choice would have important legal implications that would have to be dealt with for the model to be stable; the artists' image rights is an issue in this regard. In any case, streaming might change the business model of opera houses. For the same live performance, the theatres can indeed virtually extend the size of their audience, which is not limited by the size of the venue anymore. As it has been the case with *pay per view* in sports (Karg, McDonald and Leckie, 2019), though at a different scale, opera houses could now have a second market at their disposal. Revenues generated by streaming might therefore help them strengthen their currently fragile financial sustainability. If they choose to develop this channel, opera houses should nevertheless gauge the profitability of streamed opera beforehand, in view of the substantial investment it requires.

Our research shows some limitations. First, we conducted our study before the pandemic started. It would therefore be interesting to collect personal reports written after the health crisis started, now that opera houses reopened, and streamed operas offers remain abundant. Indeed, the perception 'in situ' and/or streamed opera spectators might have changed. On the other hand, the conditions of the study make it difficult to generalise the results at this stage. For instance, the respondents did not have the same viewing conditions, nor watched the same performance. Another limitation relates to the nature of the respondents. In our sample, three streamed opera viewers have never attended a show in an opera house. Conversely, all but one 'in situ' opera patrons are very regular opera attendees. This discrepancy might explain some differences observed between the 'in situ' and the streamed opera experience perceived values. Besides, only four respondents (two for 'in situ' opera and two in streaming) are under 30 years old. Younger viewers might have a different attitude towards streaming, and therefore value their streamed opera experience differently. A bigger quantity of reports would therefore allow us to deepen our comparison between the 'in situ' and the streamed opera experience, as well as to build up a typology of the streamed opera viewers. The study of the opera experience

1 perceived value on neophytes or occasional spectators would enable us to assess the possible  
2 value of this broadcasting mode for the development of opera geared at new audiences. As these  
3 kind of opera consumers might not grant the researchers as much time as regular attendees,  
4 short interviews can nonetheless prove useful. Netnography (Kozinets, 2010) and  
5 *Twetnography* in particular (Galan and Vignolles, 2013) could also be an interesting way of  
6 enriching the data obtained through traditional methods (Agostino, 2018). Live chats, which  
7 are increasingly featured during live opera streaming broadcasts, could also be a valuable source  
8 of information. Last but not least, while the study compares ‘in situ’ and streaming opera  
9 experiences, our research does not allow us to draw a firm conclusion that the ‘in situ’ and the  
10 streaming opera offers compete or are complementary. The only information we have obtained  
11 in that regard is the spectators’ profiles and further research is therefore necessary.

