

# Democratization or vulgarization of cultural capital? The role of social networks in theater's audience behavior

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## ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the participation in social networks of theater's audiences. Our purpose is to observe and understand the role of social networks in the consumption behavior of the theater field. We put the accent on the concept of cultural capital with its social dimension. We realize an exploratory study that consists in a dozen of qualitative semi-structured interviews with theater's audiences that participate in social networks. We provide an analytical framework based on uses, influences and perceptions of changing in social stratification in theaters. We reveal two kinds of perception: a positive one and a negative one that we denominate *democratization effect* and *vulgarization effect*. Our findings help cultural institutions to have a better understanding of who are the theater audiences and how they act. On an operational level, our study offers information to art's managers interested about the strategic use of Web 2.0 tools.

### Keywords:

Theater management

Art consumer research

Social networks

Cultural capital

## Introduction

Scientific research investigates the role of Internet as strategic channel in arts and cultural institutions (Kolb, 2005; Rentschler et al, 2007). Particularly, social media have gained interest both in research and in practice as one of the more recent marketing tools (Weinberg, 2009; Meerman, 2010; Hettler, 2010). They become a Buzz Word in the art sector especially due to its characteristics, such as the communication scope, the interactivity aspect and cost-effectiveness dimension. Indeed, research indicates that the performing arts seem to be especially eager to exploit its potential benefits (Hausmann, 2012).

Studies present the situation under different points of view: in certain cases they focus on the institution management (Hausmann, 2012) or, at the opposite, paying attention on consumer's perspective (Martinez & Euzéby, 2010). Although a slowly increasing body of literature (Janner et al, 2011; Scheurer et al, 2010; Turrini et al, 2012) explores this topic, empirical studies are still rather scarce especially concerning the ideological influence of virtual communities on the decisions of consumers (Kozinets, 2008; De Valck, 2010).

Looking at this different perspective of arts management, it seems all the more relevant to ask ourselves about the changes and the consequences of the new digital order to have a better understanding of audience behavior.

In our paper we investigate the participation in social networks of theater's audiences. Our purpose is to observe, describe and understand the role of social networks in the consumption behavior. We choose specifically the theatre, because it represents a particular case in which the social context strongly influences the experience of consumption (Esquenazi, 2003).

Indeed, several empirical evidences (Edgell et al, 1997) show that in theaters the consumption often becomes ostentation of membership to a social class. And it is through this symbolic use of arts that high social classes reflect their distinctive role on the society (Veblen, 1899; Bourdieu, 1979). We are interested on this social aspect of consumption, so we present the situation highlighting the so-called *cultural capital* concept (Bourdieu, 1979).

The novelty of our research is that we explore the social dimension in social networks' participation. Until now, no projects have been developed on the role of social networks in the theater's audience behavior, specifically in relation to the cultural capital. We choose the audience perspective putting the accent on the perception of changing in social stratification.

Starting with these concepts, we conduct an exploratory study that consists in 10 semi-structured interviews with theater audiences that participate in social networks. This research takes place in the qualitative fields of study that allow us to explore the future directions of consumption behavior.

We provide an analytical framework in which we present information about uses, influences and

perceptions on social stratification in theaters. In particular, we reveal two kinds of perception: a positive one and a negative one that we denominate *democratization effect* and *vulgarization effect*. We offer an overview that helps cultural institutions to have a better understanding of who are the actual theater audiences and how do they act.

Our findings can have a direct impact on managerial approach of theaters: firstly, they aim to develop a more specific positioning in marketing strategies. Then, they may also inspire the altering of some storyboard plans in cross-promotional campaigns or in fund raising actions.

Our paper will revolve around four parts: a brief review of the literature, the methodology, the presentation and the discussion of the main results, and finally, limits and paths for future research.

## Literature Review

In the perspective to build an evolved portrait of the cultural consumption in the Belgian French Community, a survey was realized in 2007 under the guidance of the Observatory of Cultural Policies (OPC). This research focused on the attendance of citizens in various cultural sectors (cinema, dance, theatres...) and it starts with a panoramic sight on the most frequent leisure activities that Francophones have practiced at least once in the year. This study uses the first survey conducted in 1985 by the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and the Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) for investigating into the matter, by expanding on issues such as the use of new communication technologies.

