

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING AND SERVICES MARKETING: TWO CONVERGENT PERSPECTIVES FOR VALUE CREATION IN THE CULTURAL SECTOR. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON PERFORMING ARTS CONSUMERS IN SPAIN

María José Quero*

ABSTRACT:

Using the relationship paradigm as a theoretical framework, a management model for cultural services (relationship marketing of cultural organizations) is proposed, what is an unprecedented contribution in the marketing field.

By combining two convergent perspectives –as relationship marketing and services marketing–, the model is structured on the basis of two large types of relationships in the management of a cultural organization: instrumental relationships and group relationships.

The paper is an in-depth study of relationships regarding performing arts audience. A theoretical/empirical approach was applied, including face to face interviews to 1005 performing arts consumers and telephone interviews to a sample of 2005 individuals in Spain.

Key Words:

Cultural marketing; performing arts services; relationship marketing; services marketing; customer relationships.

* Departamento de Economía y Administración de Empresas – Universidad de Málaga. Facultad de CC. Económicas y Empresariales, Campus Universitario de El Ejido s/n, 29071-Málaga (Spain). E-mail: mqg@uma.es
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1. INTRODUCTION:

The most recent literature on marketing management is demonstrating a revolutionary change in both form and content, which, undoubtedly, will result in several research projects in the short term aimed at shedding some light on this dilemma. Traditional management models and paradigms do not adapt to the requirements of new products, as there are more and more exceptions and questions on the models developed so far (Lovelock and Gummesson, 2004; Vargo and Lush, 2004). In this complex context, this paper aims to make an in-depth study of the field of cultural services management by using two concurrent perspectives –relationship marketing and services marketing–, in order to contribute to the development of the new marketing domain: cultural marketing (Kotler, 2005). This is a field still in its development phase, but has probably found, with these new trends, the right moment to grow and develop management structures and models that meet its particular requirements.

From the very beginning, contributions made to the cultural sector by the marketing discipline have been very diverse. However, although they seem to have come to a consensus in the scientific world about the idea that the management of cultural identities presents such special characteristics that make it considerably different (Voss and Voss, 2000; Colbert, 2001; Johnson and Garbarino, 2001; Arts Council of England, 2003; Kotler and Scheff, 1997). Contributions from the marketing management area still do not suffice to construct a knowledge base that is solid enough to create a theoretical management framework similar to the one other disciplines with more tradition in marketing research have.

In this context, it is stated that the relationship marketing paradigm offers a suitable framework for the implementation of cultural management and this research study has focused on the performing arts services sector, as considering that it is one of the most forgotten sectors by scientific researchers of management. Furthermore, the decreasing consumption of this art form in Europe goes against the trend if taking into account that time and money invested in leisure activities has not stopped growing with countries' economic development. In view of this situation, questions as following are required: what is the reason for this loss of competitive advantage?, what is being done wrong to be losing impact in a market, which, in theory, is becoming more and more inclined to consume leisure activities, such as the performing arts?, which agents are responsible for the results?, which agents are affected by the results?, what can be done to improve this? These questions are the basis for carrying out this research study.

2. RELATIONSHIP MARKETING, SERVICES MARKETING AND CULTURAL MARKETING AS THREE CONVERGENT PERSPECTIVES:

Relationship marketing has become one of the most important contributions in the development of modern marketing science (Payne and Holt, 2001), and it has generated a recognised interest in the field of scientific research. What is more, in the opinion of numerous authors, it has even been seen as a new paradigm (Gummesson, 1999; Peck *et al.*, 1999; Webster, 1992; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000; Kothandaraman and Wilson, 2000).

With the concept by Gummesson (2002) on "*relationship marketing is interactions in networks of relationships*" as a starting point, the management of a cultural organization is understood as being necessarily determined by a multitude of agents in the market,

collectives that create and receive value via their relationships and, therefore, they have to be included in the organization's planning process, since the value of the final product is going to depend on them to a large extent. The role of the interest groups in the planning process of the organizations is one of the least cultivated areas of relationship marketing (Henning-Thurau and Hansen, 2000). Payne and Holt (2001) explicitly refer to this deficiency: *"understanding long-term relationships with both customers and other stakeholder groups has been neglected in the mainstream marketing literature; managing the organization's internal and external relationships needs to become a central activity; this central activity is relationship marketing"*. We are faced, therefore, with a new scenario in which *one-to-one marketing* has given way to *many-to-many marketing* (Gummesson, 2004); in other words, planning relationships with individuals has evolved to planning relationships with collectives, with interaction networks.

