

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY  
FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

# **THE CONFIGURATION OF THE CORPORATE IMAGE**

**An empirical research on Cluj-Napoca Romanian National Opera**

Ph.D. Thesis Abstract

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KEY WORDS: *corporate image, corporate identity, corporate reputation, segmentation, audience, opera, interpretative arts.*

## **Abstract**

The present thesis is an exploratory research focusing on the way in which the image of the *Cluj- Napoca Romanian National Opera* [Opera Națională Română Cluj- Napoca (ONRCN)] is created at audience level. Its necessity, as well as its exploratory nature, is due to the very few number, or even the lack of such studies having been conducted in Romania. I have only found three studies on the audiences of Romanian art and entertainment organisations (The Odeon Theatre audience study and the National Theatre Festival audience studies), which are also the only studies on the audience of interpretative arts or other cultural performances. As for studies of perceived image, their number is very low and there is a total lack of research on the image of an Opera House or any institution or organization in a musical line.

The methodology used here is inspired from Schuler's method (2004) of evaluation of the organization image formed at the perception level of a specific audience, based on the attributes of the said image (the method is presented in detail at the end of Chapter 1) and it goes through three main phases.

The first one, a quantitative approach, is a segmentation of the audience of Cluj-Napoca Romanian National Opera, and is triggered by the need to identify image attributes, its outcome being essential for the second research phase. The main goal of this phase is to describe the profile of the external audience and to identify segments from which representative individuals can be extracted as subjects for the second phase interviews.

The second phase, a qualitative approach, focuses mainly on identifying the indicators/ attributes which form the institution's image – identification of the aspects through which the audience perceives the opera house as an organization generally and the Cluj-Napoca Romanian National Opera particularly. The need to go through a segmentation process first is justified as I intend to capture the widest and the most representative range of indicators, considering the possibility that different segments may lead to different attributes. Consequently, individuals from all significant segments are interviewed. The attributes identified here are the variables used in the survey questionnaire in phase three.

The final phase, a quantitative approach, is based on the outcome of phase two, and evaluates the importance of each attribute from the audience's viewpoint and the way the audience perceive the Cluj-Napoca Romanian National Opera through these attributes.

Also, structurally speaking, the first chapter of this thesis introduces basic concepts in corporate image and differentiates between corporate image and corporate reputation/ identity, presenting as well a guideline study methodology selection. The thesis also has a chapter containing guidelines in the segmentation of audiences of interpretative arts, the segmentation phase, the qualitative image phase, the quantitative image phase, and overall conclusions.

**The first chapter** introduces the most important viewpoints in the field on concepts such as "corporate image", "corporate identity", and "corporate reputation". Each concept is dealt with separately.

Concerning the "image", this thesis combines definitions which converge towards defining the image, whether organizational, corporate, company or institutional, as a representation of the organization, and presents the main image types from the literature. For example, Alvesson's definition (1990), according to which the organizational image is a holistic and ongoing impression of an individual or a specific group about an organization, and the outcome of the group's semantic configuring and the communication of the organization's image projection of itself. Such communication emanates from top managers or spokespersons and is purposefully designed to influence the public's actions and opinions. Also a significant definition is Marziantonino's (*apud* Marin, 1998), according to whom the image is a public opinion construct of a specific organization, formed directly or indirectly, with more or less awareness, rationally or emotionally, and which, as a rule, emerges as the positive or negative attitude/ behaviour of the public towards the organization. In this chapter the main image research methods are also presented, as well as two models, from which I chose Schuler's, which is discussed below.

Identity is the concept with the most varied interpretations, from Albert and Whetten's (1985) most common one, according to which identity consists of those aspects which are central

to an organization (the essence of an organization), ongoing (time-related association) and distinctive (distinguishes the organization from others), up to the concept of identity continuity of Gioia *et. al.* (2000) and the distinctions made by Balmer și Wilkinson (visual identity-corporate identity) and Wally Olins (corporate identity- corporate image). As a research model, the AC<sup>2</sup>ID test (Balmer, 2001) is presented.