Two years later, the French Ministry of Culture and Communication launched a similar initiative and it also engaged in a prospective study on cultural policies in 2030. As results, they propose several scenarios integrating the major dynamics for the future as, between others, the digital revolution.

In the above-mentioned study, social media are considered as information sources, a distribution channel, but also a "place" of consumption and exchanges. They promote networking and communities while offering multiple opportunities for access to cultural content. So, Web 2.0 tools can be factors in development for cultural institutions: those who diligently attend cultural facilities spend more time on the Internet than others (Donnat, 2009). In addition, the Internet plays a facilitating role in the organization of cultural events (Maresca & Van de Walle, 2006). It seems to be a real opportunity to be seized by the professionals of culture to facilitate the meeting between the public and works.

While many studies in the museum field have concerned Information and Communication Technologies (Courvoisier et al, 2010), the impact of the digital revolution in the performing arts has been very little developed.

For instance, the CREDOC study (Maresca & Van de Walle, 2006) represents the first exploratory

research that describes the uses of Internet in cultural practices. In this study, two main utility functions are discussed: the information search and the possibility to book tickets for concerts, cinema and theatres. Internet is therefore necessary above all as a practical tool, but not only.

Since then, it has been shown a positive relationship between the possession of an Internet connection at home and the purchase of cultural goods and services (Maresca et al, 2010). Internet promotes an expansion of supply and increased convenience for distance booking. Thus, it maintains the logic of accumulation: those that are most connected are also more involved in the cultural sphere.

**Social Media and Performing Arts**

Though social media are still a rather recent phenomenon, an increasing body of marketing research has already focused on this subject. Martinez and Euzéby (2010) develop a study on the impact of the Internet on audience behavior of performing arts. This project uses the MAO theory (motivations, attitudes and opportunities) in order to individuate these three components.

In 2011, Hausmann and Poellmann presented a research on the use of social media in Germany. They offered the status quo of social media as used by 144 German public theaters. In this publication we see a clear change of perspective compared with the above-mentioned study, because the focus is on the behavior of cultural actors.

Even if there are an ever-growing number of sources, a disagreement still exists regarding the definition and use of the term “social media” (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Scott & Jacka, 2011). But the majority in research accepts that social media enables, facilitates and supports the communication and interaction between users and the creation and exchange of user generated content (Weinberg, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Meerman Scott, 2010).

At the core of social media is a shift from the traditional broadcast mechanism to a many-to-many conversational model: content is not published only by organizations, but is instead continuously created and modified by all kinds of users in a participatory and collaborative way (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Evans, 2008). This impact of expressive social media on consumer behavior is, according to Kotler and Armstrong (2010), a way for consumers to increase

their influence on other consumers with opinions and experiences. According to the book *The Future of Competition*, the role of consumer is changing from passive recipient to active co-creator.

**Cultural Capital**

The symbolic properties of products have been widely acknowledged since Martineau’s pioneer study of the sociology of marketing (Martineau, 1958). Since then, more and more studies focus on consumption as a collective and shared process and consider conditions within which it takes place (Simmel, 1999).

In this context, scientific researches on the behavior in cultural consumption have pointed to the connection of social stratification factors with cultural preferences (DiMaggio, 1986). Social scientists have engaged in research to increase empirical evidences on the nature and extent of differences in cultural tastes and consumption across social strata (Bourdieu, 1986).

Social class refers to the hierarchical distinctions between individuals or groups in society. Typically individuals are comprised in a certain class based on their economic positions, including education and occupation, and similar political and cultural interests.

One of the most ambitious and influential positions regarding the sociology of consumption is

elaborated in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984). For Bourdieu, social classes are characterized as groups of agents who are subject to similar conditions of existence (habitus) and conditioning factors. As a result, they have similar preferences and lifestyles that are exhibited for reflecting the social standing (Bourdieu, 1987). In this perspective, the correspondence between social and cultural stratification has a large significance.

