

“Sense and Sensibility”

A Study about the Determinants of Customer Satisfaction in Arts Consumption

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PRELIMINARY DRAFT. DO NOT QUOTE.

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Abstract:

The theoretical model that is proposed in this paper, tries to discover the determinants of final satisfaction of arts consumers. After having illustrated the literature background upon which the paper is built, we preliminary test if also for culture and arts consumption the classic "expectation-disconfirmation" marketing paradigm holds. Besides, the proposed model considers not only cognitive responses like service performance and consumers' expectations, but it assesses also the role of emotions in influencing final satisfaction. The work has an exploratory nature and uses a focus group for the hypotheses testing.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The first researches about audience participation in performing arts have been carried forward within the so called field of cultural economics (or economics of the arts) that traces back to 1966 with the publication of Baumol and Bowen's book (Throsby, 1994)

These two authors underlined three different phenomena occurring in the arts' industry:

- the demographic and socio-economic consistency in audience from art form to art form;
- the extremely narrow segment of society from which audiences for performing arts were drawn;
- the protracted deficits which performing arts organizations were operating under and which threatened the quality and even the existence of art form (the so called: Baumol's cost disease).

Since then, many economic analyses have tried to assess different characteristics and determinants of arts demand. Explanations of arts individual and aggregate demand have been carried forward within the traditional economic rational choice approach according to which "the analysis of art and cultural industry [might be carried forward] in much the same way economists might analyze the steel, food or health care industries" (Heilbrun and Gray , 1993; p.3).

Within this framework, economic studies have viewed tastes as simply one factor affecting individual's decisions to participate: an individual's preferences, or tastes, have been assumed to be fixed and to depend on a host of individual characteristics (socio-demographic and psychological factors) largely assumed to be "outside" the model. (Mc Carthy, Ondaatje, Zakaras 2001). Thus, cultural economics has studied mainly the consequences for audience attendance of variations in variables like changes in income and prices. Performing arts demand has been in fact thought to be dependent on prices of tickets (P_t), on the average annual per capita income (Y), on the weighted average price of substitutes for arts participation (i.e.: other leisure activities) (P_s) and on the composite price of complementary goods like transportation, childcare, parking and so on (P_c). (Heilbrun and Gray, 1993).

Stated formally:

$$Q_t = a + b \cdot P_t + c \cdot Y + d \cdot P_s + e \cdot P_c \quad [1]$$

where a is a constant, b and e are predicted to be negative and c and d positive.

Equation [1] says that total arts attendance (that in this case means the annual quantity of tickets per capita) would be higher for individuals who have higher incomes and, as they are strongly related, higher occupational status.

Empirical researches in this field have given a lot of evidence about this phenomenon. (DiMaggio, Useem and Brown, 1978; Throsby and Winter, 1979; Heilbrun and Gray, 1993; Vogel, 2000). As a matter of fact, the majority part of frequent performing arts audience has higher income than average, has higher occupational status and works as professionals (Andreasen and Belk, 1982).

Going back to equation [1] one can see that income is not the only variable that can affect individual attendance. Also ticket prices, like most of other market goods, seem to have an important role in influencing the purchase of tickets: in this case, however, it has been shown that while an increase in ticket price may cause a decrease in arts attendance, this correlation is not so strong. By experimenting the effects of variations in tickets' prices on the willingness to pay of a group of English students, for example, it has been shown that monetary barriers to attendance are not so important even for young attendees: if students perceive arts events as entertaining and allowing socialization, their willingness to purchase very expensive tickets is in fact still high (Kolb, 1996). Another phenomenon that may account for the decrease in price elasticity of arts demand at all ages is related to the addictive character of arts consumption.

As Marshall wrote "...the more good music a man hears, the stronger is his taste for it likely to become" and of course the higher his willingness to pay for arts. According to traditional consumer theory the process of addiction could not be explained within economic theory: change or refinement in consumers' tastes were the only explanations given to justify the future increasing consumption of arts and culture.

Economic theory, assuming given tastes, was "weak" in predicting and explaining the determinant of this type of behavior: in fact, no economic explanations could soundly explain why an increase of an individual's present consumption of arts and culture increases the future consumption of it.

However, in 1977 Stigler and Becker, with the publication of the article “De Gustibus non est disputandum”, tried to explain this phenomenon within the economic theoretical framework. In fact, these two authors maintained that it was unnecessary to assume shifts in tastes to explain consumer choices in the arts field and other phenomena like persuasion by advertising and drug addiction.

