

Theatre Marketing – Analysis of Customers' Satisfaction

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THE AIMS OF PAPER

The aim of this paper was to identify key elements that create satisfaction of classic theatre audiences with respect to age (young (<35) vs. senior (35+) and theatre visiting frequency. It was measured as discrepancies between the level of theatre attendants' expectations from certain dimensions of theatre service and their experience evaluation with the same.

METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted on a convenient sample using an in-person method in two different intervals: in the first interval research was conducted on young respondents (18-34) and in second interval research was conducted on senior respondents (age 35+).

MOST IMPORTANT RESULTS

The study has identified that the general major source of dissatisfaction with Croatian National Theatre in Osijek (HNK Osijek) are repertoire and the different experience offered. These are the dimensions HNK Osijek should focus its efforts on. Also, this study confirms that HNK Osijek customers' perception of importance of different elements that create its marketing profile and their satisfaction with those differ with respect to age and theatre attendance frequency. The most critical segment in terms of satisfaction are the senior occasional visitors, where the discrepancies between the expectations and experiences are highest in general.

Keywords: theatre marketing, theatre audience, theatre experience, audience satisfaction

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INTRODUCTION

Numerous studies on theatre marketing have identified that it is losing on attractiveness in contemporary world, mainly due to increasing number of new types of cultural products being available on the market (Gainer & Padanyi 2002). The total number of visitors, especially loyal ones (subscribers) is decreasing, and the audience is aging (Grisolia *et al.* 2010). Moreover, the majority of classic theatres are publicly financed, usually with very limited and constantly decreasing total budget, and usually a non-existent one for marketing and research purposes.

Classic theatre is a social, situational and experiential phenomenon rather than a fixed or tangible product (Walmesley 2011). Therefore it needs to apply specific methodology and marketing tools to identify the most attractive market segments and to create optimal strategies.

The aim of this paper is to identify key elements that create satisfaction of classic theatre audiences with respect to age [young (<35) vs. senior (35+)]

and theatre visiting frequency. The focus of our research was Croatian National Theatre in Osijek (HNK Osijek). Customer satisfaction is one of the key elements that determine customers' behavioural intentions, i.e. their future attendance (Cronin *et al.* 2000) and therefore its composition and measurement are important for theatre management.

LITERATURE OVERVIEW

In the performing arts literature there are several issues that have been studied as potentially influencing factors and/or predictors of customer future behaviour: socio-demographic characteristics (age, gender, education), socio-economic (employment, income, social class), geographic (urban/rural), lifestyle and some others. A large number of studies are devoted to customer satisfaction as a significant predictor of customers' future behaviour.

Table 1 gives an overview of the most important factors influencing theatre attendance in different studies.

Table 1. Overview of the most important factors influencing/predicting theatre attendance

FACTOR	STUDIES
Gender	Sargeant (1997), Chan & Goldthorpe (2005), Grisolia <i>et al.</i> (2010)
Age	Peterson <i>et al.</i> (2000), Seaman (2005), Botha & Slabbert (2011), Willis <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Education/knowledge	Bourdieu (1973), DiMaggio (1982), Chytkova <i>et al.</i> (2012), Obaidalahe & Steils (2018)
Income/social class/price	Bourdieu (1973), DiMaggio & Useem (1978), Borgonovi (2004), Solomon <i>et al.</i> (2010), Chytkova <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Geography/Location	Baumol & Bowen (1966), Garbarino & Johnson (2001), Willis <i>et al.</i> (2012), Gilmore (2013)
Lifestyle/hobbies and interests	Andreasen & Belk (1980), Sargeant (1997),
Emotions/satisfaction	Cronin & Taylor (1992), L'evy-Garboua & Montmarquette (1996), Minor & Hausman (2004), Lee <i>et al.</i> (2008), Jobst & Boerner (2011), Andreea (2012), Tubillejas <i>et al.</i> (2017)
Previous experience/early exposure	Morrison & West (1986), Boerner <i>et al.</i> (2011)
Socialization	Andreasen & Belk (1980), Dos Santos & Rios (2016)

Source: authors' work

Most of the above mentioned studies are quite consistent: there are significantly more women than men interested in and visiting classic theatre; more of older than younger classic theatre visitors, especially loyal ones, and more higher educated and those with higher income and/or belonging to higher social classes. Theatres in urban areas are more popular, and the closer the distance to the theatre, the more visitors are motivated to attend. More previous experience with theatre causes more willingness to attend, and socialization is an increasingly important additional motivation for theatre attendance.