The main proposition derived from this theory is that the symbolic space of consumption will be segmented in a homologous way as the society is stratified (Bourdieu, 1979; DiMaggio & Useem, 1978), i.e., that consumption symbolizes status. In his seminal work *Distinction: a social critique of the judgment of taste* Bourdieu provides conceptual ground for explaining how one’s taste in culture can be socially conditioned.

Here, he introduces the concept of cultural capital that consists of the cultural resources that are acquired through socialization. It can be re-framed so as to address all aspects of cultural production

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by artists (embodied cultural capital), their products (objectified cultural capital) and the subsequent reception and support (institutionalized cultural capital). So, cultural capital may include cultural aptitudes, education level and/or ownership of cultural artifacts.

In the above book, Bourdieu emphasizes the unreflective acquisition of cultural capital formulating the concept of habitus. Habitus is a set of dispositions that individuals acquire in early life that exerts a quite pervasive influence on their perceptions and practices.

By synthesizing Marx, Weber and Durkheim, Bourdieu offered also a theory of social reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) – a transmission of cultural values and norms from generation to generation. Here, the consumption is a tool for class reproduction defined not in terms of means of production, but in terms of social relationships.

In this analysis, the dominant classes of modern societies use their superior cultural capital, no less than their superior economic capital, in order to maintain their position of dominance. Here the differentiation serves as a means of underwriting hierarchy because members of dominant classes seek to demonstrate and confirm the superiority of their own lifestyle over those of other classes. Through such “symbolic distinction”, cultural capital can be converted into economic capital, and cultural reproduction thus serves as a crucial component in social reproduction more generally.

According to the Bourdieu’s theory, empirical studies have shown repeatedly that audiences of theaters, concerts and museums tend to be relatively upscale in socioeconomic status (DiMaggio, 1987). Similar findings in USA have appeared in the work by Holbrook (1995) of how highbrow (lowbrow) tastes appear to reflect a higher (lower) level of formal education. And more, this elitist concept is proved in a qualitative ethnography by Holt (1998) on the relevance of cultural capital to meaning-related “embodied tastes” in such areas as clothing, housing, décor, travel, music, television, movies, reading, hobbies and food.

## Methodology

Starting from the above theoretical framework, we develop an empirical project based on the Grounded Theory (GT) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is a research method traditionally developed through the collection and the analysis of qualitative data.

Using the GT approach, we conduct an exploratory study that consists in 10 semi-structured interviews with theater’s audiences that participate in social network. We choose a small sample because it has the advantages of allowing a manual content analysis, while meeting the criteria of saturation.

For analyzing the testimonies of respondents, we apply a step process in which we mark the key

words in the text with codes; then we group these codes into similar concepts. Finally, we link concepts between them in order to offering an explanation of our phenomenon (Goulding, 2005).

The use of a qualitative type of methodology is justified by two main reasons. First, our goal is to reach an understanding “holistic” in the context, so the semi-structured interview is particularly pertinent as we are here interested in the perception of the public. Secondly, choosing a qualitative method is justified by our interpretive epistemological position because we want to understand “from within” implicit or explicit rules of consumption.

In this paper we offer an interpretive perspective by studying cultural consumption on a micro-sociological level. For this reason we focus on the relationship of the consumer with its social and technological environment. We applied a hermeneutic perspective – more comprehensive and complex (Courbet, 2001), because we touch various fields in humanities and social activities such as sociology and literature. This approach is close to what may be called Consumer Culture Theory.

Consumer Culture Theory does not appear as a theoretical integrated set, but rather as a label consisting of numerous theoretical perspectives (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). These researches focus around a polysemous and complex concept of culture that is a heterogeneous representation of lifestyles and shared values for community members. These habits and values are the reflection of social construction in which consumers choose their relationship to the market and behaviors of consumption.

It therefore becomes evident that this approach can enable us to see more avenues of research without locking in merely descriptive approaches. We choose this position in order to observe and understand consumer phenomena, not only from a positivistic perspective. Thus we use qualitative methods assimilated by external inputs discipline such as anthropology or semiotics.

