

**Title**

**Unveiling the Drive: Exploring Motivations Behind Cultural Consumption**

**Author: Chrysoula Bousiouta**

**Euncet Business School- Polytechnic University of Catalunya (UPC)**

**Professor of Marketing**

**[cbousiouta@gmail.com](mailto:cbousiouta@gmail.com)**

**+306972940086**

**Abstract**

This research is based on a theoretical framework that concerns the audience of performing arts, and their decision-making process. As, the research on consumer behaviour is inextricably linked to the development of successful marketing strategies in all areas of this scientific field (e.g.: international marketing, sectorial marketing for services or products, etc.), this paper works towards arts marketing. It also briefly describes the Greek picture, as the participants of the focus groups are people who reside in Athens, and consume cultural products presented in the capital of Greece. The main objective of this research is to improve understanding on what motivates those audiences to consume performing arts. This research has used a qualitative approach. To investigate the motivations of cultural consumers in Athens, five focus groups have been used, with the below criteria: sex, age, education, and frequency of cultural consumption. Participants' age range is 18-55+. Results point towards the stimuli as the prevailing motivation, with socialising or entertainment to follow. When the participants mention entertainment, we should consider that the majority is looking for temporary entertainment, when choosing to consume culture. The temporary entertainment is the passive one, which involves the emotional functions and satisfy needs such as relaxation and escapism. The research also showed that the deciding factors can be the performance's content, the performance's contributors, or the cultural organisation. The motivations along with the deciding factors should be considered in the creation of strategic arts marketing plans.

**Keywords**

Arts consumption; theatre; performing arts; audience's motivations; arts marketing

## **Introduction**

In the conclusions of studies that concern audiences' motivations to consume culture, the motivation is correlated with the satisfaction of needs. Motivation refers to the satisfaction of psychogenic and biogenic needs of a person to act. For these needs, one very influential model that has been developed is Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, designed in 1954. The model lists human needs, starting from the basic and going to the more complex: biological and physiological needs, safety, social, esteem and self-actualisation needs (Wilcox & Nolte, 1995), p. 40, Hill et al., 1995, p.119, Kotler & Scheff, 1997, p.77, Gordon, 2011, p.78, Blackwell et al., p.246, McGuire, 1976 & Walmsley, 2011). According to Maslow these needs should be satisfied following a sequential hierarchy, but modern theorists argue that different needs can coexist simultaneously. And although the apparent need an art experience can satisfy might be that of self-actualisation, in reality, it can cover the full spectrum of levels of Maslow's needs (Botti, 2000; Hill et al., 1995). For instance, a visit to an arts centre can satisfy needs of adequate lighting and ventilation (physiological), cloakroom facilities (safety), possibility of meeting friends (social), enhanced self-image for being up to date on arts events (esteem), and/or increased knowledge on a specific artistic form (self-actualisation) (Hill et al., 1995, p.121).

Botti (2000) categorizes consumers' needs in cultural consumption into four main types based on the benefits they seek. These include functional benefits, such as fulfilling cultural or knowledge needs (extrinsic rewards); symbolic benefits, which reflect one's personality, values, or social status; social benefits, where cultural choices convey social standing or help build relationships; and emotional benefits, offering intrinsic rewards like satisfaction, fun, or escape from routine. Various similar categorizations exist, and it is pointless to mention them all (Blackwell et al., 2001; Kim & Tucker, 2016; Zaharie, 2014).

This paper aims to explore the main motivations and needs of a diverse group of people with varying personal factors, such as educational level, life-cycle stage, lifestyle, and cultural consumption frequency. The sample focuses on Greek citizens, particularly Athenian audiences. Research on performing arts consumption in Greece is limited, with some public and private initiatives occasionally addressing the topic, but often with differing focuses. This study helps fill that gap and contributes to the existing literature on Athenian audiences' cultural consumption. Additionally, the research seeks to update or challenge past theories considering ongoing societal, technological, and financial changes. Finally, the motivations behind cultural consumption can and should be considered to improve marketing strategy plans of arts organisations.