As it is obvious in the above table, consumers' satisfaction is, especially in recent studies, identified as one of the crucial elements contributing to both retention of existing customers, and attracting new ones. A number of authors also identify satisfaction with a cultural product as key segmentation determinant (Oom do Valle *et al.* 2010, Jobst & Boerner 2011, and others).

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION – THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

The concept of customer satisfaction was first introduced by Cardozo (1965), who stated that it can be used as a predictor of repurchasing behaviour, thus emphasizing its role in retaining existing customers. Oliver (1981) defined customer satisfaction as the extent to which customers expected product benefits are realized, or the consistency between expected and actual results. A number of other studies also confirms the gap between expectations and performance as the basic concept behind customer satisfaction (Dovidow & Uttal 1989, Parasuraman *et al.* 1993, Tseng 2009, and many others).

In this study we use the same approach to identify the level of customer satisfaction. We apply a concept of overall satisfaction, i.e. cumulative satisfaction, which represents an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience over time (Anderson *et al.* 1994). It can be applied to both goods and services. It enables measuring satisfaction with different facets of the company, opposed to transactional satisfaction, which measures a particular experience (Londoño *et al.* 2017).

Some of studies in performing arts distinguish between main and additional service (Kotler & Scheff 1997, Voss & Cova 2006), where main service cover the elements of performance and additional services are related to pre- or post-performance

elements (booking and purchasing the ticket, personnel, information, parking, and similar). Very similar to this, Burgeon (cited in Kotler & Scheff 1997) identified perception of performance quality, perception of ambience and emotions to be determinants of customer satisfaction. Garbarino & Johnson (1999) have examined the influences of component attitudes of theatre goers toward actor satisfaction, actor familiarity, play satisfaction and theatre facility satisfaction, where the first three dimensions belong to the main service and the last one to additional service.

Another important issue regarding theatre customers' satisfaction is the distinction between loyal (subscribers) and frequent attenders as one group and occasional attenders as other. According to Boorsma & van Maanen (2003) the quality perception and thus satisfaction with performance might differ between the two groups. Although current research findings are not consistent, we also took the approach of differentiating between the two groups.

The review on classic theatre customers' satisfaction research indicates the importance of the topic. Since most of the studies emphasize the difference between visiting frequency, we accepted this approach. Due to specific attitudes and behaviour patterns in theatre perception among young audiences found in previous research (Leko Šimić *et al.* 2018), our goal is to test the differences between young and senior audiences.

RESEARCH

The aim of the research was to explore components of classic theatre satisfaction and discrepancies in the level of theatre attendants' expectations from certain theatre aspects and their actual experience. Difference between the two creates level of satisfaction with theatre. Additionally we wanted to evaluate potential differences in satisfaction with respect to age and frequency of theatre attendance. This is an important issue, since, like in many other classic theatres, HNK Osijek evidence shows a significant decline in theatre attendance, which is depict in Table 2.

Table 2. HNK Osijek attendance 2013-2018

THEATRE SEASON	NUMBER OF TICKETS SOLD	% GROWTH
2013/2014	38.189	n.a.
2014/2015	43.620	+14.2%
2015/2016	45.720	+4.8%
2016/2017	41.632	-9.8%
2017/2018	38.227	-8.9%

Source: HNK Osijek, internal reports on sales

Sample description and procedure

A self-completion questionnaire was developed upon analysis of previous studies and distributed to the population in the area of about 50 km around Osijek. The questionnaire was developed with a goal to evaluate respondents' expectations and experiences, i.e. satisfaction with certain aspects of HNK Osijek.