We study consumption issues as socio-cultural process of construction of identity in a specific socio-historical pattern such as a social network. We focus on how and using what symbols consumers build an online identity to tell about themselves and the others. We aim to highlight the relationship between social structures and experiences, practices of consumers and their values system.

## Data collection and description

We collect our data through 10 interviews with theater’s publics. We fix two criteria of selection for choosing respondents: first, the fact of going to the theater and secondly, having a profile on social networks such as Facebook, Twitter or managing a Blog. We have no statistical vocation; however, audiences are characterized by different socio-demographic profiles.

We contact theater audiences through our personal networks and those gently made available by ARTketing Center (*Centre de Marketing des Arts et de la Culture*) affiliated to the Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Managements. We prepare a guide of open questions in which firstly we ask respondents to present themselves, and then we go deeper into the uses and the influences of social networks in their theater behavior. Lastly, we propose them a reflection about the consequences of this participation on the social stratification of theater audience.

The questions are deliberately open-ended in order to give some directions to the conversation but, at the same time, permit enough reflection and flexibility to the participants. We conduct interviews the most informally possible with the finality to better stimulate spontaneous statements and reflections. For the same reasons we use the mother language of the respondent – French, Italian or English for equivalent level – to make them completely comfortable during the conversation.

All interviews are carried out face-to-face and recorded, and then they are transcribed and manually coded. For doing this, we identify in the text key words and then we group them in similar categories. Our processes of content analysis include inductive elements that help us to build a category system. This system is presented in an analytical framework showing the main patterns of social network's role in theater consumer behaviors.

In particular, we divide our collection of data and the related analysis into three main rounds. First, we start with the collection and the analysis of the first four interviews for having at the beginning a general identification of patterns of behavior. Secondly, we proceed with the collection and analysis of the other three interviews in order to have a more focused schema of our framework. The third round is to collect and analyze last three interviews for meeting the saturation of the information. More concretely, at this time we are able to condense all the major patterns in an overview model that presents and summarizes our results.

As mentioned in the last paragraph, we organize our collection of data in three main rounds: we collect the first four interviews in January 2013, we proceed with other three interviews in March 2013 and then we refine the information with the last

three interviews in the springtime of 2013. We meet totally 10 respondents that agree to share with us their experiences and points of views. We take from 45 minutes to 1 hour and 25 minutes in conversation with each of them in order to explore their attitude and behavior using social media.

The first respondent is Bianca, an Italian woman of 33 years old that works as a communication officer. She defines herself as a shy person that uses words and the writing as the vector of her creativity.

Arnaud is a Belgian graphic artist of 32 years old that works as a web editorial assistant for various cultural festivals in Brussels. Because of his activity, he says that he has lost his “blasé” side in the personal online communication.

Marta is a chatty and very passionate theater's assistant director; she's 29 years old and she comes from Rome. She considers the public as the cornerstone of the theater, because “the theater lives to get answers and reactions from the public.”

The last participant of the first round is Philippe, a French man of 39 years that works in the film documentary distribution. He presents himself as someone that is not expected to play a leading role, but he expresses clear reflections on the social dynamic in the theater field.

In the second round of our data collection we meet Tamara, Angelika and Marianne. Tamara speaks about herself as a very active person that develops many projects. She's an Erasmus student in Belgium that comes from the Galicia region in Spain.

Angelika is a German woman of 38 years old that works in the green sector. She likes cats and cooking organic and healthy food for her children.

Marianne has a long career in Belgian political mediation. Since she is retired, she just wants to devote time to herself for going to the theater and travel around the world.

As during the second round we meet only women, we decide to interview in the third round three men. In this way, we are able to respect the gender balance in experiences and perceptions.

François has a PhD in political philosophy; he manages and animates a weekly radio transmission where he discusses with audience on social and Belgian life issues.

Bertrand is a psychiatric assistant of 30 years old that moved from France a few months ago.

“THE ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS REVEALS THREE MAIN MOTIVATIONS IN THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: UTILITARIAN, HEDONIC AND SOCIAL REASONS.”