On the other hand, either when contributions in the field of cultural marketing do not record enough standardization or volume to be grouped in trends or schools, they do share a value: the importance of relationships in their management. Contributions made in this area are very diverse, in most cases focusing on relationships with customers (relationships with the performing arts audience). Garbarino and Johnson (1999) use the stage of an off-Broadway theatre in New York to explore the transaction/relationship continuum proposed by Grönroos (1995) to conclude that the performing arts audience has different behavioural profiles depending on the relationships developed with the organization or, specifically, *"in a consumer environment in which customers receive highly similar services [...] there are systematic differences in the relationalism of different customer groups"*. Rentschler *et al.* (2001) also considered an empirical approach to relationships with the audience of performing arts organizations in Australia: *"what arts organizations need to consider is whether the expense of having high single-ticket sales is sustainable and, if not, what to do about it"*.

Above mentioned and some other of most interesting contributions on relationships with cultural services organizations and their main interest groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Contributions of relationship networks in cultural services management.

Interest group	References
Performing arts audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve (1980) ▪ Diggle (1994) ▪ Hill, O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan (1995) ▪ Peterson (1995) ▪ Garbarino and Johnson (1999) ▪ Peck <i>et al.</i> (1999) ▪ Fisk, Grove and John (2000) ▪ Colbert (2001) ▪ Rentschler <i>et al.</i> (2001) ▪ Radbourne (2003) ▪ Iwasaki and Havitz (2004)
Educational centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve (1980) ▪ Kotler and Scheff (1997) ▪ British Council (2005) ▪ Council of the European Union (2004)
Competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Scheff and Kotler (1996) ▪ Gummesson (1997) ▪ Gummesson (1999) ▪ Kolb (2000) ▪ Oakes (2003) ▪ Radbourne (2003)

Continues...

Table 1. Contributions of relationship networks in cultural services management (continuation).

Interest group	References
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve (1980) ▪ Pérez (1996) ▪ Cimarro (1997) ▪ Peterson and Malhotra (1999)
Public organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve (1980) ▪ Cimarro (1997) ▪ Radbourne (2003) ▪ Conway and Whitelock (2004) ▪ Martell (2004) ▪ Wilson and Boyle (2004)
Non-public organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve (1980) ▪ Pick and Anderton (1996) ▪ Kolb (2000) ▪ Radbourne (2003)
Human resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve (1980) ▪ Norman (2000) ▪ Zeithaml (2000) ▪ Radbourne (2003) ▪ Capps and Capps (2005)

3. THE PRODUCT AND RELATIONSHIPS WITH CUSTOMER'S SUGGESTIONS ON A MODEL FOR THE RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL SERVICES:

Relationships with the audience are the central component in the configuration of the relationship marketing management model for cultural organizations. This central place is shared with the cultural product, whose general marketing model presents special characteristics that differentiate it from the classic structure of marketing, as:

1. Marketing process starts in the producer organization, and from this origin (the cultural product) a decision has to be made concerning the part of the market that may be interested in consuming it.

2. Once potential consumers have been identified, the company will decide on the remaining relationship policies (instrumental and group, which we will cover below).

Therefore, we are faced with a kind of market whose marketing process shows a “*product-to-client*” type structure. The atypical structure transforms the relationship policy with the cultural customer, as it considers that the core of the product is unalterable (Colbert, 2001).

This structure involves the development of a wide variety of relationships, which have to be included in the value creation process forming the marketing of a cultural product. The cultural offering of a country, a region or a district is a source of benefits for a large number of social sectors. It is not for nothing that the recognition of the “*need for culture*” is well-known in virtually all developed countries (Council of the European Union, 2004), and public organizations, as well as private entities, are involved in satisfying this demand. Based on this situation, it is logical to assume that each and every one of these collectives has to be included in the organization’s planning and a “*win-win relationship*”¹ needs to be implemented in connection with them.