The research was conducted on a convenient sample using an in-person method in two different intervals: in the first interval research (2017) was conducted on young respondents (18-34) and in second interval research (2018) was conducted on senior respondents (age 35+). Although, the

research was carried out in two intervals, it is possible to compare the results since theatre program structure is defined by strict standards (three music and three drama new performances each year and four reprises from previous year).

Altogether 1315 participants took part in the research (876 participants below the age of 35, and 439 participants of age 35+). The information obtained was analysed using the statistical software package SPSS version 21.0. Statistical techniques of univariate analysis (frequency distribution and central tendency measures) were used. The major sample characteristics of young and senior respondents separately are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Sample description

		Young respondents		Senior respondents		
		N	%	N	%	
Gender	Male	355	40.5	206	47	
	Female	518	59.1	232	53	
Age*	18-21	35-44	335	38.2	222	50.7
	22-25	45-54	306	34.9	135	30.8
	26-30	55-64	141	16.1	58	13.7
	31-34	65-78	88	10	23	4.8
Place of residence	Osijek		569	65	304	69.4
	Other urban areas		34	3.9	84	19.2
	Rural area		142	16.2	50	11.4
Completed level of education	Primary school		10	1.1	20	4.6
	Secondary school		573	65.4	196	44.7
	High school or university		268	30.6	195	44.5
	Postgraduate		22	2.5	27	6.2

Employment status	Employed	214	24.4	306	69.9
	Unemployed	137	15.6	73	16.7
	Retired			59	13.5
	Students	523	59.7		
Average monthly household income	Up to 400 €	153	17.5	64	14.6
	401 – 800 €	319	36.4	190	43.4
	801 – 1200 €	218	24.9	121	27.6
	Over 1200 €	177	20.2	63	14.4
Social networks active	Yes	783	89.4	262	59.8
	No	83	9.5	176	40.2

**age intervals in the first column are related to young respondents' age groups, and age intervals in the second column are related to senior respondents' age groups*

Source: authors' work

Research results and discussion

Theatre attendance was measured by a question of visiting frequency to HNK Osijek. The results in young age group (below 35) showed that only 1% of respondents are subscribers, i.e. loyal consumers to HNK Osijek, 5% visit HNK Osijek at least once in two months, 45% few times a year, and 49% of respondents have never visited HNK Osijek. Regarding theatre attendance in senior age group (35+) only 1.4% of respondents are subscribers, i.e. loyal consumers to HNK Osijek, 5.2% visit HNK Osijek at least once in two months, 54.5% of respondents visit HNK Osijek few times a year, and 38.9% of respondents have never visited HNK Osijek.

Respondents who never visited HNK Osijek were excluded from further analysis since they could not evaluate their level of satisfaction with HNK Osijek.

For further analysis, respondents from each age group (young and seniors) were divided into two different groups according to their theatre attendance frequency: frequent theatre attendants (subscribers and those who attend theatre at least once in two months) and occasional theatre attendants (those who attend theatre couple of times in a year). Total number and percentage of frequent and occasional theatre attendants from each age group are depicted in Table 4.

Table 4. Respondents' theatre attendance

		Young respondents		Senior respondents	
		N	%	N	%
Frequent theatre attendants	Subscribers and respondents who visit HNK Osijek at least once in two months	52	6	29	6.6
Occasional theatre attendants	Respondents who visit HNK Osijek a couple of times in a year	394	45	239	54.5

Source: authors' work

The table clearly shows that HNK Osijek mostly attracts senior (35+) audiences, in both groups. This corresponds with Chytikova *et al.* (2012) findings that confirm younger consumers to be significantly less represented in frequent theatre attendance. Research findings of Grisolia *et al.* (2010) also show that majority of theatre attendants are occasional visitors, no matter of age or type of performance. Londoño *et al.* (2017) also found that theatre-going in Columbia (only 16.6% of the sample are visitors in previous year) is not a common habit.