He has the habitude of attending arts and musical events focused on Mediterranean traditional cultures, especially of Italy and Greece.

Karim is an eclectic Tunisian artist of 39 years old; he works as a singer, musician and dancer. He declares to have an overflowing personality and to be socially and politically engaged.

In Table 1 we summarize the socio-demographic profiles of our respondents. As we mentioned, we respect the gender balance by interviewing 5 men and 5 women. Their ages range from 30 to 39 years old for men and from 22 to 61 for women. All respondents live at the moment in Brussels, but they have different national origin: 3 Belgians, 2 French and 2 Italians, then a Spanish, a German and a Tunisian.

About their professional activity, we can say that 4 respondents work in various statuses of the cultural sector and 5 respondents work or study, or have a long experience in the communication sector. While only one respondent works in the health and social sector. All our respondents have a level of education that range between Bac level and Master level, with only one pick of PhD education level.

Concerning social media presence, all participants have a Facebook profile but only in one case the respondent activates and deactivates his Facebook profile depending on periods and moods. Other 2 respondents have also a Twitter account, while other 3 respondents manage a Blog in addition.

All these informations about the profile of the sample are summarized in the Table 1.

## Results

### Main Patterns and analytical framework

We present our results in an analytical framework that is based on three main patterns: the uses, the influences and the consequences on cultural capital.

### Uses

The analysis of the interviews reveals three main motivations in the use of social media: utilitarian, hedonic and social reasons.

(...) in your home page you find just information that you want... it's so useful

(Angelika).

Utilitarian motivations are highlighted in the practices whatever is the profile of interviewed. It confirms the importance of these dimensions (Maresca & Van de Walle, 2006) because social media and, in particular, Facebook and Twitter allow primarily to obtain updates in real time.

The users build the structure of the information flow through the "like" button. So, they express their interests and receive information on their own home page. In this way, "(...) you follow regularly, in a glance (...)" (Marianne); "you keep informed and you go (...) you look for friends' activities" (Bertrand). A variety of action verbs emphasize proactive movement of public: users have a continual look moved by utilitarian purpose and not disinterested: "(...) you always know what's happening and you go (...)" (Tamara).

(...) go deeper, discover, enjoy (...)

(Bianca).

Meanwhile, hedonic motivations emerge in the discourse. Users can take ownership of the upcoming event by many digital resources. For instance, seeing videos on YouTube or having a look to opinions and criticisms deposited by spectators or artists themselves. In this way, users participate in the intellectual preparation of the cultural output.

This hedonistic dimension is emphasized in researches on the consumer's experience in websites' consultations (Dandouau, 2001). In this mindset, browsing the social media is not always carried out with the specific aim of showing, but also for discovering new talent and new works. So, they can

Name	Age	Sex	Place - Origin	Activity	Social Networks
Bianca	33	F	BRUX - ITA	Communication Officer	FB - Twitter
Arnaud	32	H	BRUX - BE	Graphic Artist	FB
Marta	29	F	BRUX - ITA	Theatre's Assistant Director	FB - Blog - Twitter
Philippe	37	H	BRUX - FR	Film Documentary Distribution	Ex - FB
Tamara	22	F	BRUX - SPA	Erasmus Solvay Student	FB - Twitter
Angelika	38	F	BRUX - DE	ASBL Communication	FB - Twitter- Blog
Marianne	61	F	BRUX - BE	Retired - Political Mediator	FB
François	36	H	BRUX - BE	PhD - Political Philosopher	Blog - FB - Twitter
Bertrand	30	H	BRUX - FR	Psychiatric Assistant	FB
Karim	39	H	BRUX - TUN	Musician	FB

TABLE 1. PROFILE OF THE SAMPLE

also offer the possibility of extending the experience and share with others their pleasure.

(...) share posts and experiences (...)  
(François).

These social motivations are intrinsic to the concept of digital networks: users communicate between them in a system of mutual exchange. They build their own network of contacts based on systems of shared values, interests and preferences, or based on experiences and past situations. Users retain the power to manage these relationships, as they feel better, in a perspective of full exercise of their private spaces.