## **Motivations of consumers so far**

Consumer motivation explores why people choose to consume certain products, revealing underlying needs and benefits sought, such as physiological needs, safety, love, financial security, pleasure, social image, and knowledge (Blackwell et al., 2001; McGuire, 1976). These needs can vary in priority and intensity, depending on individual circumstances and may sometimes conflict. Activities may address multiple needs simultaneously, and motivation strength is influenced by the importance of each need. Identifying true motivations can be challenging due to potential distortion, social desirability, or unconscious factors. Moreover, motivations are dynamic and change over time (Blackwell et al., 2001; McGuire, 1976).

It seems that the more usual attendance patterns of arts events can be found within societies that appreciate education, creativity, and leisure. They are audiences with high social class, influenced mostly by their parents that had a particular interest in arts, they belong in the age group 35-54, and they are mainly women. On the motivation, there are several opinions

regarding the most prevailing for arts attendees and it is not easy to be standardised, but self-actualisation and entertainment are among the first. Social needs such as display, going out, dressing up, and personal needs like relaxation and learning anticipation, lead consumers to entertainment, which give to people a relief from boredom and everyday life's routines (Blackwell et al., 2001). In terms of entertainment, there are two types, the one that involves people's cognitive functions and intellectual quests, completes the existing knowledge, seek for further learning, and learning is entertainment. The second type is that by nature more passive that involves the emotional functions and satisfy needs such as relaxation and escapism (Badimaroudis, 2011; François Colbert, 2009; Cooper & Tower, 1992;). According to Myer (2009), "aside from a very small number of discerning connoisseurs, the average consumer is looking for temporary entertainment when choosing a cultural venue" (p. 4).

In experience economy audiences are seeking for experiences and, according to Pine and Gilmore (1999), the experience is met where the realms of aesthetics, escapism, education, and entertainment overlap; experience is something non-tangible and its value is memorable. Performing art, as an ephemeral art, has the same quality as experiences; the performance lasts only for the time performed and then passes in memory and it is left there for a long time afterwards. As experiences occur within individuals, two persons cannot have the same experience during a specific event. The sensations that will be created within a person and the influence that the event or the ambience has on each person derive from the background of each one (Botti, 2000; Bousiouta, 2010; Martinez et al., 2018; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Walmsley, 2011).

### Objectives and Methodology

As briefly seen above, some research has been done regarding the audiences' motivations for arts consumption. This article attempts to focus on performing arts and especially theatre, using qualitative methods, inductive reasoning, and particularistic approaches. No hypotheses or theories were developed at the beginning of the research but during it. The research was conducted in 2020 and was driven by its main research objective: *What needs motivate audiences to consume culture*, which consists of two research questions presented in the below table.

MAIN RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	Research Questions	Conclusions
A-What motivates audiences who reside in Athens, Greece, to consume culture?	RQA1- What are the main motivations of audiences, who reside in Athens, to consume arts?	CA- The main motivation of Athenian consumers to attend a cultural spectacle is to get stimuli, socialise or entertain themselves, while the deciding factors can be the performance's content, the performance's contributors, or the cultural organisation. Confirming theory, a motivational conflict and multiple motivations at the same time were noted.
	RQA2- What are the deciding factors of audiences in their decision-making process for cultural consumption?	

*Table 1. Main Research Objectives*

This research aims at tracing and, furthermore, examining the motivations and deciding factors of audiences to consume culture. Building on existing theories, researched and methodological principles, the study is based on qualitative research, using (five) focus groups (FG). The

audiences that will be researched are the frequent culture consumers, in a European urban environment; specifically, Greeks who consume arts in Athens.

### ***Planning and Design of Focus groups***

Focus groups are especially useful in promoting interaction among research participants. Nevertheless, the participants should be considered as narrators instead of reporters of experience; this means the version of the story they narrate each time, might be a bit different (Acocella, 2012; Arksey & Knight, 1999; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

To facilitate the interaction among the focus group, the latter should be characterised by homogeneity, but not excessive, and without including close friends or relatives; the participants should have similar characteristics and interests, so they can feel equal and express their thoughts more freely, and a wide range of perspectives is also important for group dynamics. (Acocella, 2012; Arksey & Knight, 1999; Morgan, 1997; Neuman, 2014; Stewart et al., 2007; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

The study on cultural consumers in Athens was conducted through focus groups. Five focus groups were formed primarily from acquaintances and acquaintances of acquaintances, following the snowball sampling method. While it's often believed that focus groups should consist of strangers, Morgan (1997) argues that comfort in discussing the topic is more important. The participants, all university graduates or university students, were selected based on criteria such as age (18-55+), gender, education level, and cultural consumption frequency. Gender representation was 80% women and 20% men, reflecting research that women attend cultural events more frequently. Age groups were divided into 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, and 45-55+, with two groups for the popular age range of 35-44. The groups had a maximum of five participants each, totalling 26 people, with no incentives provided for participation. Marital status and life cycle were not considered as criteria, as age categorization was deemed sufficient.