The next part of the analysis aimed to compare differences between young and senior frequent theatre attendants regarding the importance, i.e. expectations and evaluation of actual experience with some key elements that create main and

additional service of the theatre. The main elements in case of HNK Osijek are identified as performance, price, ambience, theatre names and staff, while under additional elements we considered other cultural offers in the city, different kind of experience and lifestyle.

These elements, according to the mentioned literature, strongly influence the overall customer satisfaction. The evaluation used 5-point measurement scale (1 – not important at all, ... 5 – greatest importance) for importance and the same scale (1 – not satisfied at all, ... 5 – completely satisfied) for satisfaction. Table 5 depicts (using arithmetic means) how young and senior frequent attendants evaluate certain aspects of HNK Osijek.

Table 5. Expectations and experience evaluation of frequent theatre attendants

Frequent attendants								
Dimension	Young audience*				Senior audience			
	Expectations	SD*	Experience	SD*	Expectations	SD*	Experience	SD*
Performances/repertoire	4.20	1.117654	3.95	1.06801	4.52	.871	3.86	1.177
Price	3.35	1.182353	3.64	1.077971	3.45	1.152	3.68	.863
Location	3.06	1.356502	4.37	0.900351	3.34	1.261	4.56	.847
Ambience/atmosphere in the theatre	3.77	.97281	4.28	0.825936	4.07	1.334	4.08	.891
Theatre names – actors, directors	3.56	1.236093	3.83	0.934871	4.28	1.412	3.48	1.626
Staff	3.33	1.078481	3.90	1.019196	3.83	1.136	4.11	1.281
Other cultural offers in the city	3.16	1.296581	3.43	0.814779	3.24	2.099	3.59	1.782
HNK offers a “different” kind of experience	3.63	1.057559	3.37	1.050638	4.07	2.034	3.63	2.221
Attending theatre is recognised as a part of the lifestyle of those who know true values	3.40		3.59	0.910844	4.52	2.115	3.67	1.861
AVERAGE	3.27		3.48		3.84		3.65	

*Standard deviation

Source: authors' work

Table 5 shows that there are certain discrepancies between attendants' expectations and their actual experience with HNK Osijek in both groups (young and senior audience). It is also visible that young and senior attendants have different levels of expectations and experience evaluation when it comes to HNK Osijek. In general, senior audience has higher expectations of all elements of theatre attendance than young audience. If we consider the overall satisfaction to be the positive difference between expectations and actual experience, it turns out that senior frequent visitors' segment is not satisfied with HNK Osijek, whereas the young one is. Further analysis shows that young frequent attendants are mostly satisfied with theatre location, staff and theatre atmosphere and only elements where their expectations are not met are different experience offered by the theatre and the repertoire.

Senior frequent theatre visitors show the highest level of satisfaction with theatre location, staff and price, and the highest level of dissatisfaction with different experience offered by the theatre,

unrecognized lifestyle of theatre attendants and theatre names. Difference offered by HNK Osijek and repertoire seem to be the critical elements causing highest level of dissatisfaction within both age segments of frequent attendants. Different experience can be explained as novelty, i.e. desire to do and experience new and different things and is related to aspects such as discovery, adventure, excitement, curiosity and uniqueness (Hixson *et al.* 2011).

Repertoire creation of HNK Osijek is limited to a certain extent since the title of national theatre house implicates inclusion of high-culture products into repertoire, while majority of attendants especially young ones, strongly prefer "easy and entertaining" type of performances (Leko Šimić *et al.* 2018). Low satisfaction in these dimensions could strongly demotivate theatre visitors for future attendance.

Table 6 shows how young and senior occasional theatre attendants evaluate certain aspects of HNK in terms of expectations and satisfaction.