Then, users express opinions or discuss on different points of view, but at the same time they develop and give life to a model of sharing experiences. In other words, they use these tools for looking for people interested in same shows or events to "(...) go with someone that has my tastes" (Bianca).

Finally, social networks also encourage artists and often the exchange is direct with the performing arts' authors. Our respondents recognize to post comments when they enjoy the show and do not spread negative word-of-mouth in a sense of "respect for creators" (Karim).

To summarize, in the first pattern of our analytical framework we identify three motivations of social media's uses: utilitarian, hedonic and social. Our results are in line with the results of Maresca and Van de Walle (2006), Dandouau (2001), Martinez and Euzéby (2010).

### *Influences*

The second pattern is linked to the concept of influence that has long been studied in sociology, communication and marketing (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). It is defined in a variety of ways: in the traditional theory a minority of users, called *influentials*, excel in persuading others (Rogers, 1962). This theory predicts that by targeting these *influentials* in the network, one may achieve a large-scale chain-reaction of influence driven by word-of-mouth (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

On the contrary, the modern view states that in the virtual age choices are based on the opinions of peers and friends (Domingos & Richardson, 2001): this modern view of influence leads to marketing strategies such as collaborative filtering.

In this second perspective, we observe in our analysis two attitudes of behavior of theater's audience in using social networks: one active and the other one passive.

— *me in front of others*

In the first case the respondent follows a pattern in which he is the protagonist of the action and in this way he takes the risk of revealing his

*ego*. He suggests topics for discussion on theater performances, expresses points of view and opinions through posts and comments.

— *others in front of me*

In the second case the respondent follows a pattern of behavior in which he is the audience of other users: he notes, follows comments and posts without express opinions. These users do not expose themselves, but they have confidence in the opinions of peers and friends; they become curious to see a performance or to go to the theater.

We call *influencer* the first type of respondent and *influenced* the second one. These two attitudes of behavior are ideally located at the ends of a range in which respondents assume intermediate positions.

According to the *peer to peer* approach presented by Domingos and Richardson, respondents used the word *inspiration* instead of influence. François said: "behind my posts there are no goals, only the modesty to inspire reflections."

However, the idea of "confidence" is evoked into conversations: Philippe speaks about the risk of encountering fake-users that create and build easily false images of them in the virtual world. While Tamara sees a self-confidence aspect in virtual community as "a simple place where to express yourself because you feel valuable", and for Karim it is "a mean for caring of society, for criticize wrong things and become more engaged together."

Our results confirm the modern scenario designed by Domingos and Richardson presenting a model in which users play the protagonist role or the audience role in a sort of *virtual theater*.

### *Consequences on Cultural Capital*

The third and last pattern on which our analytical framework is based is the cultural capital concept. Here we go deeper into the perception of respondents on the social stratification and the changes that social networks produce in theater consumption.

This is the most original part of our analysis, in which we reveal two kinds of perception: a positive one and a negative one. For simplicity of presentation, we call them the *democratization effect* and the *vulgarization effect*.

— positive perception –  
the *democratization effect*

In the first case the respondents perceive the use of social networks as a means that allows a better fruition of theater, especially for new audiences. Here the social network is perceived as a "channel that conveys information more quickly and in a fun and attractive tone" (Marta).

These interactions between audiences and theaters improve the experience of consumption for occasional public. Arnaud suggests that this system

creates a sense of curiosity that pushes audience to discover and live the theater experience.

At the same time, this system of shared experiences and values increases the loyalty of existing audience because “we feel part of the theater community and we become involved” (Bertrand).

These findings push us back to the question of democratization as André Malraux presented in the early 1960s. The mission to reach “all kinds of people” had justified the creation of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs in France and in other European countries. In that way, public authorities sought to reduce disparities between population groups and attract new audiences (Abirached, 1993; Caune, 2002).

In this first case, we can assimilate the above-mentioned concept of democratization to those found by the analysis of our interviews.