The concept of “corporate reputation” is explained through the main definitions in the literature. Schreiber’s point of view (2008) is presented, which distinguishes between an organization’s reputation in his view (reputation is an intangible value which allows the company to manage better the needs and expectations of various stakeholders, creating distinctness and barriers against competition) and in the stakeholders’ view (for whom the reputation is the intellectual, emotional and behavioural response to how the organization’s communication and actions meet their needs and interests.) Also, the main reputation research models are presented and discussed.

The last section attempts to clarify the three concepts from the my perspective and to justify my choice for the image concept. Thus, the **corporate image** is the organization’s representation in the mind of various groups or configured in/ through various media. **Corporate reputation** is also an image, but a **noted** one, which consists of **positive** and/ or **negative** attributes. Reputation has no indifferent attributes and we cannot consider reputation in the absence of notoriety. As for **identity**, the most useful here is Albert and Whetten’s. From my point of view, identity is the sum of the organization’s main features. I chose the notion of image because it is generic, the other two referring rather to specific types of image.

In the end, Schuler’s model is presented, which was adapted for the second phase of the this research. Schuler considers that the image of an organization corresponds to the mental model of the individuals which are the public of the organization when they think of it—consisting of cognitive, affective, and sensory information, functioning as a interconnected database. His method of identifying the content of these “databases” includes different tools, and was developed throughout several studies, where every stage was tested so as to improve its

techniques. The main objective is the generation of a graphic map of the image as perceived by a specific public so as to be used in organizational communication by the manager in the decision-making process.

The models presented in this chapter will be examined in contrast with the model obtained as a result of identifying the ONRCN's image attributes in Chapter 4.

**The second chapter** presents the main theoretical guidelines needed to segment the audience of interpretative arts, while surveying the literature and the studies in the field which focused on this area of research. The first important study is Paul Di Maggio's (1978), who uses socio-demographic variables to segment the art public and adds one more variable: the attendance frequency. Also, I present here the two studies conducted in Romania mentioned above, as well as an outline of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, which provides an explanation for the research results. Thus, the empirical studies mentioned above shows that the arts consuming public is predominantly well educated and has intellectual pursuits. Bourdieu explains this phenomenon in terms of this socio-economic category having the ability to appreciate and consume art by virtue of their cultural capital.

**The third chapter** consists of the segmentation phase proper, based on a questionnaire (presented in full in the appendix.) The study identifies the modal audience categories—segments which become the target public in the second phase of ONRCN's image research, from which individuals are selected for interviews— and shapes the profile of the institution's audience. The tools include socio-demographic variables (age, gender, nationality, level of education, musical instruction, occupation, residence, family monthly income, number of family members), variables of cultural preferences (the degree to which they prefer various genres—opera, musical, classical ballet, contemporary ballet, concerts, etc.) and variables of show attendees' behaviour. The data was collected between October 1 and December 20, 2009 as it follows: questionnaires were handed out at the entrance before the show, electronic questionnaires were administered by email, and questionnaires were administered by operator (in person or on the phone).

**Table 1. Respondents' features**

	Variable	Percent
<b>Gender</b>	Feminine	71.8%
	Masculine	28.2%
<b>Age</b>	Under 18	3.9%
	18-35	60.7%
	35-50	16.6%
	50-65	14.0%
	Over 65	4.9%
<b>Education and qualifications</b>	Secondary school graduate	3.3%
	Vocational school graduate	1.6%
	Highschool graduate	22.5%
	Post-highschool qualification	2.3%
	Univeristy graduate	48.7%
	University postgraduate	21.6%
<b>Occupation</b>	Student	36.0%
	Retired	8.4%
	Employee	42.5%
	Employer, manager	11.7%
	Unemployed, housewife	1.3%
<b>Musical instruction</b>	with musical instruction	24.9%
	without musical instruction	75.1%
<b>Nationality</b>	Romanian	92.2%
	Hungarian	4.9%
	German	1.9%
	Other	1.0%
<b>Residence</b>	Cluj-Napoca resident	64.0%
	Cluj-Napoca non-resident, but county resident	7.5%
	county non-resident	28.6%
<b>Income</b>	under 1000 RON	49.2%
	1001 – 2000 RON	33.3%
	2001 – 3000 RON	7.4%
	3001 – 4000 RON	3.7%
	4001 – 5000 RON	.5%
	over 5000 RON	5.8%