¹ These are relationships that mutually benefit the agents involved in them. According to Relationship Marketing Theory postulates, it is suggested that this category of relationships should always be sought, thus ensuring they are maintained in the medium to long term.

Performing arts organizations will have to manage a multitude of relationships to achieve their objectives. These relationships were formerly classified into two large categories (Quero, 2003):

a. *Instrumental relationships*: this first category groups the marketing mix instruments and incorporates a relationship focus (i.e., product, price, distribution and communication relationships).

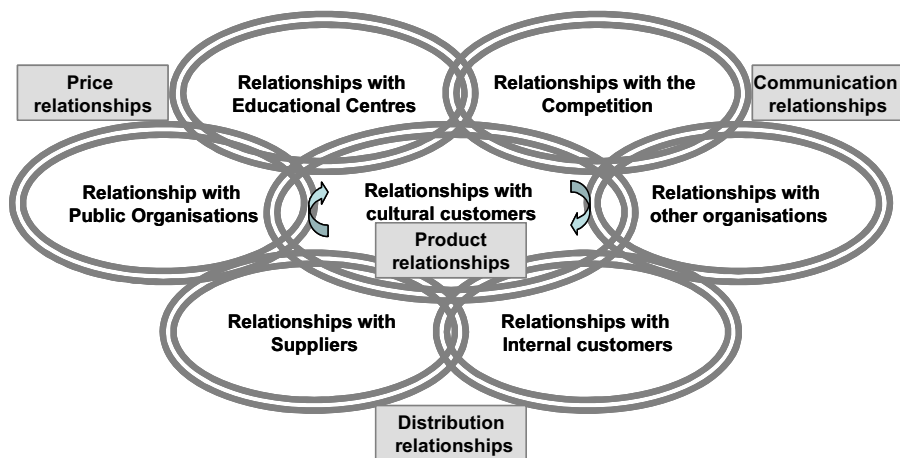
The differentiation factor characterizing the design of these policies is that they have to be planned taking as a reference the creation of value for customers and for every one of the agents involved in the production process of the cultural services.

b. *Group relationships*: the second of the categories is related to the identification and planning process of relationships with collectives or agents of interest, as the performing arts audience, educational centres, public organizations, competition, suppliers, non-public organizations and internal relationships.

From this point of view, group relationships and instrumental relationships are understood as different in nature, but they converge in strategy; in other words, whilst some of them require skills connected with the management of relationships with collectives, others require a different kind of skills, more visible for the customer and connected with decision-making in specific aspects, such as programme designing (product), ticket sales (distribution), show value (price) or conveying the information to the market (communication).

However, the management of both groups has to converge in obtained results at the end. In other words, that is to say that every one of the collectives has to have its expectations met in these decisions.

Figure 1. A relationship marketing model for cultural organizations.



4. BENEFITS OF RELATIONSHIP STRATEGIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL CUSTOMERS:

It has to be pointed out that the core of the service itself (i.e., it being understood as obtained *entertainment*² by consuming a cultural product) should not be confused with the global service, which includes a wide variety of process and support services, playing a key role in the process of creating value and its perception by the audience (Lovelock, Vandermerwe and Lewis, 1999). Here is where the strategies of *attracting audiences and making them loyal* come into play, as a set of activities aimed at identifying and meeting customers' relationship requirements.

The process of interaction between producers and customers is the central component of relationship marketing. Jackson (1985) was one of first authors suggesting that the design of relationship strategies should reside in customer orientation towards relationships. From this perspective, the idea by Grönroos (1995) on identifying different orientations towards customer relationships implies considering relationship strategies as a continuous line fluctuating between purely transactional strategies and more intense relationship strategies, thus covering different consumer profiles.

The difference between transaction and relationship exchanges has a direct influence on customer perceptions. In the retention process between the customer and the organization, perceptions on product and organization change. Although customer considers satisfaction to be the main element in the relationship at the first phases, as the relationship deepens, commitment and trust play a leading role (Johnson and Garbarino, 2001).