Morgan claims that there should be “more than one group in each segment” (Morgan, 1997, p. 44), when the researcher uses multiple segments. In my case, I do use multiple age segments but, if we consider these segments as sub-segments of the segment “audiences with high educational level” then we have in total 5 groups of the same segment. The below table presents the basic criteria used for the composition of focus groups (Criteria: sex, age range, educational level, frequency of cultural consumption).

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Focus groups make-up</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Sex</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>78% females and 22% males in total</li> </ul>	The initial aim was 70% females and 30% males in each group and it partially succeeded.
<b>Age</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 group aged 18-24</li> <li>1 group aged 25-34</li> <li>2 groups aged 35-44</li> <li>1 group aged 45-55+</li> </ul>	One of the groups aged 35-44 consisted of Subscribers (to at least one cultural organisation).
<b>Education</b>	All groups consisted of university students or graduates	The group consisted of university students was the age group 18-24
<b>Frequency of Cultural Consumption</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>75% of the participants said they were consuming arts Frequently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Frequently</b></li> </ul> Every week Twice per month Every month

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>25% of the participants said they were consuming arts Non-Frequently</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Non Frequently</b> Every three months Twice per year At least once per year</li> </ul>
--	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

*Table 2. Criteria of focus groups*

## Results

In the results of this research, participants in focus groups were labelled with letters and numbers to indicate their gender and age, with “F” for females, “M” for males, and “S” for those with cultural subscriptions, followed by their age. Participants were also categorized by age groups: "Young" (18-34), "Middle age" (35-44), and "Old" (45-55+).

The findings reveal that the main motivation for attending cultural events is seeking stimuli, followed by socializing and using it as an alternative outing. Other motivations include consuming art for its own sake, entertainment, following specific artists, and educational purposes. Some young participants linked their cultural consumption to habits formed in childhood. F24 described her interest in understanding different perspectives from artists, while F62 expressed her love for contemporary culture. F21 mentions:

“Performing arts and theatre in particular is the ultimate expression of the human soul, something that makes me feel complete as a human being”.

The participant highlights a need for belonging, wanting to feel part of the audience attending a performance together. For her, cultural events also provide relaxation, stress relief, and a means of self-expression. As a theatre student, F21 feels the need to stay informed about local performances and often form opinions on specific shows.

Some participants identified as "fans," following specific artists, directors, or contributors due to admiration or to reduce the risk of disappointment, whether financial or related to expectations. Being a fan influences the decision-making process, particularly in the stages of information search and evaluating alternatives. Fans, entertainers, and socializers prioritize different attributes when choosing cultural experiences. The choice of attributes, classified as salient (most important) and determinant (decisive when salient attributes are similar), varies based on motivations. For example, those focused on socializing will search for information differently than fans who prioritize following a particular artist.

Some consumers express similar motivations for cultural consumption, categorizing their needs broadly as socializing, pleasure, entertainment, and education. For example, F27 sees art as a necessary part of her education, while others attend for the stimuli they receive (F34, M33, M34). M33, F62, and F59 emphasize the importance of sharing experiences and engaging in post-performance discussions. F27 also mentions belonging to an artistic social circle as a key motivation.

Older participants (35-44) prioritize socializing but share similar motivations with younger attendees, like discovering new perspectives or understanding artists. M42 and F41 highlight sharing experiences and interacting with actors, while F35 adds her passion for dance as a primary motivation.

Some participants, described as "lonely escapists," attend performances alone, focusing on the art itself. F59 and F62, for example, are drawn to contemporary performances. Subscribers like S40, S36, and S35 attend with social groups but also seek stimuli from cultural events.