They assume that households maximize a utility function of commodities (“Z-goods”) that they produce with market goods, their time, their skills, training and other human capital. The accumulation of better understanding of art leads to a fall in the so called shadow price of arts, making more attractive and cheaper to consume more and more arts. Tastes can therefore be considered similar among individuals: by realizing that the marginal utility of time allocated to arts and culture is increased by an increase in the stock of cultural capital, one can say that art appreciation rises with exposure because the marginal utility of the time spent on music rises with exposure even though tastes have been unchanged. In other words, an increase in the stock of music appreciation capital over time increases the productivity of time we currently spent on appreciating music (i.e.: the thrills per hour we get from it). (Caves, 2000)

For certain extents this powerful theory suggests that the satisfaction and enjoyment individuals derive from the arts depends not only on income, price, and tastes but also on such factors as prior artistic experience, knowledge of the arts, education, and family background, which allow individuals to become more effective consumers of the arts: the more experience and familiarity an individual has with the arts, the more enjoyment he or she is able to derive from a particular level of consumption.

Starting from these observations, literature on audience attendance in the arts has tried to enrich the powerful portrait designed by using the rational economic approach in the arts field.

Empirical researches have showed that educational attainment is the individual characteristic most closely related to attendance. The 1997 NEA Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) has been consistent with this findings for all the performing arts forms surveyed: the rates of attendance for every art forms increase with the increasing in the educational level. (NEA, 1998).

Not surprisingly, if one takes, for example, audience composition for opera and classical music, almost half of the audience of these forms of performing arts is composed by well educated people

What would drive this education effect, however, is not clear.

Beside education, many other scholars have claimed the importance to consider other social setting in which arts attendance occurs. (Belk, 1986, Uusitalo, 1986, Woods, 1987). According to these authors the main determinants of arts attendance should have been founded in non aesthetic purposes of attending cultural events. The choice of attending performing arts would lay in something "external" to individual: it is not only the search of "collative properties" of works of arts that animates arts' attenders. The real motivation of arts attenders arises from the interplay between arts, political, religious and social forces (Becker, 1982; Day, 1985). On the basis of the works by Veblen, arts and cultural consumption is a mean of social distinction within society (Bourdieu, 1984). For this reason arts demand may be classified as "nonfunctional": consumers demand this type of goods due to factors other than the qualities inherent in the commodity but to external effects on utility. Depending to the type of arts we consider, we can observe that cultural consumption is in fact affected by what Leibenstein called snob, bandwagon and Veblen effects. (Leibenstein, 1950) Therefore, artistic and cultural consumption can be used to communicate ideas or status in a symbolic way (Uusitalo, 1986).

This is particularly true nowadays: cultural institutions and activities have become important in the process of status signaling because the materialistic based status signaling is no longer efficient thanks to redistribution of wealth and social mobility. (Kelly, 1987) .

Other empirical researches have been carried forward to assess the role of social class and status in patterns of cultural attendance. Social class has been found to be the dominant construct in influencing actual art patronage behavior, art patronage intentions and arts attitudes of adolescents. Besides, people from different social class form attitudes towards the arts independent of actual experience with arts activities. (Bamossy , 1985).

Social class is also an agent to discriminate the way in which people enjoy arts performances: middle class people are rather passive attenders while very low and very high class attenders are pretty active and involved in arts institutions activities. (Uusitalo, 1986). In many marketing research, life style patterns have been taken into consideration to predict audience attendance in performing arts. Andreasen and Belk's (1980) is an example of this type of researches.

They individuated some categories of lifestyle patterns: the passive home body (those dedicated to family and home oriented activities like watching tv), active sports enthusiast (those that prefer active sport and outdoor activities like movies, parties and spectator sports), inner directed self sufficient (those that participate in a number of industrious home oriented activities such as gardening, reading, craft projects ecc and that are family oriented and prone to undertake outdoor activities), culture patron (heavy arts attenders), active homebody (similar to passive homebody, they golf, or do some gardening instead of watching tv) and socially active (they go to parties, to restaurants clubs, meetings...). By considering the interactions between all these independent variables, they found that socio-economic factors are not significant predictors of likely attendance when lifestyles enter the regression.