These contributions lead us to an *a priori* classification of the cultural market according to following criteria: frequency of attendance, formal connections developed (subscribers or similar) and the level of satisfaction (Hill, O'Sullivan and O'Sullivan, 1995; Peterson, 1995; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve, 1980). This approach enables identifying four types of customers:

a. *Potential customer*: this is the one the organization thinks it can start commercial relations with, as he falls into the profile of demanders, but he is not currently a consumer.

b. *Purchasing customer*: this is the one that has had one or a few commercial relations with the organization. He has attended an event at some stage, but only once or on a few occasions. His attendance cannot be considered as usual within his consumption habits.

c. *Active customer*: this is the one that has frequent relations with the performing arts organization (he attends shows four or five times a year), he is satisfied with the service received and also adopts an active role, acting as a consumer motivator and performing an important marketing activity. This type of customer is considered to be a "*part-time marketer*"³, as it is understood that he performs an important communication activity for an organization marketing intangible products, such as the case in question.

² "*Entertainment*" is understood to be the benefit customers look for in the consumption of a cultural activity.

³ Gummesson (1999) calls "*part-time marketers*" to those customers who disseminate positive information about an organization's products, as he considers that they are actually performing an important task in the communication aspect of the product. In the case of cultural services, the experience of acquaintances that have consumed the product is one of the information sources with the most value and, therefore, most determinant in the decision process to acquire a cultural product.

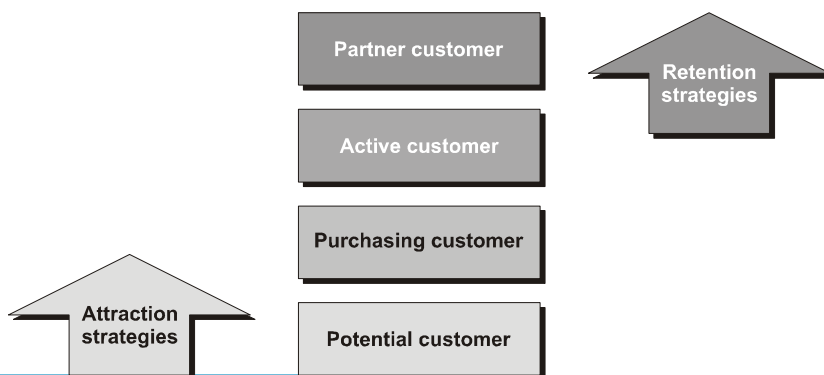
d. *Associate customer*: this is the highest level of relationship with the organization, which generally materializes in some form of more formal connection (belonging to a club, association, subscriber, etc.). He attends the performing arts more than six times a year, he is satisfied with the product acquired in all its aspects (both with the programming and with the design of the servuction as a whole), and he disseminates positive information about the organization, which he is proud to belong to.

This classification of the audience, based on relationship criteria, enables differentiation of two large phases in the retention process of performing arts customers: the *attraction phase* and the *retention phase*. The strategies to follow in each of the phases will be based on different objectives and they will be formulated differently. The direction to be followed will always be upwards, so attraction strategies have to be developed for the potential audience and the purchasing audience; in other words, strategies aimed at creating interest in consuming the performing art activities on offer. With the rest of the audience types, which, to a greater or lesser extent, already know and consume performing arts activities, retention strategies have to be implemented, aimed at involving customers in the organization's system, intensifying consumption by strengthening commitment and trust.

It is important to point out that the objective is not to obtain the same type of relationship for all customers, nor, therefore, for all the customers to have an associate relationship. The point is to give every audience profile the type of relationship required so that both the organization and the public obtain the highest possible level of satisfaction.

A cultural services organization can obtain many benefits from having strong relationships with customers (Anderson, Fornell and Lehmann, 1994): more consumption (independently of the fact that the organization's aims are marked by economic objectives or those that have a social impact, increasing the number of spectators is, in principle, the priority objective in the management of a performing arts organization), extension of the customer's period of life, decrease in the price's elasticity, increase in satisfaction (with improvement in relationships, generating positive references) and not as much awareness of the competition's actions (understood as being other alternative forms of leisure, and not the consumption of cultural activities, which are considered complementary).

Figure 2. The relationship ladder of the cultural customer. Strategies.