Table 6. Expectations and satisfaction of occasional theatre attendants

Occasional attendants								
Dimension	Young audience				Senior audience			
	Expectations	SD*	Experience	SD*	Expectations	SD*	Experience	SD*
Performances/ repertoire	3.53	.97851	3.50	1.02444	4.38	.964	3.53	1.236
Price	3.69	1.09397	3.15	1.002105	4.10	1.087	3.23	1.229
Location	2.82	1.25115	4.07	1.07133	3.29	1.445	4.29	1.670
Ambience/atmosphere in the theatre	3.67	1.03768	3.90	.92162	3.97	1.349	3.84	1.080
Theatre names – actors, directors	3.29	1.23249	3.50	.98954	3.86	1.869	3.45	1.365
Staff	3.05	1.18145	3.63	.98265	3.45	1.482	3.83	1.657
Other cultural offers in the city	3.12	1.21445	3.22	1.05932	3.55	1.544	3.28	1.620
HNK offers a "different" kind of experience	3.34	1.14240	3.26	.99973	3.97	2.006	3.53	2.020
Attending theatre is recognised as a part of the lifestyle of those who know true values	3.18	1.22099	3.14	1.08807	4.03	1.990	3.93	2.075
AVERAGE	3.28		3.48		3.84		3.66	

*Standard deviation

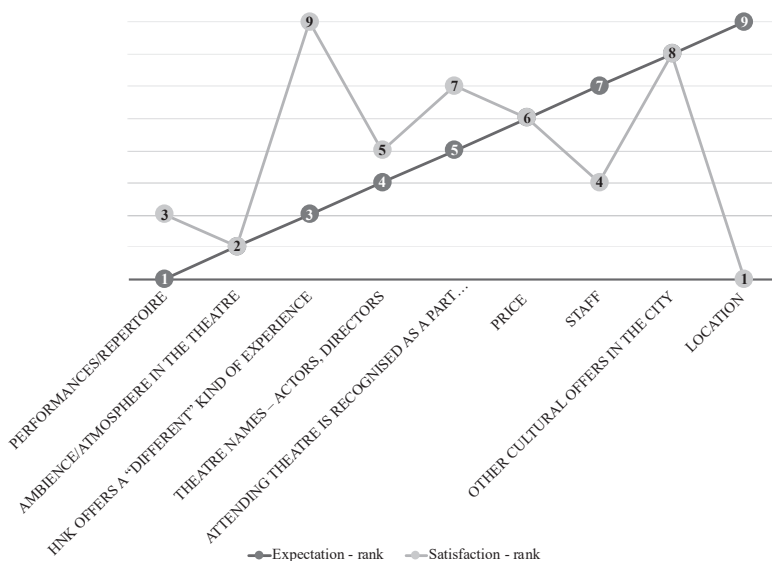
Source: authors' work

Table 6 also shows differences in terms of expectations and experience evaluation by both young and senior audience who are occasional visitors. Research results show the same pattern as in the case of frequent attendants: young attendants are generally satisfied with theatre performance and senior attendants are not (expectations are higher than experience evaluation). Deeper analysis shows that young occasional theatre attendants show highest level of satisfaction with theatre location, staff and theatre ambience and the lowest (and only) with price and recognition of theatre attendants' lifestyle. Senior occasional theatre attendants seem to be most dissatisfied of all four groups. The only dimensions in which their expectations of HNK

Osijek are met are location and staff. The highest level of dissatisfaction is visible in elements of price, repertoire and theatre "names". Comparison of frequent and occasional theatre attendants confirms the findings of Boerner *et al.* (2011) who found no significant differences between "experienced" and "inexperienced" theatre visitors.

Given the average scores in tables 5 and 6, different dimensions of HNK Osijek service are ranked from 1 to 9 by the highest scores. Figure 1 to 4 depict how different segments according to visit frequency and age rank importance (expectations) of certain aspects of HNK Osijek and which experiences they are most and least satisfied with.