Also the age of the patron is a good determinant of preferences in arts forms and attendance behavior (Levy, Czpiel, Rook, 1980). In many survey on arts attendance, the median age for performing arts is 35 (Di Maggio et al., 1978) while, according to the SPPA the peak attendance rates is in the 45-54 group. Audience participation tends to increase with age till middle years and then decreases constantly. (Heilbrun and Gray, 1993). In their research about predictors of attendance in the arts, Andreasen and Belk found a negative correlation between age and arts attendance. However, "the family life-cycle measures suggest that this may be because of high attendance among (a) single adults and (b) young adults with no children and low attendance among older adults with no children (the so called "empty nest" stage) (Andreasen and Belk, 1982, pp. 116-117). Age is significant to assess also the patterns of participation among arts forms and types of live performances. For example: older patrons are more frequent attenders to opera rather than non-musical play (Sexton and Britney, 1979).

Age plays an important role also in taste formation.

In fact a sensitive period in the development of consumers' tastes for the arts seems to exist for everybody. In some recent experiments, consumer tastes for popular songs have been found to be strongly related to the respondent's age at the time the movie or the song were popular: the tastes that were formed in this specific life stage would tend to prevail for the rest of their life. (Holbrook

and Schindler, 1989) This phenomenon - the “age related preference peaks” in consumers’ tastes for the arts - may reflect broader aspects of “nostalgic consumption”.

The importance of the emotional aspects of artistic consumption has been underlined recently by a group of researchers that wanted to recover the qualitative aspect of arts consumption and that has been influenced by the studies of new experimental aesthetics and the works by Berlyne (1973).

The “hedonic consumption perspective” (this is the name assumed by this stream of research) considers in fact emotions and arousal as one of the leading motivation process in consumer appreciation of arts. According to this researchers, while consuming arts, affective reactions to stimuli precede extensive cognitive encoding: arts’ primary appeal appears to be mainly sensory, rather than cognitive (Day, 1985).

Consumers react to syntactic properties of artistic stimuli (i.e.: the way in which signs relate to each other in forming patterns of artistic stimuli) and on the basis of them they base affective responses to these syntactic stimuli (Holbrook, 1979). Affective responses are considered different not in type, but according to the intensity of the arousal. Hedonic responses to arts are not limited to arousal but also relate to the multisensory aspects of one’s experience with artistic products (Hirschman, 1982). This activity implies the recollection of historic imagery drawn from previous experiences of one’s own life and the stimulation of fantasy, creativity and unreal imagery. (Holbrook, 1986). All these researches underline the importance played by fun, enjoyment and pleasure in the consumption experience: these elements are the real output benefit that the consumer wants to receive from an aesthetic experience (Hirschman, 1983).

Hedonic consumption perspective completely reverses the traditional consumer behaviour framework of analysis: the emphasis is no longer on the belief component of mental activities, on verbal information, on tangible features of the product, on the analysis of the decision making process as Bettman information processing theory suggests. (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982).

Rational processes of information seeking are totally banned and we can speak of intrinsic exploratory behavior (Berlyne, 1973) that consists in seeking for stimuli whose information content do not influence what the organism does next (they are sought for their own sake).

The hedonic perspective has been therefore powerful in introducing emotions and arousal as possible drivers for audience participation in the arts. In spite of all these stimulating characteristics, till now little effort has produced in order to test empirically the hypothesis formulated within this paradigm.

Besides, many works have analysed the role of emotion during consumption without paying too much attention to the role of them during the post- purchase phase.

The objective of this research is to test empirically in what extent emotions influence audience satisfaction in performing arts' consumption.

Many works have studied customer satisfaction and, as a result, the definition of customer satisfaction itself got controversial (Bagozzi, 1999). However, it should be asserted that while the first models of customer satisfaction have concentrated on cognitive responses of consumers, more recent models have emphasized the role of emotions in the determination of the level of satisfaction. (Oliver, 1993, Westbrook, 1987; Westbrook and Oliver, 1991; Oliver, 1997).

The theoretical model that is proposed in this paper tries to discover which are the determinants of the final satisfaction of art consumer.