These results on the implementation of relationship strategies have already been confirmed in other sectors (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000; Gummesson, 1999; Peck *et al.*, 1999; Reinares and Ponzoa, 2002), but there are few empirical contributions in the cultural field and they are excessively localist (Johnson and Garbarino, 2001). In the specific case of Spain, the evidence provided below is likely to be the first study that has been conducted in the cultural sector from the perspective of marketing management.

5. EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE ON ATTRACTION AND RETENTION STRATEGIES VALIDITY IN PERFORMING ARTS SECTOR:

Methodological process for data collection:

In order to analysis the validity of the implementation of relationship strategies in the specific area of performing arts (theatre, dance, lyrical poetry and live music), it was considered as appropriate to carry out two empirical studies. The first of them, on the so called *current audience*, involved personal interviews carried out before and after the shows at the place where they were taking place (*Study 1*). The second one, on *general public*, consisted of telephone interviews of consumers and non-consumers of performing arts (*Study 2*). In both cases quotas were established on the basis of age, gender and geographical location.

By using both levels of analysis, it was intended to ensure the inclusion of all types of audience (current and potential), as well as non-consumers.

Table 2. Technical details of the survey for the *Study 1* on current performing arts audience.

Universe:	Current performing arts audience
Area:	Spain
Sample unit:	Individuals attending performing arts
Sample size:	1005 valid surveys
Sampling method:	Polyphase sampling
Data collection method:	Personal interview before and after performances
Sample error:	± 3.15 %, for a confidence level of 95.5 %
Field work date:	November 2002 to January 2003

Table 3. Technical details of the survey for the *Study 2* on general public.

Universe:	Spanish population
Area:	Spain
Sample unit:	Individuals over 14
Sample size:	2005 valid surveys
Sampling method:	Probability sampling stratified by geographical areas, age and gender
Data collection method:	Telephone interview
Sample error:	± 2.20 %, for a confidence level of 95.5 %
Field work date:	November 2002 to January 2003

Results and implications for the management of relationships with the customer group:

In principle, attraction and loyalty activities should be located in the sphere of relationships with the performing arts audience, and this would not be a mistake. However, if being coherent with the marketing perspective adopted, it becomes clear that strategies with the different agents of interest have to be developed in order to implement these policies: educational centres also create value, as do public organizations and even the competition. Every one of these interest groups is characterised to a greater or lesser extent by its potential to support and receive value and, therefore, its relationship with the performing arts organization is going to result in the creation of value for the audience, which is the main reason for developing attraction and retention strategies, although this research is focusing its attention on the customer. The general objective would consist, therefore, of managing attraction strategies in the first categories in order to develop retention strategies in a second stage, which are aimed at strengthening the connections between the organization and increasing attendance.

Focusing on attraction strategies, it is not feasible (or useful) to list the specific activities that have to be implemented in order to attract the performing arts audience, since their types are going to depend on the specific area in which the organization carries out its activity. The objective in this area is to recognise the variables that have more impact in the first phase of the process of deciding to go to a stage show.

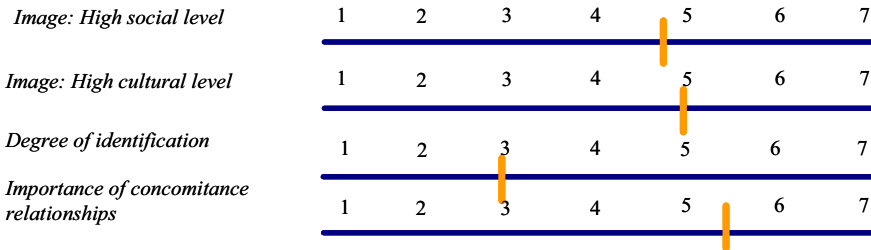
The requirements that may potentially urge an individual to attend a stage performance are very varied. The results of the study assign a special importance to factors such as: entertainment, developing a hobby, and learning and socialising. From this information, we can gather that the types of benefits a stage show can provide are very similar to the ones offered by alternative leisure activities, such as going to the cinema or a sports activity, which leads us to suggest that the problem, in this case, is going to lie in finding the way to break down this *perception barrier*, which makes it far more difficult to spark the interest of a customer that does not usually consume this type of art.

