

Opera's audiovisual strategy on the internet: towards a search for new media audiences

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Received on 10 May 2016, accepted 30 June 2016

Abstract

Opera currently attracts global audiences by using audiovisual strategies on the internet. Theatres digitalise performances and broadcast these in audiovisual format to make it easier for audiences to access opera while these organisations, aware that young audiences mostly consume videos online, also develop audiovisual content whose aim is to modernise society's image of opera and bring it closer to the emotional worlds of such audiences. By studying the audiovisual content offered by 12 international opera houses, this article analyses the characteristics of such initiatives to explain the impact, as yet limited, they have on the artistic sector.

Keywords

Opera, art, communication, audiovisuals, digitalisation, audiences, internet, media, YouTube.

Resum

En l'actualitat, l'òpera vol atraure audiències globals per mitjà d'estratègies audiovisuals a la xarxa. D'una banda, els teatres digitalitzen el seu espectacle i el difonen en format audiovisual per facilitar l'accés dels públics a l'art. De l'altra, aquests organismes, conscients que els públics joves consumeixen majoritàriament vídeos a Internet, desenvolupen continguts audiovisuals que permeten actualitzar la imatge social de l'art i acostar-se als mons afectius de les audiències. Mitjançant l'estudi de l'oferta audiovisual de 12 teatres internacionals, l'article analitza les característiques d'aquestes iniciatives per explicar l'impacte, encara discret, que generen en el sector artístic.

Paraules clau

Òpera, art, comunicació, audiovisualització, digitalització, públics, xarxa, mitjans, internet, YouTube.

1. Introduction: a commitment to online audiovisual content

Today no-one can be in any doubt that the creation and appreciation of culture have been transformed by digital media (Igarza 2008, 34). As stated in the Anuario AC/E by Cultura Digital published in 2016,¹ digitalisation has brought about such significant changes in art and culture that these are affecting not only the creators of content and the media but are also essentially altering the uses and meaning given by audiences to these media (Tubella, Tabernero & Dwyer 2008, 20; Díaz 2009, 64; Celaya 2016, 8). Within this new context for cultural industries, produced by this fusion of media and the multiplicity of functions, the internet lies at the heart of daily communication with audiences (Press & Livingstone 2006, 184; Moura 2016, 25-35).

Some of the features of online communication, widely studied by the literature, are interactivity, immediacy, personalisation, enlargement, non-lineality and participation (León & García-Avilés 2000, 141-179).² All these characteristics are due to

new ways of appreciating information (non-linear, random and asynchronous) experienced by the generations of audiences born in the digital era. These users are able to recognise new narrative structures that do not require coherence between the different parts. According to authors, this digital generation also has a greater tolerance for audio and visual stimuli, great exposure to continuously changing images and is also familiar with saturated aesthetics, lighting and colours (Boiarsky 2002, 15-16). It therefore seems logical for audiovisual language, via its many different manifestations, to establish itself online as a means of expression that is capable of favouring this media-driven interpretation of cultural content by users (Díaz 2009, 64-71).

For many authors online video constitutes a substantial part of communicative interactions between cultural organisations and their audiences. Video has become a cultural form with its own rules, legitimised through its use by audiences: online it's the users themselves who freely confer such audiovisual messages with their own personal order and significance (Manovich 2001, 251-252; Cebrián 2008, 348). This promotes the fragmentation

of content to such an extent that communication is established through shorter snippets (Cebrián 2005, 65; Webster 2008, 23-38; Díaz 2009, 65). Consequently, although the internet provides access to extensive cultural content, the format whose consumption is growing the most is the audiovisual clip, especially among younger generations (Arias 2009, 64; Díaz 2009, 65).³ It's therefore natural that most artistic and cultural industries have started to create digital audiovisual strategies (Fumero & García Hervás 2008, 56-68). Notable examples of some of the global initiatives developed by cultural companies include the design of video games to encourage the consumption of art among young people and the use of new audiovisual technologies to promote international cultural festivals (such as Artfutura, devoted to digital art and creativity in the plastic arts, and the Subtravelling Festival and Tribeca Film Festival, both aimed at promoting "screened reality" and new technologies), among others (Roselló & Celaya 2016, 100-158; Sánchez Coterón 2016, 73-85).