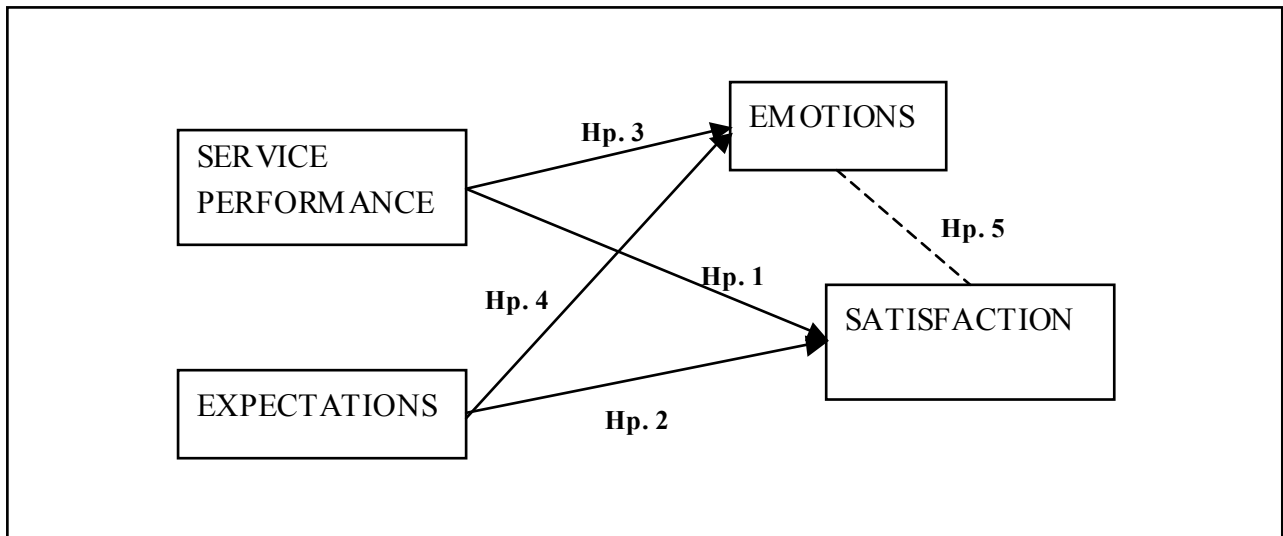
In order to do this, next section will illustrate the hypothesis we want to empirically test with this research. Section 3 will illustrates on the contrary the preliminary results that emerge in a first focus group we develop to test the reasonability of the research.

2. RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The theoretical model that is proposed in this paper, tries to discover which are the determinants of the final satisfaction of art consumer.

Figure 1 illustrates the hypothesis we have formulated.

Figure 1



With reference to customer satisfaction's antecedents, service performance exceeding standards leads to satisfaction while subperformances yield to dissatisfaction (Engel and Blackwell, 1982; Howard and Shelth, 1969). Without exception, researchers in the area of satisfaction agree that satisfaction is a function of an initial standard and some perceived discrepancy from the initial reference point (Oliver, 1980). The different theories of consumer satisfaction are enclosed in this confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm and they differ in the choice of the standards (Fournier, 1999; Yi, 1990).

This standard can be represented by the **consumers' expectations** of attribute performance: the expectation set, when it is compared to the level of perceived service performance, produces confirmation/ disconfirmation belief (Tse and Wilton, 1988).

Other models assume the consumers' **desires** as standards (Westbrook and Reilly, 1983). The authors maintain that what customer *expects* from a service sometimes is different from what he *desires* from it: sometimes aspirations can be more responsible for satisfaction than expectations.

Another standard is represented by the **experience based norms** (Cadotte, Woodruff and Jenkins, 1987) that refer "*to what should be the performance of the product, whereas the predictive expectations in the basic confirmation paradigm mean what will be the likely product performance*" (Yi, 1989, p.24). They derive from personal experience or information received.

Equity perceived could be considered another standard. According to this theory, consumers, when they evaluate an exchange, compare two ratios: the ratio of their inputs (ie. time, money) and outputs (ie. service performance and prestige of the consumption situation) and the ratio of merchant's inputs (ie. information and product assessment) and outputs (ie. commissions). The disagreement between the two ratios leads to dissatisfaction (Oliver and Swan, 1989).

We suppose that, referring to the art consumption, the first standard described causes the customer satisfaction:

Hp. 1: Consumers' expectations influence audience satisfaction

Hp. 2: The performance of the service influences audiences satisfaction

To define the performance of the service in arts consumption is particularly difficult. However, literature in arts marketing has already listed the possible attributes of the service to be considered. Hill, O'Sullivan, Hill (1995) proposed the distinction between attributes relating the central experience of attending live performances and factors relating to the extended experience of theatres goers.