The study carried out on the *general public* was the one that was the most revealing in this aspect, since it enabled us to obtain conclusions of interest for management:

Firstly, it is possible to see that concomitance relationships (simultaneous consumption by different spectators of the same service) in attending stage shows can justify the low consumption recorded by performing arts activities in Spain, when compared with other types of leisure, such as cinema or sports activities.

Those people who attend less frequently and those who do not attend at all analyzed the *perceived image* of the people who go to stage performances as characterized by attributes such as: people with a high level of culture, in a high social class and who like to dress for the occasion and wear elegant clothes. If adding to this information, as was to be expected, that less frequent consumers and non-consumers are the people who least identify with the performing arts audience and that the social dimension of this type of activities demonstrates the importance of carrying out leisure activities with people with similar profiles (tastes, style, social class, etc.), it can be understood that one of the deterrents to the consumption of performing arts activities is to be found precisely in this barrier: non-consumers' lack of identification with the current audience (Figure 3).

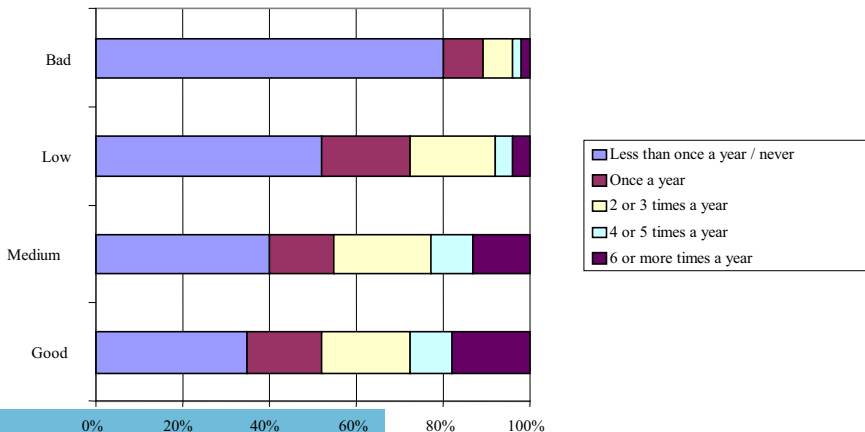
Figure 3. Information from the general public on performing arts consumers, degree of identification and importance of concomitance relationships.



This lack of interest in performing arts activities is directly reflected in another internal variable: *perception*. Proof of this is the strong level of connection between the level of information and that of consumption, which corroborates the need to break down this perception barrier, which is intimately connected with the organization’s image.

The empirical study also reveals some of the most influential strategies in this area. On the one hand, education: both studies demonstrate the influence of early attendance of performing arts activities and the level of attendance at the moment. It is not for nothing that the most lasting consumption habits with regard to leisure activities are usually created in individuals when they are younger. Moreover, consumers themselves link their level of interest in the arts with their current consumption of them. It is also pointed up that reference groups have a strong influence on consumption. We must not forget that we are marketing a leisure activity, with a high social component, and, therefore, we should reflect on the need to offer collective strategies, which encourage group consumption.

Figure 4. Connection between levels of information and consumption.



Priorities in the implementation of *attraction strategies* should, therefore, be channelled along the following lines:

a. *Implementation of cooperation activities among performing arts organizations* to promote generic demand (which all would benefit from): in the performing arts sector, demands are linked...

b. *Implementation of effective strategies with educational centres*: even when most organizations state they have links with educational centres, the low level of consumption among the youngest generations shows that these policies are not very effective and there should be a fresh approach to their instrumentalization. A possible way is to include the family and reference groups in this area.

c. *Implementation of segmentation strategies* that enable the development of satisfactory concomitance relations for the different segments in organizations' performing arts audience.

In any event, it is important to point out that it is much easier and profitable to implement retention strategies with usual and sporadic customers than to attract new ones. This does not mean that we want to limit marketing strategies to customer retention. However, we do want to highlight that once we have managed to get the potential audience to change to the level of purchasing audience (sporadic attendees), it is very important to start to use relationship strategies in order to gradually modify the attitude and belief barriers that separate the potential audience from the current audience.