1.1 Opera is making its content more audiovisual to attract online audiences

In the cultural sector, audiovisual digitalisation has affected both stage arts and opera (Bustamante 2011, 59-64; Lacasa & Villanueva 2011, 65-74). After having suffered the problem of attracting new generations of fans and with the express desire to set up a dialogue with younger audiences, in the 21st century opera has embarked on audiovisual communication strategies by means of digital media (Boiarsky 2003, 19-21; Ramírez-Soley 2011; Matabosch 2013). Such media favour opera because its spectacular nature, due to its eminently narrative base and audiovisual quality, can easily be digitalised and adapted to the new demands of video consumption (Citron 2000, 1-19; Radigales 2013, 160-170).

In 2016 international opera houses made an effort to improve their knowledge of their potential audiovisual audiences who are culturally active online but who, for various reasons, did not attend live shows at theatres, to determine what they could be offered from the point of view of medium usability (Boiarsky 2002, 17; Ramírez-Soley 2011, 1-13). In this quest, opera is aware that the possibilities of domestic integration offered by the internet for such a high-culture art are not merely limited to online audiovisual dissemination but can also help to stimulate, among such audiences, an additional desire to learn more about the musical genre (Silverstone, 1994, 3). These organisations are therefore exploring creative online strategies based on audiovisual language and format that help take the spectacle out of the theatres and bring it into the lives of people. Their aim is form part of the image society builds of itself and of its time (Hoffmann 2011, 273; Carroll, Foth & Adkins 2010, 147).

In general, there appear to be two audiovisual initiatives of a global nature which international opera houses have implemented to renew their audiences: 1) digitalising and audiovisualising the spectacle of opera to provide online access, and 2) building an informative network of audiovisual content

that helps to modernise opera's image, to educate and boost loyalty among new audiences. The main aim of this article is therefore to analyse in detail some of the features of such initiatives to determine whether opera is achieving its goal of dialogue with new audiences.

2. Methodology

Using a quantitative and qualitative methodology, an exploratory study has been carried out of the audiovisualisation strategies employed over the last few years by 12 of the leading international opera houses to promote opera, such as the Teatro Real in Madrid, the English National Opera, the Metropolitan Opera House in New York (the Met) and the Teatro Alla Scala in Milan. Specifically, an analysis has been carried out of the audiovisual content provided on the official websites and other online sites run by these theatres. This method has provided a systematic examination of the types, conventions and formal features of audiovisual texts. To complement this study, bibliographic sources have also been consulted of international standing, as well as monitoring recent news cuttings and the public actions carried out by these opera houses and other cultural organisations, such as *Opera Europa* and *Opera America*.

3. Audiovisual strategies to disseminate opera

The digital dissemination of opera content in domestic spaces is a strategy that has become well-established in the art industry thanks to the development of various online broadcasting services by theatres. This study has focused on discovering the precise channels used to disseminate opera on the internet, creating possible emerging markets, as can be seen in table 1 below.

After analysing the data, it can be concluded that, to take opera out of the theatre and decentralise its consumption, the growing trend employed by opera organisations has been to implement two different services depending on whether the original show can be seen live or recorded. On the one hand, online broadcasts via streaming have been set up in the international market, very discreetly, to disseminate premieres live. On the other hand recordings of operas can be watched by using a Video on Demand (VoD) service which, in one form or another, is being developed by the major opera organisations as part of their strategy for economic expansion (De Diego 2010). Below we present the main results from both initiatives.

3.1 Video on Demand (VoD) is boosting opera in audiovisual format

The most popular method used to disseminate opera digitally at an international level is video on demand or *a la carte*, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, as can be seen in table