The central experience relates to attributes like the artistic element, the ease of access to the theatre, the branding, the atmosphere, the venue ambience, the staff attitudes, the physical environment and various conventions. On the contrary the extended experience of arts consumptions relates to ancillary products, workshops, sponsorships, recordings, merchandise, catering.

As it will be illustrated later, in this research a focus group will be used in order to list the possible attributes that are important in live performance consumption.

Moreover, as we mentioned above, the proposed model considers not only cognitive responses like service performance and disconfirmation, but also the role of emotions in the assessment of final satisfaction. In the last twenty years many studies have explored the role played by affect in consumer behavior (Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer, 1999; Erevelles 1998).

To a large extent, this new direction of research is originated by the realization that cognitive models have been inadequate in explaining many purchase decisions and other marketing phenomena: affect seems to play a relevant role in any consumer behavior (Hirschmann and Holbrook, 1982; Holbrook and Hirshmann, 1982).

This growth in the study of affect characterizes marketing literature despite the fact that important methodological, theoretical, and empirical difficulties often challenge researches in the area. There are difficulties due to definition, observation, operationalization, identification, measurement and classification of affect processes and results (Elster, 1999).

Affect is a *valenced feeling state* (Cohen and Areni, 1991). It is an umbrella for a set of more specific mental processes including emotions, moods, and (possibly) attitudes (Bagozzi, Gopinath, and Nyer, 1999; Erevelles, 1998).

Defining the emotions is a very difficult task: it is difficult to describe them unambiguously.

In light of the complexity presented above, it is useful to describe emotions by using prototypical categories instead of binary categories (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000).

Binary categories provide an unambiguous criterion that represents the sufficient and the necessary condition for membership. A binary category is characterized by two basic attributes:

- clear-cut boundaries within which the criterion is fitted;
- an equal degree of membership for all items.

“Married person” is an example of binary category: one cannot be a little bit married.

On the other hand, membership in a prototypical category is determined by an item's degree of similarity to the best example in the category (the typical case): the greater is the similarity, the stronger is the degree of membership. Many of our everyday categories are prototypical, for example “houses” or “friends”. The principal difficulty in using prototypical categories is the absence of clear-cut boundaries and the equal degree of membership: some objects are so similar to the prototype that we are not in doubt about their inclusion in the category (for example, an apartment certainly is included in the category “house”); with other objects the degree of similarity makes it difficult to determine the inclusion or not (for example, we are not sure the tortoise shell belongs to the category “house”).

Prototypical classes are generally more appropriate to the psychological realm – and, thus, to the emotions – which is complex and has ambiguous boundaries. Membership in the general category of emotion, as well as membership in the general category of a particular emotion, is a matter of degree rather than an all-or-nothing affair. Accordingly, each category has a certain internal structure, and no sharp boundary separates members from nonmembers. Thus, “*the boundaries between romantic love, liking, and friendship are fuzzy, as are those between envy and jealousy*”(Ben-Ze'ev, 2000, p.7).

Referring to the general category of emotion, if we classify the emotions using a prototypical class, it is not necessary to define precisely what an emotion is but only to characterize the typical case.

Elster (1999) suggests a characterization: the basic features of the typical emotion are: specific sensation, sudden appearance, spontaneous appearance, brevity, cognitive origin, partiality, physiological activation, facial expression, action readiness. Of course, the “typical emotion” is

characterized by all these properties; the degree of membership of an item in the category is related to the number of the characteristics it shows.

Elster (1999) maintains that each emotion is distinguished by a **specific sensation** as a color is distinguished by a specific hue.

Moreover, an emotion **suddenly** appears and this rapidity has an important adaptive value: emotions enable people to react to a new situation without losing time. In fact, emotions occur when a change is appraised as relevant to our personal concern (Oatley, 1992). For example, when a football team wins the championship for the first time, this change determines intense emotions in the team's fans, who consider the change as relevant, while others, who do not consider the change as significant, are totally indifferent. In light of Oatley's consideration about emotions, the adaptive value of emotions is evident: *"for survival purposes it is crucial that the organism pay special attention to significant changes which may increase or decrease the chance of survival. Being emotional, which is the opposite of being indifferent, forces the organism to pay such special attention"* (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000, p.14).