Figure 1. Frequent young theatre attendants' expectations and experience ranking

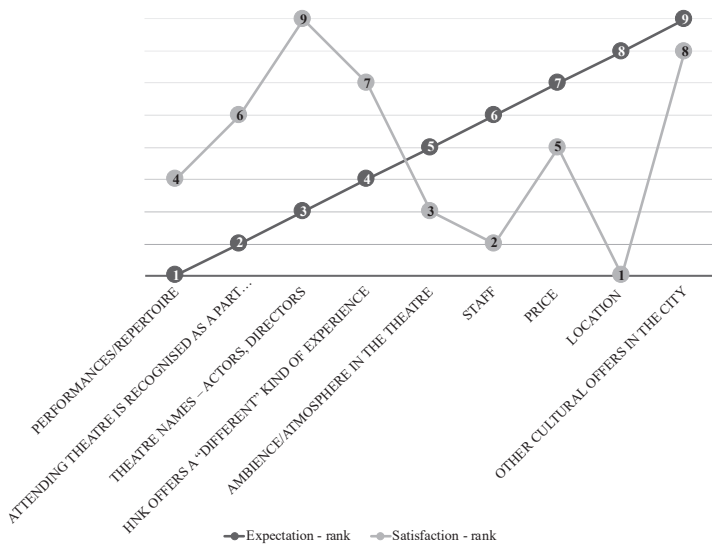


Source: authors' work

As it is visible from Figure 1, young frequent attendants give the highest importance to performances and ambience. Besides that, they also seek a different kind of experience in HNK Osijek. They are mostly satisfied with the location to which they give the least importance, but ambience and performances are among three aspects they are mostly satisfied with. This is contrary to findings of Boerner *et al.* (2011) who found that infrastructure and service in the theatre, which correspond to our dimensions "Staff" and "Atmosphere" were

not significant for a sample of German theatre audience. Our findings regarding the location, i.e. the theatre building confirm the study of Chytкова *et al.* (2012) regarding its relative insignificance. The level of satisfaction when it comes to getting a different kind of experience is very low (from all of the HNK aspects, they are least satisfied with this aspect). It is evident that the greatest discrepancy is precisely in this aspect.

Figure 2. Frequent senior theatre attendants' expectations and experience ranking

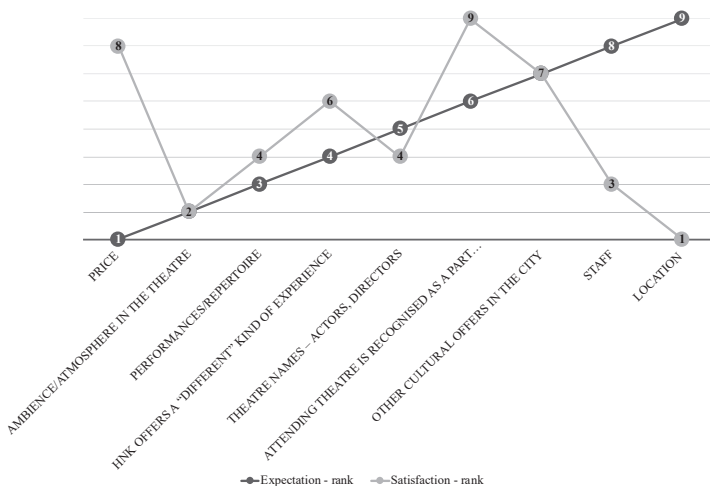


Source: authors' work

When it comes to senior frequent attendants, they also perceive performances as the most important aspect of the theatre, but as opposed to young attendants, they perceive theatre attendance as a part of a lifestyle as important value, and also put high importance to theatre names (actors,

directors). They are mostly satisfied with location, staff and ambience – none of which they perceive as most important. They are least satisfied with theatre names, which represent the most significant discrepancy between expectations and satisfaction.