Table 1. Platforms for the online broadcasting and dissemination of performances

	Theatre by country (Link to the official website and Facebook)	Does the platform allow live broadcasts online with prior payment?	Online media library (whether part of the official website or not)?
1	Teatro Real (Madrid, Spain) Web Facebook	Yes. Palco Digital. https://www.palcodigital.com/	Yes. Via Palco Digital.
2	Gran Teatre del Liceu (Barcelona, Spain) Web Facebook	No.	No.
3	Opéra National de Paris (Paris, France) Web Facebook	No.	No, but there's a structured section entitled "Opera Video" with all the videos of the season listed by category, according to their format or the information they contain. This includes sections of "latest videos" and the option to enter keywords.
4	The Metropolitan Opera (New York, USA) Web Facebook	"Met Live in HD" has been developed but this is only a strategy for schools and cinemas globally, not for individual use as yet. Own radio service called <i>Sirius XM Satellite Radio</i> . Payment, monthly subscription. http://www.metopera.org/About/FAQ/FAQs/Live-in-HD-FAQ/	Yes. Pay service. Up to 2012 called <i>Metplayer</i> . Afterwards adapted to mobile devices such as iPad, becoming <i>Met Opera on Demand</i> . Monthly subscription. Offers videos in HD, Telecast and audio.
5	Teatro Alla Scala (Milan, Italy) Web Facebook	No.	No. It has a <i>Video Gallery</i> which only shows institutional videos of the opera house and the members of the choir and orchestra, but not productions of operas performed there.
6	Sydney Opera House (Sydney, Australia) Web Facebook	No.	It's not strictly a video library but it does have a page linked to the website entitled <i>Play</i> with all the performances recorded. This is its own video channel with access to content organised by artist, musical genre, type of show or theme, etc.
7	Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna, Austria) Web Facebook	No.	No. Neither does it have a surrogate <i>YouTube</i> channel. Only a brief fragment of video is provided on the official website, next to each title from the music season, as an example of the show.
8	Deutsche Oper Berlin (Berlin, Germany) Web Facebook	No.	No.
9	Royal Opera House (London, UK) Web Facebook	No.	No. There's a section called <i>Media Player</i> that takes you to <i>YouTube</i> . It can be shared.
10	Chicago Opera Theater (small season) Web Facebook	No.	No. It has a video section but this is imported from its own <i>YouTube</i> channel.
11	Teatro Colón (Buenos Aires, Argentina) Web Facebook	No.	No. Neither does it have its own <i>YouTube</i> channel although it does upload a lot of videos onto this generalist platform.
12	Bolshoi (Moscow, Russia) Web Facebook	No.	No. It redirects you to its own <i>YouTube</i> channel.

Font: author.

1. A download area provides consumers with tools to search, rate, personalise and distribute content (Díaz 2009, 65-66). Among the VoD strategies developed by opera houses, based on a content analysis, of particular note is the pioneering service called *Met Opera on Demand* by the New York opera house which, since 2012, has also included options for distribution via smartphone and tablet. *Met Opera on Demand* is considered to be a complex VoD service, based on prior payment, that combines an interactive media library⁴ with over 300 videos from the past (VHS quality), distributing the latest broadcasts from the *Met* in HD quality, as well as audio files.

Like *Met Opera on Demand*, VoD offers advantages to both opera fans and the institutions themselves. Of particular note among the main advantages extracted from the findings of the qualitative analysis is the ability of users to compare versions of the same opera (as a loyalty tool), the sound and image quality of the downloads (especially with pay services), the discovery of details which audiences attending the live performances missed, the great documentary value of this service for the theatres, since it acts as a large audiovisual database, and the chance to share some fragments on social media, thereby attracting new users (Wasserman 2009).

These characteristics mean that, in spite of the high cost of the service, it is logical that some theatres have made an effort to develop media libraries that can be consulted, such as those offered by the Sydney Opera House in Australia and the Opéra National in Paris.⁵ The analysis of the results has also observed how the general trend among opera houses, which are aware of how important it is for the decentralisation of art to be able to access content from home, has been to create alternative channels on generalist channels viewed extensively by internet users, such as *YouTube*, in order to make up for the lack of their own online media libraries. As can be seen in table 2, 100% of the sample in 2016 had their own *YouTube* channel compared with 77% of these theatres offering the service two years earlier. On these channels users can see shows from past seasons, either partially or in their entirety, although as there is no payment involved the quality of the image and sound is lower, as is the case of the channels created by the Royal Opera House in London, the Chicago Opera Theater in the United States and the Bolshoi in Moscow. All the evidence suggests that, in the future, most of these organisations will also end up creating their own video services as part of their image and corporate communication, as is the case of the *Met* and *Teatro Real*, since having specific platforms to consume art could help to improve the perceived online reputation of these institutions.

It can be concluded that, for opera, the future of the VoD service will depend partly on the conditioning factors of the internet itself in technological and environment terms. Although today many of these theatres offer the chance to appreciate an entire opera on a smartphone or tablet, with high quality, cultural agents wonder whether audiences will be willing to use mobile devices to access long-duration content (Díaz 2009, 65; Ramírez 2011).⁶ An analysis of the results therefore sug-

gests that, unlike the rapid development seen in entertainment towards mobile screens, due to opera's narrative and musical length the dissemination of such audiovisuals is dependent on devices designed for high quality appreciation in environment terms, such as home computers or digital televisions.