The third feature, the **spontaneous appearance** refers to the not-intentionality: we do not choose to feel an emotion, we passively undergo them.

Besides, emotions are transient states. In fact, the change that elicits the emotion cannot persist for a very long time; after a while, the person perceives the change as a normal and stable situation. The *brevity* is one of the principal characteristics that differentiates emotion from mood. In fact, the term mood *"is applied to affective states, often of relatively long duration"* (Frijda, 1986, p.252).

Moreover emotions, have **cognitive origin**, that means that they are elicited by considerations about the self or the others. Besides, these considerations could be related to the past, to the present or to the future. For example, Stendhal maintains that even love has a cognitive origin: it is elicited by the belief that the beloved is in love with us (Elster, 1999).

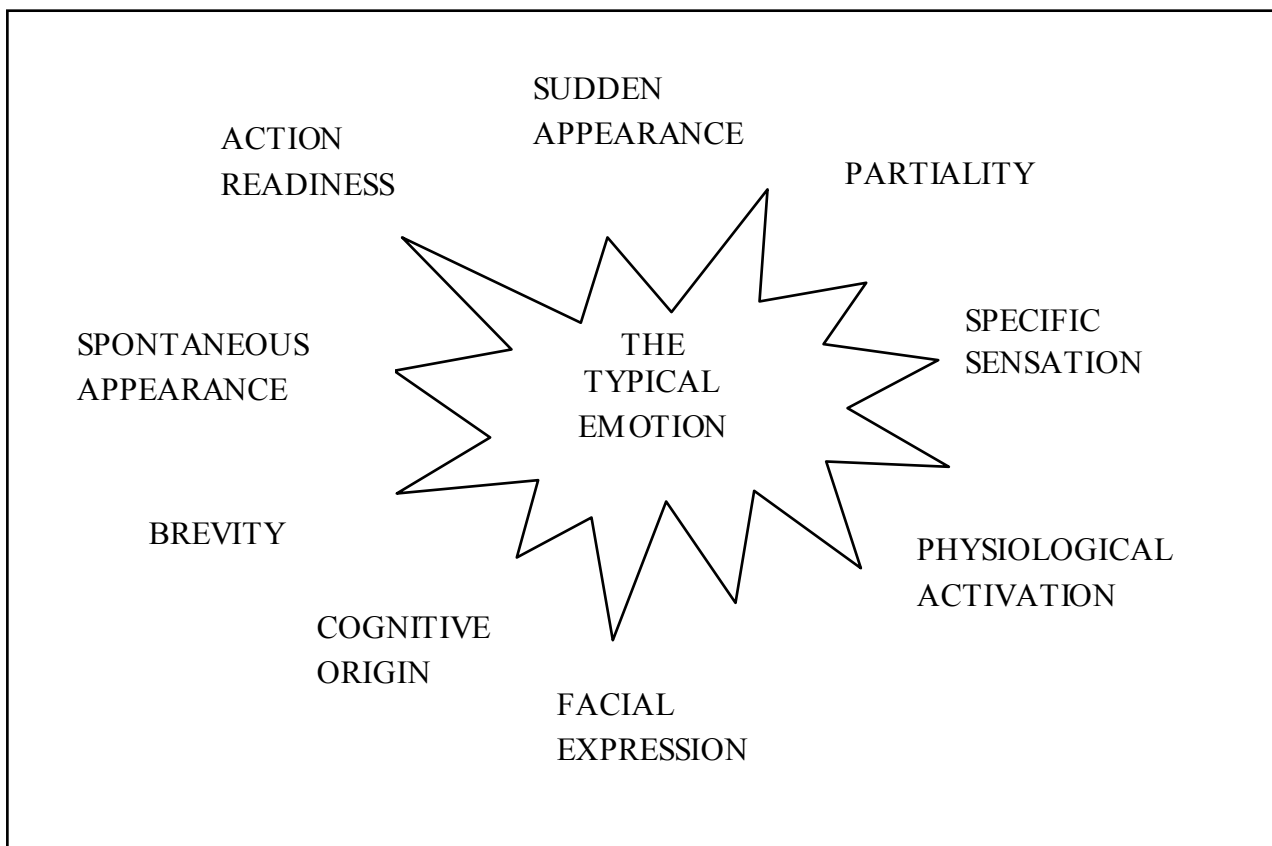
The characteristic of **partiality** refers that emotions are focused on a narrow target (one person or few people) and direct our attention on specific things. Being indiscriminate is a state of nonemotion. Advertisers, for example, know perfectly that if they want to elicit an emotion they