Figure 3. Occasional young theatre attendants' expectations and experience ranking

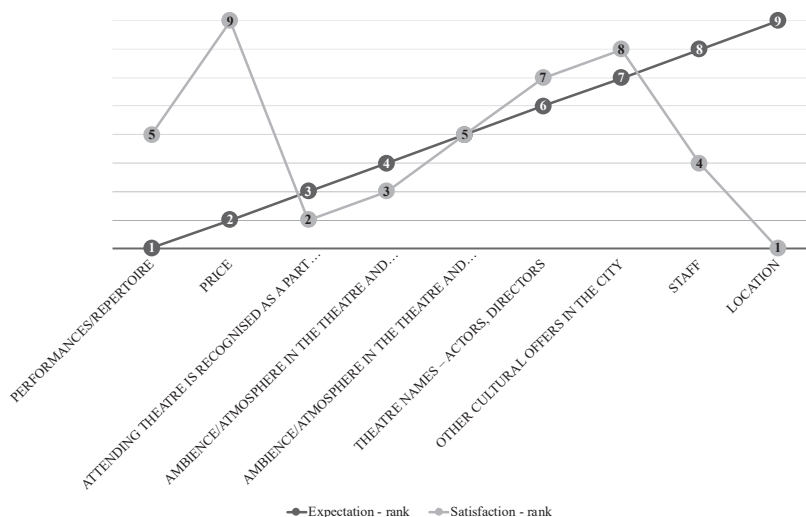


Source: authors' work

As it can be seen in Figure 3, young occasional theatre attendants give highest importance to price (as opposed to both young and senior frequent attendants who did not perceive price even in top 5 aspects – Figure 4.). Besides price, they also perceive ambience and performances as important

aspects. When it comes to their satisfaction, as well as frequent young attendants, they are mostly satisfied with the location, then ambience and the staff. They are least satisfied with theatre attendance as a particular lifestyle value and with the price.

Figure 4. Occasional senior theatre attendants' expectations and experience ranking



Source: authors' work

Similarly, occasional senior attendants perceive performances and price as the most important aspects of theatre. On the other hand, they also want their theatre attendance to be recognised as a part of a particular lifestyle. Their expectations in this aspect are almost met with experience evaluation, given the fact that, besides location and staff, this is the aspect they are mostly satisfied with. On the other hand, occasional senior attendants are least satisfied with the price, other cultural offers in the city and theatre names.

CONCLUSION

Identification of different audiences' profiles and their expectations and experiences with different product and service elements that create their satisfaction is beneficial to marketers of theatres and other public cultural institutions since it enables adaptation of all marketing elements and strategy, according to the needs and preferences of identified customers' groups.

The aim of the research was to contribute to understanding of consumer behaviour in case of classic theatre by exploring components that create classic theatre satisfaction. It was measured as discrepancies between the level of theatre attendants' expectations from certain dimensions of theatre service and their experience evaluation with the same. We also wanted to analyse and evaluate potential differences regarding the age and frequency of theatre attendance.

First of all, our study indicates that HNK Osijek is, just like many other classic theatres, not a mass culture institution. Very high proportion of our initial sample has never visited HNK Osijek (49% of young respondents and 39.9% of senior respondents). Secondly, only a few percent of respondents are loyal customers (subscribers). The majority of theatre goers are occasional ones, visiting HNK Osijek a few times a year.

The study has identified that the general major source of dissatisfaction with HNK Osijek are repertoire and the different experience offered, which according to the analysed theories, are the

core elements of the classic theatre product. These are dimensions that HNK Osijek should focus its efforts on.

Finally, this study confirms that HNK Osijek customers' perception of importance of different elements that create its marketing profile and their satisfaction with those differ with respect to age and theatre attendance frequency and consequently that such segmentation might be useful for analysis and marketing strategy creation for classic theatre. The most critical segment in terms of satisfaction is the senior occasional visitors segment, where the discrepancies between the expectations and experiences are highest in general. Hence, if HNK Osijek, or any other cultural institution aims to achieve higher levels of customers' satisfaction, it needs to understand the specific needs and interests of each market segment.

As every research, this one is not without limitations either. The first limitation is related to the sample. The sample was convenient and the highest percentage of respondents were the ones who rarely or never go to the theatre. Also, the research was limited to one country and one theatre only – HNK Osijek. Further research should focus on different theatres in Croatia and in different countries.

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