3.2 Audiovisualising live opera through streamed broadcasts

Regarding the strategy to distribute live shows, as can be seen in table 1 streamed opera is still in its infancy as a project and strongly influenced by economic and technological factors. Just 16.6% of the sample of theatres (2 out of the 12 analysed) offer online streaming of opera: the New York *Met* (via its school project) and the *Teatro Real* in Madrid (via its *Palco Digital* platform). To be able to provide this service, to date it has been those international organisations financed by many different investors that have led this kind of initiative since its beginnings in 2008, such as the Bayreuth Festival and the Glyndebourne Festival.⁷

In spite of the technological conditioning factors, this research concludes that, from an artistic perspective, streaming is considered to be the ideal formula to modernise opera naturally as it maintains the artistic drive of the art: it conveys the experiential dimension of the live event, making viewers co-participants in the real-time experience (Heye, 2008). After analysing the content, one example that warrants particular attention is the Spanish case of the *Palco Digital*, a project set up in 2011 by the *Teatro Real* in Madrid, as well as the *Orbyt* platform via its *ONO* pay channel. The *Palco Digital* is an audiovisual channel which, via the internet, offers live productions from the opera house in high definition audio and video. Although, at present, this service also provides a facility to download historical files of Madrid productions, the initiative is focused, by means of an annual subscription for a package of paid content, on users being able to see premieres via their laptop in real time as in the theatre production (Lorenci 2011).⁸ In 2011 this Spanish initiative needed to invest more than four million euros in the technological infrastructure required to give the theatre full autonomy and allow it to record, broadcast and produce in high quality, surpassing the quality of the facilities at Covent Garden in London and the *Met* in New York.

As in the case of the *Palco Digital*, given the large financial investment required by theatres to carry out live-broadcast initiatives, it seems that the future of these services will depend on the emergence of third parties capable of taking shows to the end consumer, such as technological firms or broadcasting channels, for example *Medici.tv*, *ClassicalTV*, providers such as the Spanish firm *I2CAT*, *GARR*, or virtual platforms such as *Terena* in the Netherlands.

Although VoD and streamed content have already been set up on the internet, having analysed the data given in table 1 it can be observed that opera is actually only using this online dissemination strategy to a limited extent. According

Table 2. Audiovisualised online information of opera house websites in 2015

	Theatre by country	YouTube (when started and link)	Is a video of each opera from the season included? Can it be shared?	Specific multimedia services offered	Development of their own audiovisual consumption services for mobile devices	Another type of audiovisual promotional information used? If so, which, how and in what format?
1	Teatro Real (Madrid, Spain)	Yes, double. One for the theatre and one for the <i>Palco Digital</i> . 2010 and 2011. YouTube	Yes but not directly. You have to click on the "audiovisual material" window to see them.	Palco Digital.	<i>Palco Digital</i> adapted for <i>iPhone</i> , <i>iPad</i> . Pay service	The home page does include some video.
2	Gran Teatre del Liceu (Barcelona, Spain)	Yes. 2008. YouTube	Most operas are included. Most can also be shared and are fragments from the theatre's previous productions of the same opera. If not, there's a gallery of photos.	Contains videos from the television programme "Opera en Texans" and its international version "This is Opera" as part of the popular information on its programming.	No. Tickets can be bought via <i>iPhone</i> but through ServiCaixa. Since 2011.	No videos included on the Home page. Short videos in the intros of "Opera en Texans" and video conferences with the presenter. Serial with small fragments entitled "la webcam de Ramon Gener" on the titles of the operas. The season is announced on <i>YouTube</i> .
3	Opéra National de Paris (Paris, France)	Yes, since the end of 2015. YouTube	Yes. Fragments are included from the productions, statements from directors... Videos can be easily shared.	A video-pdf of the whole season can be downloaded in a separate window to be able to see all the information as a "video-format catalogue". Very few offer this option.	Free <i>iPhone</i> app. The information is adapted from the website for the mobile device. Videos and information can very easily be shared.	The aforementioned audiovisual PDF video. The Home page doesn't have any videos.
4	The Metropolitan Opera (New York, USA)	Yes, although substituted by its "Metplayer" platform. YouTube	Yes. Not only video but a lot of trailers, opera fragments, interviews, 'making of' documentaries, etc.	<i>Met Live HD</i> , <i>Met Opera on Demand</i> , <i>Sirius XM</i> (radio), <i>Saturday Matinee Broadcast</i> (radio)	The Met Opera for <i>iPhone</i> , <i>iPad</i> ; free of charge. The old media library <i>Metplayer</i> is now called <i>Met Opera on Demand</i> (pay service, adapted for <i>iPad</i>).	No videos on the Home page. Videos can be easily shared and have a specific section that refers you to the purchase of tickets at the online box office.
5	Teatro Alla Scala (Milan, Italy)	Yes, since 2007. Videos are arranged by show category. YouTube	Not on all of them - you have to click on a separate page.	None. There's an archive, a kind of news section but you have to subscribe and ask for information.	No.	No.
6	Sydney Opera House (Sydney, Australia)	Yes, since 2006. YouTube	No	<i>YouTube Symphony Orchestra 2011</i> . A whole project affiliated with the theatre to create online symphonic music.	Yes, free adaptation of the website information for <i>iPhone</i> and <i>iPad</i> . Curiously, with the app you can listen to podcasts but not on the website, these having been overwhelmed by the video material.	Yes. Interviews with singers and directors that can be downloaded from the website itself.