Data analysis shows that the prevalent segments are: the 18 to 35 adult segment, the female audience segment, the university educated segment (with the sub-segments university graduates and university postgraduates), the employee segment, as well as the student segment, the segment of the audience with musical instruction, the county non-resident student segment, the low income segment (with the sub-segments under 1000 lei and 1000-2000 lei), the highly educated and low income mixt segment, the segment of those accompanied by one, two or three people, and the weekdays attendee segment.

The prevalence of the female audience appears in other studies as well, such as the Odeon Theatre's study (2003) and the Di Maggio study (1978). Also, the highly educated and low income mixt segment appears in Di Maggio's study as well. But in the Odeon Theatre study the situation is slightly different, as the audience's income is at least average. In any event, we may consider that the correlation between art consumption and the educational level predicted by Bourdieu's theory is confirmed. The retired people segment is significant as well: they are also prevalent in the highly educated segment, most of them being at least university graduates.

I have also discovered, with reference to the audience's preferences and show attendees' behaviour, that the public, as its interest for opera grows, develops a tendency to prefer other genres hosted in an opera house as well. Also, The ONRCN audience are as frequent cinema-goers as well, and less frequent concert-goers. Finally, regarding show attendance, there are no significant differences among segments.

The data also suggests that, in contrast to the theory according to which the highly educated audience are omnivorous consumers, the individuals are more or less selective, preferring a specific type of art, even if it is not restricted to a single genre, but to multiple similar genres. Also, I found no differences between the preferences of the highly educated versus the preferences of the segment with a lower level of education, which indicates that the highly educated do not have more diversified art preferences than the ones with a lower level of education.

Analyses results show that most of the respondents prefer to come in company, which indicates that opera show attendance is ultimately group behaviour. Also opera show attendees prefer weekdays to weekends.

**The fourth chapter** constitutes the qualitative phase of the research, the data being collected by means of exploratory interviews with representative individuals of the prevalent segments. Following the interview analyses, I identified the features the audience uses to shape their representation of the Opera House. For each interview, I described the indicators in semantic categories, which constitutes the intermediate stages for indicator categorization. Finally, I set down 14 indicator categories, 11 of them being classified as follows: *quality of repertory, show quality, environment quality, and quality and range of auxiliary services*. The indicator categories are treated as attributes of the “opera house” and “The Romanian National Opera House of Cluj-Napoca” concepts.

Thus, the first class of indicators rendered the following attributes: *repertory amplexity, repertory variety, repertory novelty*.

The second class of indicators rendered the attributes: *artist quality on stage, the orchestra’s technical/ musical performance, quality of scenography, quality of stage management and montage*.

The third class of indicators rendered the attributes: *quality of venue, quality of backstage and auxiliary personnel, quality of audience*.

The indicators of the fourth class were gathered together under a single attribute: *quality and range of auxiliary activities*.

Besides the indicators of the four classes, in the semantic categorization, I have identified three more indicators, generally signaled in the interviews by a single word, but which I believe describes three separate attributes: *accessibility, tradition, elitism*. Also I have identified,

expressed through different words or phrases, other indicators which can be incorporated under the three categories.