After an individual joins the *current audience* group, *retention strategies* come into play. These strategies will be perceived by the consumer as part of the service offered by the organization and, therefore, they will be assessed by him in his consumption process.

The importance of implementing retention strategies in organizations providing performing arts services is very high. The study has shown that:

1. Attendance frequency among the current performing arts audience is very high and it is mainly formed by people who usually or assiduously attend.

2. The level of satisfaction increases the more the person attends stage shows. This usually happens in a multitude of products in diverse sectors...

3. References disseminated about the organization are more positive the more assiduous the attendance of the stage shows is, which implies that the information conveyed has the maximum influence in its own environment. This shows a strengthening of commitment and trust, which will make the individual less sensitive to the competition...

4. The level of information is intimately connected with the level of attendance, which leads us to infer that it is much easier and economical to reach the current audience, which is already interested in the product and is familiar with the organization's systems.

Based on these premises, retention strategies will be implemented that are adapted to the audience segments the organization is aiming at. In this respect, the tactical principles of relationship marketing do enable establishing strategic recommendations that are valid across the board, such as construction of a database that contains up-to-date information on the performing arts audience and implementation of retention strategies suited to the benefits sought by their consumers (Grönroos, 1995).

The specific means adopted by these policies can vary, depending on the organization's objectives and limitations, as well as on the imagination of the directors themselves in the process of creating value for their audience. The study that was carried out demonstrates that in order to implement relevant retention strategies one needs to start by discovering the benefits customers want in the implementation of a close relationship with the organization: programming, receiving appropriate information on activities, preferential treatment in the reservation or purchase of tickets, discounts on prices... As we strengthen our commitment and trust in the organization, the competition in prices is expected to increase.

The specific forms these strategies most often take are: sending appropriate information on the organization's programming, offering subscriptions (in this respect, it is important to note how the trend shows us the need to make this policy more flexible, adapting it to current requirements), belonging to a club or association, possibility of attending seminars, conferences or similar, which promote interest in different types of art, and organization of festivals, gatherings, etc.

6. CONCLUSIONS:

The aim of this study was to contribute to the development and implementation of relationship marketing, services marketing and cultural marketing in a specific area: the performing arts sector.

The process of selecting and planning the relationships suggested by the relationship marketing paradigm has enabled to develop a theoretical model for organizations of performing arts services, in which two types of relationship groups are identified: instrumental relationships and group relationships. *Instrumental relationships* include product, price, distribution and communication relationships in the model, with the particular feature of the fact that their design has to be dependent on the analysis of the effects they may have for every one of the interest groups. With regard to *group relationships*, seven collectives have been identified: performing arts audience, educational centres, public organizations, competition, suppliers, other organizations and internal relationships. Every one of them is capable of creating and receiving value in their relationships and, therefore, they have to be included in organizations' planning process, in order to implement win-win strategies⁴.

In the area of relationship management with the performing arts audience, a classification of the audience has been proposed on the basis of relationship criteria, which has enabled two important phases to be identified in the retention process with cultural customers, the *attraction phase* and the *retention phase*, whose primary objective is to foster relations with the customer until the highest possible level of relationship with the organization is obtained.

The empirical contribution has served to corroborate the theoretical contribution by implementing a study on the current performing arts audience in Spain and the general public, which demonstrates the importance of managing relations between the cultural

⁴ As previously stated, win-win strategies are understood as those in which all the agents involved benefit, thus ensuring the relationship will be maintained.

organization and its customers and the benefits of implementing an appropriate relationship marketing strategy.

This research study could be also considered as a significant contribution to the marketing discipline, due to its important theoretical implications:

1. Relationship Marketing is considered as the integrating paradigm, capable of adapting to the requirements of cultural services, in general, and to performing arts services, in particular.

2. The marketing-mix paradigm is included into the management model, redefining its main instruments as product, price, distribution and communication relationships.

It is also an unprecedented contribution in the field of cultural marketing, at least in Spain, offering a theoretical model for the planning and management of organizations offering performing arts services.

This study paves the way for a multitude of future lines of research. For example, the study of every one of the interest groups and their role in the process of creating value, as well as the way in which instrumental relationships have to be implemented emerge as priority actions to be implemented in order to build some foundations in the area of arts marketing that are as solid as those in other sectors.

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