Source: author.

Table 2. Audiovisualised online information of opera house websites in 2015 (continuation)

	Theatre by country	YouTube (when started and link)	Is a video of each opera from the season included? Can it be shared?	Specific multimedia services offered	Development of their own audiovisual consumption services for mobile devices	Another type of audiovisual promotional information used? If so, which, how and in what format?
7	Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna, Austria)	Yes, since 2015. YouTube	Yes.	No.	No.	No.
8	Deutsche Oper Berlin (Berlin, Germany)	Yes, since 2014. YouTube	Since 2013, yes. Can be shared.	Own section selling its own CDs-DVDs	No.	Videos inserted into the page itself.
9	Royal Opera House (London UK)	Yes, since 2007. YouTube	Yes but not clips from the operas but related information. Includes general videos on the 'making of', statements from producers and artists in general, as well as trailers.	Yes, specific "Backstage" section with videos also linked to <i>iTunes</i> .	1) Device for <i>iPhone</i> but the operas can't be seen on a mobile. Only to buy tickets and see trailers. 2) In 2011 a game was launched for <i>iPhone</i> and <i>iPad</i> called "The Show must Go On" (69 pence)	Use of "Extras" in the "Discover" section, always next to the written information. No videos on the Home page.
10	Chicago Opera Theater (small season, Chicago, USA)	Yes, since 2007. YouTube	Yes. Not a teaser or a clip but a 'making of' or extras, or promotional video.	No.	No. It's only developed corporate pro-opera cases for mobile devices (merchandising).	No.
11	Teatro Colón (Buenos Aires, Argentina)	Yes, since 2015. YouTube	No.	No. Curiously, apart from tickets you can also buy food for the event.	No.	No.
12	Bolshoi (Moscow, Russia)	Yes, since 2005. YouTube	No.	No.	No.	No.

Source: author.

to the findings of this research, the success of such initiatives could be limited by unfavourable environments for viewing an original show online (given that operas last a long time), by technological and economic difficulties and also by a continuing minority interest in opera. Opera must realise that, for such a sophisticated art, the creation of new digital markets requires a boost from a whole network of information that helps audiences to feel a desire to appreciate it.

4. Strategies to communicate opera in an audiovisual format

As opera is an art that requires a certain amount of previous learning, the natural exchange of knowledge, relations and desires that occurs on the internet means that this medium is very useful for creating a benchmark operatic context for new cultural audiences. Opera also seems to realise that digital audiences are much more oriented towards an audiovisual and media-based appreciation of content that previous generations of audiences (Pereira Domínguez & Urpí Guercia 2005, 78). Consequently, the efforts made by organisations are not solely aimed at distributing their digitalised product but also at the progressive audiovisualisation of this informative world related to opera, so necessary to stimulate aesthetic emotions and true personal involvement with art (Rössel 2011, 89). According to the evidence found by this research, there are many different audiovisual communication proposals today on the internet. Due to their proliferation and constant change, it's difficult to cover them in any detail in this article. This section will therefore focus exclusively on an analysis of the main audiovisual formats and content included by opera houses in their online communication strategies in order to adapt the information they produce on their art to how viewers use digital media.

As can be seen in table 2, in the last 6 years the presence of videos on opera on the official websites of opera houses has gradually increased thanks to the models started by theatres such as the Metropolitan Opera House in New York (Lacasa & Villanueva 2012, 413-418). These findings also reveal that those theatres that are most committed to this audiovisual initiative are fundamentally Anglo-Saxon: London, New York, Chicago and Australia. In Europe, Spain can also be considered as a pioneering country in the use of audiovisual content as a strategy to communicate with audiences. Below is a summary of some of the most relevant findings from the analysis of the content.