— negative perception –  
the *vulgarization effect*

At the opposite site, the negative perception of participation in social networks is linked to a loss of quality and the trivialization of experiences. In this second case, respondents reveal a tendency to pass on the surface of theater in which audiences miss the bottom of experience.

We can assimilate these concepts to the pejorative signification of the vulgarization concept. It is defined by the *Centre Nationale de ressources textuelles et lexicales* as the act of making vulgar, trivial or coarse. In the social context, this implies a degradation aspect that means a loss of distinction, i.e. changing to a lower and less respected state (Péladan, 1883; Fargue, 1939).

“There are so much suggestions and stupid comments that the consequence is the trivialization of things” (Angelika). While François says that audience does not take the time to focus on the different levels of playing and reading of the performance. In this perspective all impressions and sensations are encapsulated in a single “I like” and respondents estimate this system “so reductive” (Bianca).

Concerning the changing of social stratification, Marianne states that the atmosphere in theater halls is more relaxed and bohemian. But, there is no perception of a clear change because “the elite circles remain closed on them and do not open to new audiences” (Karim).

## Discussion

Social networks give a wide range of tools that play a role in theater audience behavior. This first exploratory study allowed us to draw the outline of a digital sphere summarized in the analytical framework (Figure 1).

Here, three main patterns appeared: the uses, the influences and the consequences on cultural capital. Concerning the uses, we identified three motivations such as utilitarian, hedonic and social reasons in line with the literature results (Maresca & Van de Walle, 2006; Dandouau, 2001; Martinez & Euzéby, 2010).

Then, we presented a model of influence in which users play the protagonist role or the audience role in the modern collaborative scenario designed by Domingos and Richardson (2001). Finally, regarding cultural capital and the changes in social stratification, we revealed two kinds of perception: a positive