have to discriminate: “[...] when UNICEF campaigns for donations to help disadvantage children, it does not supply us with statistics about these children, but indicates that by donating thirty-two cents, we can provide a vial of penicillin to treat a particular child’s infection” (Ben-Ze’ev, 2000, p.36). Nevertheless, moods can be described “as experiences of situational meaning structures with the characteristic of globality” (Frijda, 1986, p.252). In fact, “Most moods do not seem to be clearly related to a single object or piece of business in an adaptational encounter, as is the case in acute anger or fear. When we speak with someone’s being melancholy or cheerful, it is usually difficult to identify either a specific object (as in the target of anger) or cause of the state (as in a provocative act)” (Lazarus, 1991, p.48).

The **physiological activation** is related to the capacity of emotion for inducing physiological changes. For example, the heart-beats increase in case of rage, fear or sadness; they decrease in case of disgust.

Moreover, different emotions are associated with typical *facial expressions*. For example, people that feel shame blush; happy people smile.

Figure 2 : The basic features of the typical emotion



Finally, **action readiness** refers to the impulse for action elicited by an emotional state. This feature characterizes emotion but not mood, that is an experience that seems detached from felt action readiness (Frijda, 1986).

We will focus our attention to one of the nine basic features that characterizes a typical emotion: the cognitive origin.

According to the cognitive theory of emotion, this feature represents the quintessence of the emotions and allows us to distinguish one emotion among the others. Referring to the cognitive origin of the emotion, the cognitive perspective specifies: "*the experience of emotion is closely associated with the organism's appraisal of its environment along several cognitive dimensions*" (Smith and Ellsworth, 1985, p.817), and emotional differences involve differences in the way people appraise the environment. Appraisal is a particular type of cognitive activity: it "*consists of a continuing evaluation of the significance of what is happening for one's personal well-being*" (Lazarus, 1991, p.144).

Research has supported the cognitive approach to emotions by demonstrating strong relations between emotions and cognitive appraisal structures (Frijda et al., 1989). Nevertheless, not every scholar believes that affect is postcognitive: "*affective reactions can occur without extensive perceptual and cognitive encoding, are made with greater confidence than cognitive judgments, and can be made sooner*" (Zajonc, 1980, p.151). The difficulty with Zajonc statement is that he identifies cognitions with conscious elaboration (Lazarus, 1982): cognitively oriented scholars do not maintain that emotions are necessarily elicited only by conscious cognition and they believe that appraisal could also be an unconscious process.

Cognitive scholars maintain that emotions are elicited not by events, per se, but by the interpretation of events: "*if an individual conceptualizes a situation in a certain kind of way, then the potential for a particular type of emotion exists*" (Ortony et al., 1988, p. 2). Thus they maintain that different emotions correspond with different patterns of appraisal.

Possible individual differences in the cognitive elaboration of stimuli might make it difficult to build a general theory of emotions, and, thus, a theory about consumption emotions. Nevertheless, we

can reasonably assume that, given common cultural environments, most people in a society tend to have the same or similar emotions in the same or roughly similar situations (Averill, 1982). The task is to develop a plausible theoretical framework for typical or everyday consumption experiences.

The literature about the appraisal determinants of emotion is rich (Frijda, 1986, 1987, 1993; Lazarus, 1991; Ortony et al., 1988; Roseman, 1991; Scherer, 1993; Smith and Ellsworth, 1985; Weiner, 1985), and there is a strong degree of convergence between the different competing approaches (Scherer, 1988). We will not examine all the emotion-antecedent criteria suggested by these theorists: we will focus instead on key appraisals that are likely to be relevant in consumption situations.

In particular, relating to the purpose of this study, the performance of the service and consumer expectations are the most important cognitive antecedents of consumption emotions.

In fact, a good performance influences the sense of involvement: in this case the spectator perfectly feels the emotions the author would like to stimulate. Besides, expectations may influence the direction of the attendees' emotions.

Given this consideration, we can formulate the following hypotheses:

H_p 3 The performance of the service influences the consumption emotions.

H_p 4 Consumers' expectations influence the consumption emotions.