4.1 Slow audiovisual adaptation of official websites

As can be seen in the third and fourth columns of table 2, on theatres' official websites (and in general in all the information managed by the opera industry online for users), video has been incorporated as the main format capable of offering the most important information regarding annual seasons of music.

Although, judging by our research, opera's strategy is

appropriate, the adaptation of website information to audiovisual language has taken place somewhat slowly in comparison with other artistic sectors. This phenomenon is because opera has come up against a generational problem that is now online: in order to meet the information needs of its traditional opera fans, who are not very used to multiple, integrated texts or hypertext (Jukes 2008, 13-15)⁹, until very recently the communication on theatres' official websites had remained faithful to designs and conventions more befitting a written environment and parameters of analogue and textual information (as if it were a book), which are not very compatible with the audiovisual nature of opera itself or of videos. In our findings it is notable that, up to 2012, some of the world's leading theatres such as the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires (whose website was updated throughout 2013) still used analogue-type aesthetics that were not very user-friendly and a predominance of lineal text (Díaz 2009, 70). Although this situation seems to be changing gradually, opera houses are refusing to entirely give up the type of communication their websites have traditionally used to respond to audiences most loyal to art: at present these people are still, ultimately, the ones who go to see live opera, who pay for expensive tickets and sustain the economic motor of opera (Ramírez-Soley 2011).

After our analysis we can state that, in 2016, these sites still do not exploit the aesthetic, educational or commercial potential of inserting videos of opera online, especially to achieve a dialogue with new virtual audiences. They are therefore missing the chance to adapt their media because, as we have seen, online videos are essential in order to encourage an integrated discourse brought about by audiovisualisation, and to provide an up-to-date image of art (Díaz 2009, 70; Moura 2016, 25-35).

4.2 Absence of audiovisual content specifically for mobile devices

Another of the findings of this research is related to the development of mobile apps. Not content with audiovisualising their institutional content, opera houses have also embarked on offering audiovisual opera on these devices, as can be seen in the fifth column of table 2. However, after a more detailed analysis of the apps created by the Teatro Real, Opéra National de Paris, Met and Sydney Opera House for tablets and telephones such as the *iPad* and *iPhone*, it can be seen that, at present, these seem to be replicas of their websites: they're designed to act as mere disseminators of the services offered by the official websites. Only some of them have started to include small informative videos via *narrowcasting* or *multicasting* systems in order to promote products, reinforce the theatre's corporate image, educate about a specific opera or create public opinion, among others (Díaz, 2009, p. 67). It has been shown that, although these initiatives are small and anecdotal, such short videos can help keep information up-to-date and encourage greater interaction between parties when used for cultural purposes.¹⁰

The number of artistic apps for mobile devices on the

international cultural network is increasing daily thanks to the appearance of specialised initiatives such as *iphoneArt*, *Jodi.org*, *Snapseed*, *Instagram*, *Streetmuseum* and *Snibbe*, among others. However, in the area of opera, the development of services and content specifically for mobile devices is still almost inexistent. As an exception we can cite the first opera game for *iPhone* patented in 2012 by an official organisation, the Royal Opera House in London, called *The Show Must Go On*.

As is already happening in other cultural industries, opera could explore the development of interactive apps, created by artists themselves which, rather than being a mere adaptation of the website to mobile screens, take advantage of new ways to interact with art such as playing with technology itself, with audiences taking part in performances and also music education (Sánchez Coterón 2016, 73-85).

4.3 Increase in audiovisual marketing as a promotional tool

Another of the most notable findings of this research is the considerable increase in audiovisual clips for promotional purposes on websites, mobile devices and digital opera platforms. Increasingly influenced by online marketing strategies, or by the commercial models adopted by sectors such as cinema, television and advertising, the opera industry is attempting to renew its image, imitating those successful audiovisual formats (short in duration, aesthetically visual and easily shared) that are capable of encouraging greater consumption on the internet (Muro 2006, 155; Colbert & Cuadrado 2003; McLean 1994; Scheff & Kotler 1996). Below are some of the most representative examples of this digital communication.