12

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18

**Table 1. Respondents' profile**

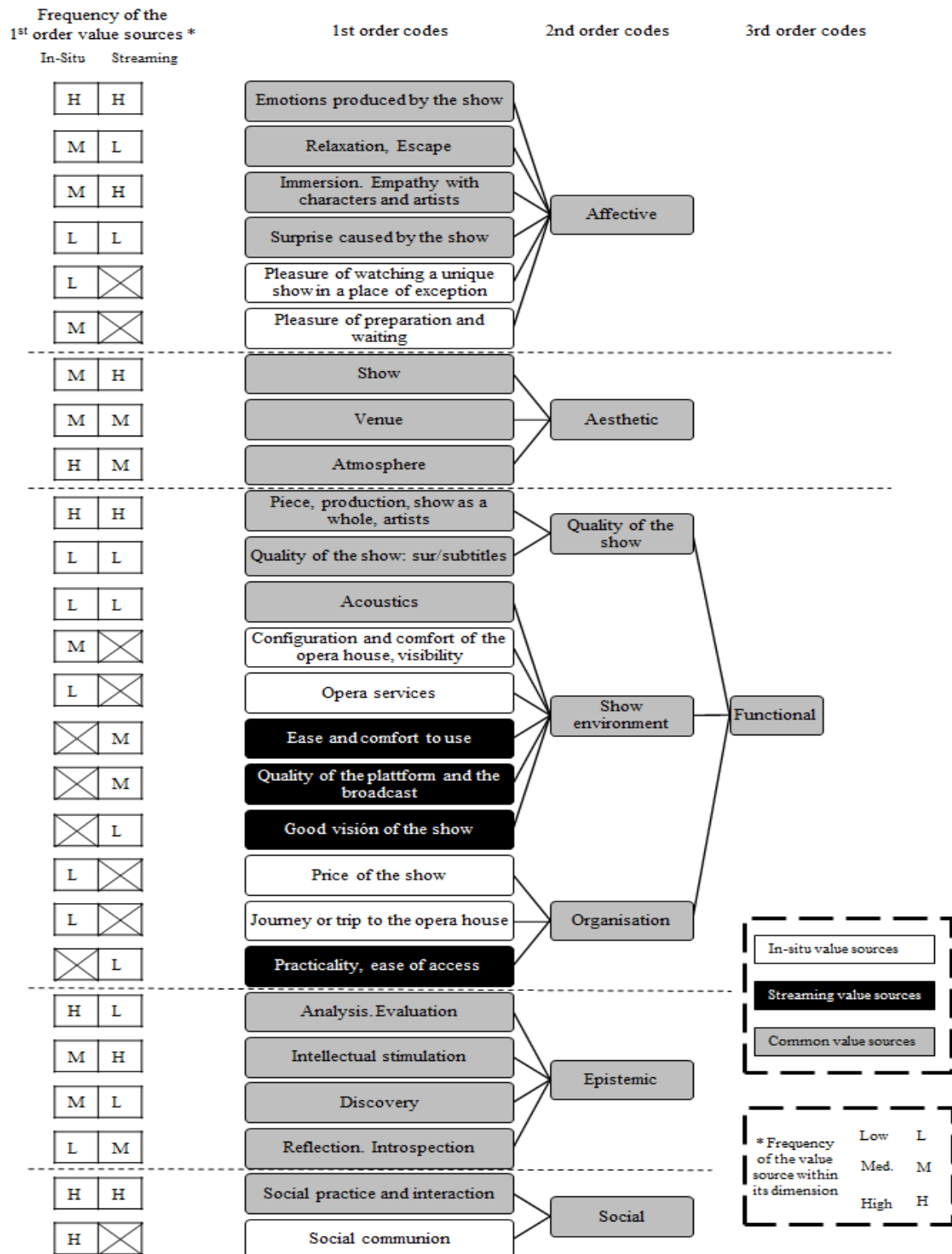
| Consumption channel | Respondent code | Narrative language | Opera                 | Place of attendance / Country of viewing | Gender | Age   | Opera annual consumption |             |           |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------------------------|-------------|-----------|
|                     |                 |                    |                       |                                          |        |       | All channels             | Opera house | Streaming |
| Opera house         | R1              | French             | Hamlet                | Paris "Opéra Comique" (France)           | M      | 60-75 | >10                      | >10         | 2-5       |
|                     | R2              | English            | Lucia di Lammermoor   | Vienna State Opera (Austria)             | F      | <30   | >20                      | >10         | >10       |
|                     | R3              | French             | Rusalka               | Paris Opera House (France)               | F      | 30-44 | 10-20                    | 5-10        | 5-10      |
|                     | R4              | English            | Rigoletto             | Zurich Opera House (Switzerland)         | F      | 60-75 | >20                      | >10         | NC        |
|                     | R5              | French             | La Finta Pazza        | Dijon Opera House (France)               | F      | 45-59 | 2-5                      | 2-5         | 0         |
|                     | R6              | French             | La Bohème             | Royal Swedish Opera House (Sweden)       | F      | <30   | <2                       | 1-2         | 0         |
|                     | R7              | French             | La Finta Pazza        | Dijon Opera House (France)               | F      | 30-44 | 2-5                      | 2-5         | 1-2       |
|                     | R8              | Spanish            | La Forza del Destino  | Royal Opera House (United Kingdom)       | F      | 45-59 | >20                      | >10         | 2-5       |
| Streaming           | V1              | French             | The Bartered Bride    | France                                   | M      | 45-59 | >20                      | >10         | 1-2       |
|                     | V2              | Spanish            | La Bohème             | Spain                                    | F      | 30-44 | 5-10                     | 1-2         | 5-10      |
|                     | V3              | English            | Frankenstein          | Canada                                   | M      | 45-59 | >20                      | 5-10        | >10       |
|                     | V4              | Spanish            | La Traviata           | Guatemala                                | F      | 60-75 | 5-10                     | 0           | 5-10      |
|                     | V5              | Spanish            | Andrea Chenier        | Guatemala                                | F      | <30   | 2-5                      | 2-5         | 1-2       |
|                     | V6              | French             | Ermione               | France                                   | F      | <30   | <2                       | 0           | 1-2       |
|                     | V7              | French             | Nikola Šubić Zrinjski | France                                   | F      | 45-59 | 2-5                      | 0           | 1-2       |
|                     | V8              | French             | Madame Butterfly      | France                                   | F      | 30-44 | 1-2                      | 1-2         | 1-2       |

**Table 2. Dimensions of the opera experience perceived value in an opera house and in streaming**

| Dimensions | Channel                                                                    |                                                             |
|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
|            | Opera house                                                                | Streaming                                                   |
| Affective  | Emotions produced by the show                                              |                                                             |
|            | Relaxation, Escape                                                         |                                                             |
|            | Immersion. Empathy with characters and artists                             |                                                             |
|            | Surprise caused by the show                                                |                                                             |
|            | Pleasure of watching a unique show in a place of exception                 |                                                             |
|            | Pleasure of preparation and waiting                                        |                                                             |
| Aesthetic  | Show                                                                       |                                                             |
|            | Venue                                                                      |                                                             |
|            | Atmosphere                                                                 |                                                             |
| Functional | Quality of the show: piece, production, show as a whole, artists           |                                                             |
|            | Quality of the show: sur/subtitles                                         |                                                             |
|            | Show environment: acoustics                                                |                                                             |
|            | Show environment: configuration and comfort of the opera house, visibility |                                                             |
|            | Show environment: opera services                                           |                                                             |
|            |                                                                            | Show environment: ease and comfort of use                   |
|            |                                                                            | Show environment: quality of the platform and the broadcast |
|            |                                                                            | Show environment: good vision of the show                   |
|            | Organisation: price of the show                                            |                                                             |
|            | Organisation: journey or trip to the opera house                           |                                                             |
|            |                                                                            | Organisation: practicality, ease of access                  |
| Epistemic  | Analysis. Evaluation                                                       |                                                             |
|            | Intellectual stimulation                                                   |                                                             |
|            | Discovery                                                                  |                                                             |
|            | Reflection. Introspection                                                  |                                                             |
| Social     | Social practice and interaction                                            |                                                             |
|            | Social communion                                                           |                                                             |

Source: own conception

**Figure 1. Coding scheme and frequency of the ‘in situ’ and the streamed opera experience value sources**



Source: own conception