Thus, satisfaction is not the only emotion that a spectator can feel. In fact, emotions do not appear in isolation, but in a cluster (Ben-Ze'ev, 2000). The literature underlines that an emotional term usually refers to a very complex and interactive group of emotional states rather than to a single entity. For example, love and joy are usually associated with jealousy and fear that derive from the possibility of losing the beloved. Thus, emotion is a dynamic experience that it can be modified because we constantly evaluate new information and feel accordingly: *"Elaboration provides information that may itself elicit new emotion, or modify the prevailing one; and information uptake from the environment continues, often modified by the previous response. Emotions usually are*

processes over time. They usually are not one-shot responses [...]. (Frijda, 1993, p.382). Thus, we hypothesize that:

Hp.5 Consumption emotions are correlated to customer satisfaction

3. PRELIMINARY RESULTS

In order to test qualitatively the hypotheses we have formulated before, we conducted an exploratory focus group in order to:

- control which attributes of the services performance affect customer satisfaction most.
- verify whether the confirmation / disconfirmation paradigm is suitable to be adopted in arts consumption or not.
- verify which role emotions have in the assessment of customer satisfaction in arts consumption.

We chose a cut down version of a focus group, a mini-group with 4 respondents (Mc Givern, 2002)

This choice was motivated by the difficulty we encountered in recruiting respondents that had attended the same live performance. We recruited people through a variety of means (announcement via mail and various discussion forums in internet)

The mini-group lasted one hour and recruited people were young people that attended a replica of “King Lear” staged at Teatro Leonardo in Milan.

A skilled qualitative researcher guided the discussion that followed the covered the following topics:

- introduction of participants
- analysis of expectations before the show
- analysis of emotions during the show
- analysis of service attributes
- overall judgement about the satisfaction from the show

The results can be summed up as it follows:

1) all the classical attributes considered in arts marketing literature (see section 2) entered the discussion. An overemphasized role was assumed by the aspect and behaviour of other customers in the theatre. Here are some evidences that emerged from the focus group:

L and M: *"I appreciated the fact that there were a lot of people. It was a very informal ambience even if it was on Saturday"*

LA: *"I appreciated that all the people in the hall were happy at the end of the show"*

S: *"We waited a lot before being able to buy tickets but I was not bothered by the line in front of the box office. I would have liked even to talk to people queuing with me"*

2) all the participants denounce the important role played by emotions while entering the theatre and during the show and the correlation with customer satisfaction (Hp.5). Here are some evidences that emerged from the focus group:

L: *"I liked it because it was involving and touching...I got quite involved and touched by the relationship between Lear and his daughters...in the end I cried"*

S: *"I was sympathetic with what was happening in the first part. The second part was more boring... however I will never forget King Lear..."*

LA: *"I did not get involved by the relationship father / daughter...At certain point I laughed a lot, I think they had a great sense of humour... These are the reasons why I liked the show."*

M: *"The show gave a lot of energy that I preserved also after the show. It was great! "*

3) all the participants denounce a strong influence of expectations before coming to the theatre and before entering the hall on emotions that have been felt during the show (Hps 4) and on customer satisfaction (Hp.1). This reinforces the rationality of the uses of the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm in assessing customer satisfaction in arts consumption. Here are some evidences that emerged from the focus group:

M: *"I thought that the show would have been a classic representation of King Lear. During the show I was happy because I realized that everything was completely new and different from classic representations"*

S: *"I knew the show would have been quite different from classical representations of Shakespeare. This thing made me quite anxious and intimidating. I thought I would have been out of place, with few people without understanding nothing. When I saw a lot of people (especially young people) in the hall I felt at home and I enjoyed the show"*

LA: *" I knew the group of actors, the director and the way in which they stage old masterpiece. However I was surprised when I recognized an actress as a friend of mine. This stroke me positively"*

L: *"I did not expect music: music touched me a lot. I was touched by actors efforts and by the fact that other people were enthusiastic about them"*

4. FURTHER PATHS OF INQUIRY

The preliminary results that emerged from the focus group reinforce the hypotheses we made at the beginning: the disconfirmation / confirmation paradigm is suitable to study customer satisfaction of arts attendees. However, as we mentioned above, it seems that there is some logics in modifying traditional models used in assessing satisfaction.

Emotions play a particular role in defining the intensity of customer satisfaction.

The research that we started has of course an explorative nature and no ambition to fix general laws.

Future researches will appropriately test our hypotheses through a survey based research that assesses whether these preliminary results can be generalized to a larger population.

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