**Table 2. Value centralization for interviews**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Valoarea ordinii de menționare (VO)</b>	<b>Valoarea frecvenței menționării (VF)</b>	<b>Valoarea Pregnanței (VP) (VO+VF)</b>
1. Repertory ampleness	21	12	43
2. Repertory variety	37	35	72
3. Repertory novelty	27	30	57
4. Artist quality on stage	47	89	136
5. Orchestra's technical/musical performance	17	21	38
6. Quality of scenography	30	37	57
7. Quality of stage management and montage	14	26	40
8. Quality of venue	41	100	141
9. Quality of back stage and auxiliary personnel	18	23	41
10. Quality of audience	25	55	80
11. Quality and range of auxiliary activities	8	12	20
12. Tradition	4	7	11
13. Elitism	17	17	34
14. Accessibility	15	9	24

The chapter has also a “quantitative quality”, which registers the pregnancy of the attribute – the order and the frequency with which the indicators are mentioned (Table 2).

Comparing the research results to the models presented in the theoretical chapter, I have identified only a few points of intersection:

The attributes in the *show quality* class show some similarities to the *product quality* dimension from the Fortune magazine model, to the *problem products* from Hill and Knowlton’s model (2003), to the *products and services* dimension from RepTrack and Harris Interactive model, to the variables regarding service quality from Nguyen’s study (2006), and to the *competence* dimension from the corporate personality scale (Davies et al., 2001a).

The *venue quality* attribute is similar to the *space* dimension from Nguyen’s study (2006).

The quality of the *back-stage and auxiliary personnel* attribute is similar to the *interaction with personnel* dimension from Nguyen’s study (2006) and to the *relationship with consumers* feature proposed by Macnamara (2006).

The *repertory novelty* attribute here shows similarities to the *innovation* feature from the Fortune magazine study, to *the ability to innovate* from Hill and Knowlton (2003), to the *innovation* dimension from the RepTrack model and to the *innovation* indicator from the corporate personality scale (Davies et al., 2001a).

The elitism attribute shows similarities to the *shic* dimension from the corporate personality scale (Davies et al., 2001a).

**The fifth chapter** is also the final phase of the research, in which, through the administration of a second questionnaire, I measure the attributes which configure the image of the organization, identified in the qualitative study. The attributes were measured on a Likert scale with values from 1 to 10. The intention was to have two images emerge, the ideal opera house one, and the one of the Cluj-Napoca Romanian National Opera. Consequently, the questionnaire focused on the degree to which the audience considers that a specific attribute characterizes the ideal opera house on the one hand, and the Cluj-Napoca Romanian National Opera on the other.

Thus, the attributes were evaluated: repertory amplexness, repertory variety, repertory novelty (from the repertory quality class), artist quality on stage, orchestra's technical/ musical performance, quality of scenography, quality of stage management/ montage (from the show quality class), quality of venue, quality of back-stage and auxiliary personnel, quality of audience (from the environment quality class), and the quality and range of auxiliary activities attribute.

Alongside the *accessibility*, *tradition*, and *elitism* attributes from the outcome of the qualitative study, I decided to add *professionalism* and *innovativeness*. This new configuration (compared to the one from the outcome of the qualitative study) truly displays, in my opinion, the main dimensions of the Opera House image. Thus, the *professionalism* attribute includes all the attributes from the "show quality" class, the *quality of back-stage and auxiliary personnel* attribute, and even attributes from the "repertory quality" class. The *innovativeness* attribute includes the *repertory novelty* attribute, and the *elitism* attribute includes *audience quality*, *venue quality* and *quality and range of auxiliary activities*.

The second part of the questionnaire contains all the variables used in the segmentation study.

Data collection underwent the same procedures as in the first quantitative phase.

Data analysis revealed that the most visible attributes are the *show quality* ones ("orchestra's technical/ musical performance" and "artist quality on stage") and *the environment*

*quality* ones (“quality of back-stage and auxiliary personnel” and “quality of venue”), while the *repertory* category and the *quality and range of auxiliary activities* are the weak aspects of ONRCN’s image. The results show that there are small differences between the images of different audiences.