Inspired by the film industry, opera houses have started to create cinematographic trailers for their seasons of music as well as the use of online "extras", such as 'making of' documentaries for shows, biographies of the singers and composers, interviews and statements by the artistic team (De Diego 2010, 1-2; Sheil 2012). With these "extras" consumers learn the value of art, that opera is much more complex and enriching than they may have realised based on just the music alone, helping to contextualise the meaning of an opera within a contemporary framework. Online advertising and marketing have also been included in the latest strategies to attract audiences, such as the creation of low-cost lipdubs and flashmobs, podcasts to promote the operas being shown, viral messages and costly spots for theatres' seasons of music.¹¹

This sudden audiovisualisation of content *about* opera, however, does open the door to a certain underlying consideration. The proliferation of technologically and aesthetically sophisticated videos helps to offer a much more permeable image of art because it is more commercial and up-to-date, but it also results in the tendency to *spectacularise* the performance itself, forgetting that, in doing so, this may negatively affect the conception of opera that theatres are hoping new audiences will have (Muro 2006, 155; Heyer 2008, 596).

4.4 The success of opera clips thanks to viewings on YouTube

Finally, we should also note that audiovisual clips seem to have found a common shared space: the generalist platform *YouTube* (Strangelove 2010, 10).¹² As can be seen in table 2 almost all opera houses have developed their own channels where opera and institutional content exists side by side with a host of audiovisual clips, of an amateur or fun nature, whose function is to promote opera as an important, current world (Lacasa & Villanueva 2011, 65-74). Although such clips are framed within the context of theatres and art, on *YouTube* they become more a source of fun as they are seen separated from their institutional reference and on a familiar platform for users that helps turn them into elements of infotainment (Díaz 2009, 68). Theatres will probably encourage this type of audiovisual content on opera more eagerly once they've realised that younger audiences construct part of their personal identities through such audiovisual expressions (Fumero & García Hervás 2008, 56- 68; Thussu 2008, 161).

Another of the characteristics *YouTube* seems to have is the capacity to attract a large number of fans around the statements and lives of celebrities (Strangelove 2010, 15). Consequently, today it's not strange to find videos of world-famous singers such as Roberto Alagna or Anna Netrebko offering exclusive interviews on this platform for international audiences. By exposing their private lives, opera singers hope to attract the attention of mass audiences and thereby the support of advertising to boost their global reputation even further (Bourne 2009, 283).

As reflected by the findings, it can be concluded that, thanks to services such as *YouTube*, today audiovisual clips are one of the few tools capable of giving an online voice both to the producers and also to the professionals and audiences of opera. Although not considered as *pure opera*, these audiovisual micro-discourses are very important in the media-based process of opera as, from a user's point of view, they represent new ways of organising popular emotions that are linked not to any direct experience but to the technical intervention of the media (Gordillo 2008, 9-10). Moreover, in the same way that opera celebrities attract crowds of followers via this platform, opera organisations could themselves create initiatives on their own *YouTube* channels to encourage an appreciation of the art, in snippets, which can simultaneously set up a dialogue and also educate thanks to the continual comments linked to such videos.

5. Conclusions

In the new cultural context caused by digitalisation, opera is attempting to attract and educate audiences via the internet and provide an image of a familiar, up-to-date art. In turn, online media want content that's not only capable of stimulating the interest of users but also of raising their cultural level. The

internet allows both sectors to create synergies that ultimately add value to the life of society. As has been seen in the findings of the analysis, opera today is aware of this opportunity and, in general terms, has made the right move in incorporating audiovisual initiatives in its move to become more approachable to society. More than with any other art, such strategies are possible thanks to opera's audiovisual nature; they help make opera more accessible, personalised and social.

However, as shown by this study, the continuing minority interest in opera's audiovisual products reminds the art that, from a user's point of view, today's problem is not one of technology or even distribution; in a media-based society opera must be able to create a better correlation between the audiovisual messages it transmits and the expectations of its audiences. In the future opera should explore initiatives that provide it with greater insight regarding the desires, habits and tastes that are already being displayed on the internet by new music audiences. After what we've seen in this study, it can be said that, to become up-to-date and legitimised by such audiences, it's not enough for opera to use audiovisual clips that are aesthetically close to their affective worlds. With such initiatives opera can only achieve the first step of attracting the attention of its potential audiences but it cannot hold a dialogue with them and therefore educate them culturally.

As has already been observed with the *YouTube* phenomenon, digital audiences will increasingly propose audiovisual stimuli that should not only be accepted by cultural industries but also promoted and encouraged. Strategies such as the interactive use of videos on these platforms, the creation of content specifically for mobiles with wholly audiovisual characteristics, the integration of hypertext language on the internet, as well as encouraging participation and online education related to this content will help to increase the demand for artistic content, thereby raising the cultural level of users at the same time as helping to boost the loyalty of new virtual communities given their growing video consumption.