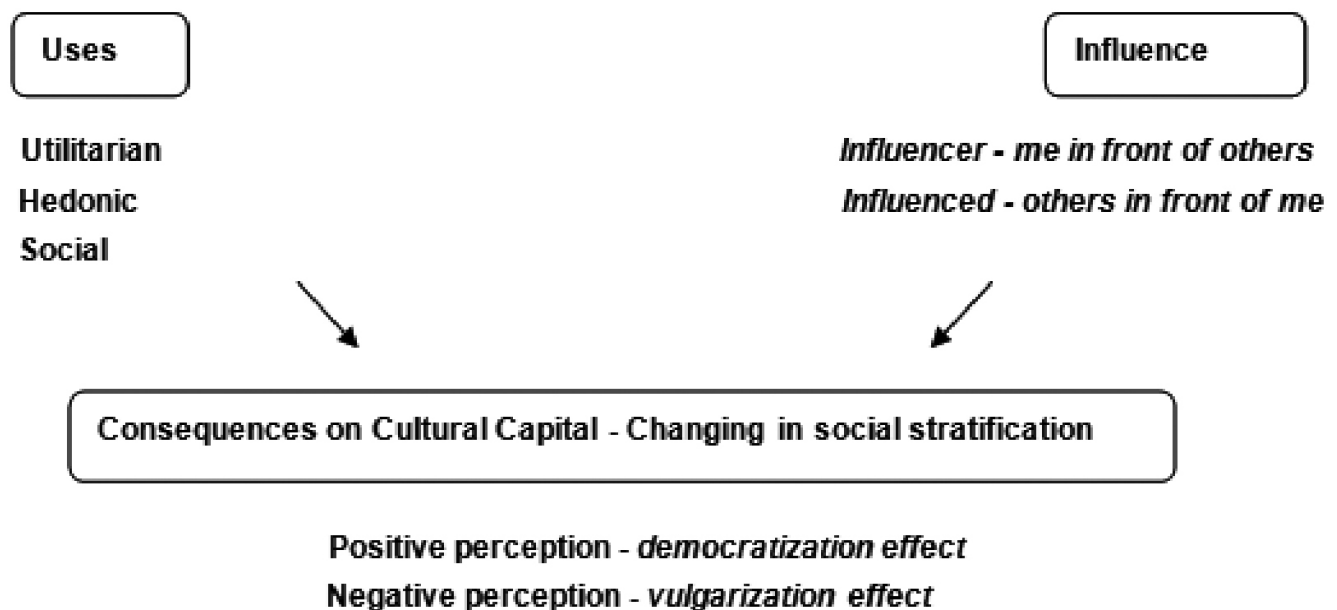


FIGURE 1. MAIN PATTERNS – ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK



“REGARDING CULTURAL CAPITAL AND THE CHANGES IN SOCIAL STRATIFICATION, WE REVEALED TWO KINDS OF PERCEPTION: A POSITIVE ONE AND A NEGATIVE ONE THAT WE DENOMINATE THE *DEMOCRATIZATION EFFECT* AND THE *VULGARIZATION EFFECT*.”

one and a negative one that we denominate the *democratization effect* and the *vulgarization effect*.

Meanwhile, respondents highlighted also the changes of hierarchies and the less institutional conditioning in the virtual era.

il n'y a plus de surmoi  
(Philippe).

Philippe notes that there are some changes in the hierarchical order, which becomes increasingly blurred and obsolete. The huge information flows and the ever-growing presence of different points of view allow audiences to develop a critical awareness. Each user can build this awareness by looking himself for information that suits him best, often as alternatives to those institutionalized.

In this perspective based on the audience's freedom, the super-ego (Freud, 1920) changes and disappears. In Freud's structural model of the psyche, the super-ego plays the critical and moralizing role. It reflects the internalization of cultural rules, mainly taught by parents, educators, teachers or people chosen as ideal models.

As the super-ego controls the sense of right and wrong, it helps fit into society by acting in socially acceptable ways. In this new virtual scenario in which audiences choose by themselves, the super-ego becomes less conditioned by social impositions.

With the lowering of social pressure, audiences can find their own community of interest in which they feel accepted, without following social imposed rules. These findings are supported by various research papers in which it is suggested that virtual communities act as important reference groups (Kozinets, 1997 2002) and that they may supplement those existing or replace traditional ones (Constant et al, 1996).

Here the essential difference between virtual and traditional reference groups is the voluntary and conscious choice, whereas membership in traditional communities may be socially imposed (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2002). So, in this second perspective, audience is free to join the virtual community of their choice because they find like-mindedness among its members.

## Conclusion

In this paper we offer an overview about the changes of the new digital order. We provide information that

helps cultural institutions to have a better understand of who the actual theater's audiences are and how they act.

Our findings can have a direct impact on practice and management approach of theaters. Firstly, the digital opportunities are far from being fully exploited and, secondly, these new codes of expression disrupt and innovate the old ones.

— under estimation of use

According to the literature, there is a variety of social media applications to explore, especially for smaller organizations (Hausmann, 2005). We also highlight the underestimation on their use with regard to the general scarcity of resources in the performing arts sector. It seems advisable to focus on the services offered by social networks as powerful marketing channels. They can be used especially by the so-called underground realities, due to their communication and interactivity aspects (Ranan, 2003).

Furthermore, our results provide information on their social role, especially concerning the choices of cultural policy. In the perspective of a “democratizing” role of social networks, it seems important to consider the more practical aspects of this phenomenon.

Web 2.0 tools may be consciously used both by public authorities and by small organizations that deal with social disadvantaged realities. Finally, our results may also inspire the altering of some storyboard plans in cross-promotional campaigns or in fund raising actions.

— new codes of expression

Social networks offer the possibility to break codes and rules of expression with the adoption of new devices and applications. In this new landscape of the digital era, a growing number of books and blog articles explore the new communication rules in practice.

According to these sources, authors offer new approaches to the information overload in the fast-changing business environment. This *hyperthinking model* is based on the evolution of the individuals' mindset in an exchange system of communications and, consequently, ways of thinking (Weiss, 2012). Embracing this approach, we summarize our analysis

by saying that when audiences change the expression way, they change also the way of thinking.

This conclusion allows us to go deeper on the consumer behavior, especially in order to explore and predict directions for future developments. Furthermore, our results provide information for developing more specific positioning in arts marketing and new strategies customized to each group of audience.

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