As mentioned above, the categories which group the attributes are *quality of repertory*, *show quality*, *environment quality*, and *quality and range of auxiliary services*. The factorial analysis shows that the public’s perception is structured slightly differently, but we will present the data in accordance with the original plan, which is more logically structured. The strong aspects of the institution’s image are linked to the attributes belonging to the second category, “orchestra’s technical/ musical performance” and “artist quality on stage” reaching the highest values.

“Quality of back-stage and auxiliary personnel” and “quality of venue” are the most important attributes from the *environment* category. “Audience quality” is the least valued by the public itself, which may constitute a topic for further research which should look into the ways different audiences perceive each other.

The main problems of the image of Cluj-Napoca Romanian National Opera regard the *repertory*, which, measured against the other categories, is perceived as the weaker quality for all its three attributes: *ampleness*, *variety*, and *novelty*. Still, the weakest aspect of the institution’s image is *quality and range of auxiliary activities*.

The respondents consider that the Cluj-Napoca Opera House scores fairly high for accessibility, this attribute ranking second on the institution’s image attribute hierarchy. Tradition ranks fifth, whereas elitism is even less valued from this point of view, which puts it in the tenth place.

**Table 3. Attribute hierarchy**

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Quality and range of ONRCN's auxiliary services	271	6.45	2.325
ONRCN's repertory novelty	270	7.25	1.978
ONRCN's repertory amplexness	261	7.38	1.933
ONRCN's repertory variety	272	7.40	1.880
ONRCN's innovativeness	260	7.47	1.738
ONRCN's audience quality	274	7.47	1.856
ONRCN's elitism	262	7.58	1.921
ONRCN's venue quality	269	8.05	1.746
Quality of ONRCN's scenography	271	8.06	1.821
Quality of ONRCN's stage management	274	8.12	1.741
Quality of ONRCN's back-stage and auxiliary personnel	272	8.24	1.917
ONRCN's tradition	265	8.32	1.686
ONRCN's professionalism	266	8.44	1.629
ONRCN's artist quality on stage	272	8.44	1.574
ONRCN's accessibility	264	8.62	1.557
Technical/ musical performance of ONRCN's orchestra	274	8.78	1.530

The research shows that there is little difference between the images of different audience segments. There is a slight tendency that the public, the younger they are, the stronger they identify tradition as a ONRCN attribute, the higher the income, the more demanding they are for for a larger repertory, the more frequently they attend, the more exacting they are about ONRCN's professionalism, stage management, and orchestra performance. The male audience is more exigent about the quality of auxiliary services, and the audience with musical instruction are harder to satisfy with regard to certain technical attributes relating to show quality.

Consequently, the study's results do not allow the segmentation of the public from an organizational image perspective.

I believe that in order to perfect the tools, future studies should ask the subjects to hierarcally order the attributes, generally speaking, in order to get a clearer quantitative picture of their importance.

Regarding **future research**, here are a few suggestions: for a more comprehensive view other aspects of ONRCN's image should be considered. It would be revealing to see how the institution's image is configured at the level of its internal public; which, for this category of stakeholders, are the main factors taht shape the image of the organization they are part of; to what degree the attributes extracted from this public match those from the present study; or how the shared attributes differ in the way they are being perceived. Moreover, other categories of stakeholders could be considered as well: teachers and students at the Music Academy, teachers at the Classical Dance Highschool, agents, etc.

Another aspect of the concept relates to the institution's image in the media. It is very likely that this type of organizational image is configured by attributes different from the ones shaping the image of the audience, as the media focuses rather on the extraordinary, which is not always representative for the institution's main activities.

Furthermore, future research may compare the images which are intentionally communicated and those which are unintentionally communicated, that is, the image designed and communicated by management and the representations formed among different categories of stakeholders or in the media.

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