Notes

1. It's highly recommended to consult the *Anuario AC/E de Cultura Digital* for 2016, which focuses particularly on the impact of new digital technologies on different cultural sectors such as museums, stage arts and dance (Celaya 2016). Specifically, in order to illustrate the scope and interest of the article if extrapolated to other cultural spheres in addition to opera, we recommend reading contributions made to this area of study by María Moura Santos —El impacto de internet en la creación cultural—, Paul Waelder —El mercado del arte en la era del acceso—, and Pepe Zapata —Transformación de las Artes Escénicas en la era digital—. This annual of international findings is published each year by the association *Acción Cultural Española*.
2. Regarding immediacy, users are more able to access content when they want and when it's convenient, in what has been called an "instant information culture" (Harper 1999, 57). Personalisation allows users to decentralise the consumption of content because access to information is easier. Enlargement is understood in the sense of access to a larger amount of information as users' wish (Igarza 2008, 169-171).
3. In 2016 there are a lot of products that are merely fragments of more extensive audiovisual narratives, often manipulated and post-produced by their creators or by the users themselves (Díaz 2009, 65; Lacasa & Villanueva 2011, 65- 74).
4. One of the big advantages of the platform is precisely its interactive nature since users can easily browse the work, divide up and share the lineal view to directly reach the desired content, make lists of favourites or choose the quality of the video played.
5. Strictly speaking, these theatres do not provide virtual media libraries linked to their official websites from which operas can be downloaded but redirect users to pay platforms created to download and view content.
6. It's still believed that, today, online devices do not provide a suitable environment (understood in terms of image and sound quality) to appreciate the art of opera under the best circumstances: in short, being able to see a complete, long-duration opera.
7. In 2008 the Bayreuth Festival was a pioneer in launching this new way of attracting new audiences to the event via live content through its website. It thereby managed to make the most of a festival that lasts just two months a year, raising its international profile and turning opera into a newsworthy event. The project was repeated in successive years with other titles (such as *Die Walküre*, by Richard Wagner, in August 2010). Its success has also been imitated by other organisations such as The Glyndebourne Festival.
8. In a similar way to the initiative by the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, the *Palco Digital* offers its subscribers different pay services: users can watch, from home via the internet, exclusive audiovisual content to which they have unlimited access for the time their subscription lasts (six months or a year). They can also buy tickets for live broadcasts. Fundamentally the *Palco Digital* allows users to enjoy live broadcasts produced in high definition and with high quality digital sound via live streaming from the opera house. The application of latest generation technology also means the signal can be transmitted via satellite or produced on Blu-Ray or DVD. The *Videoteca* of the *Palco Digital* also has, on demand, works recorded in high definition at the Teatro Real, as well as extra content to find out more about the operas. According to the official website itself, the *Videoteca* will continue to add titles to extend its collection of documents and make this available to the public. See its official website: <<http://www.palcodigital.com>>. Last consulted on 23 September 2015.

9. Traditionally audiences that are not digital natives, more closely connected with the art of opera than with media content, are those who have principally gone to the internet to consume opera information. In fact these opera fans usually coincide mostly with the category of non-media based audiences, less used to multiple and integrated forms of interpretation (Jukes 2008, 13-15).
10. We note, as an example, the company Jodi.org, known for creating an app called "zyx" to develop a performance work in which users can actively participate. The app shows a choreography to follow with the recording of everyday movements and the frustrated interactions users make when using a mobile. One of a number of artistic reflections on the behaviour produced in using mobile technology by way of performance art, this was carried out at the New Museum of New York last year. See: <<https://blogmobileart.com/2012/09/20/apps-moviles-en-el-contexto-artistico/>>
11. As an example, see the spot promoting the last 2015-2016 season for the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona.
12. *YouTube.com* is the most standardised website in the world for sharing videos online. Its fame increased in 2006 when Google acquired its shares. At that time users of the generalist platform uploaded an average of 80,000 new videos per day (Tan & Jarvis 2006) and, by 2010, the number of views per day was in excess of 150 million (Strangelove 2010, 10).

End note

This paper provides some results of the research entitled *La mediatización audiovisual de la ópera como proceso de apertura a nuevos públicos en el siglo XXI*, which received the First Prize of the XXVII CAC Awards to Research into Audiovisual Communication.

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