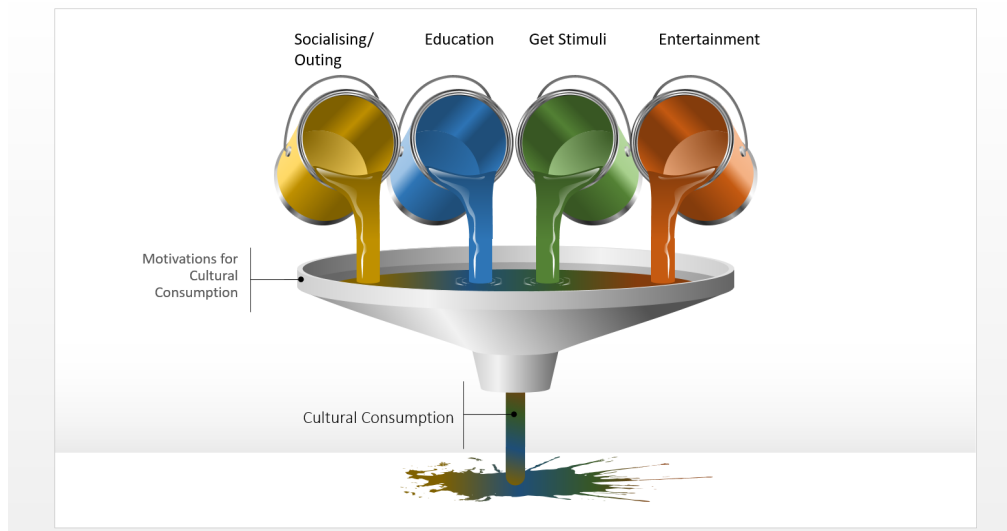
Others, like M64 and M50, focus more on the outing, specific artists, or traditional genres like Greek theatre, with M50 seeking catharsis through more conventional performances. Despite

overlapping motivations, the study categorizes consumers by their dominant motivations, though many have multiple needs.

Categories	Definitions
Get stimuli	Through cultural consumption, individuals explore different perspectives, find creative inspiration, interpret artists' intentions, and see their own thoughts reflected or articulated on stage.
Socialiser	For participants, cultural consumption serves as an opportunity for both socializing and going out, with these activities often being seen as synonymous. This includes sharing the experience and discussing it, as well as enjoying drinks or food together afterward. Socializing also involves interacting with people within the same social, artistic, or other circles.
Art Seeker	Their main incentive is related to the arts. Their cultural consumption seems more qualitative, and they even attend spectacles alone (lonely escapists), as the primary motivation concerns arts. Connoisseurs also fall into this category.
Entertainer	Those who through cultural consumption feel relaxation, pleasure, and escape reality. (*Those who combine entertainment with educational purposes, belong to the so-called category “edutainment”.)
Fans (Groupies)	Fans consume arts primarily due to their strong interest or admiration for specific artists or contributors. They often choose cultural events to mitigate risks, such as economic or expectation-related risks.
Education Seekers	This group views cultural consumption as essential to their education, seeing each cultural event as an opportunity to learn something new or expand their existing knowledge.

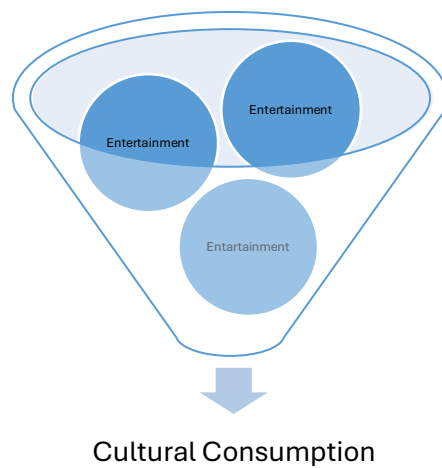
*Table 3. Motivations' Categories*

Below I present a figure (1) that shows the multiple motivations/needs of one participant (F34) at the same time. It also shows the overlapping of the categories: Socialiser, Education Seeker, Get Stimuli, and Entertainer. The funnel of cultural consumption depicted in the graphic below is formed by the combination of motivations. The final colour of the cultural consumption each time depends on the quantity of each motivation. Sometimes the yellow colour might be less, while the blue might prevail.



*Figure 1. Simultaneous Motivations of One Consumer*

Apart from the overlapping motivations though, there are times that cultural consumption derives from the urge of one only motivation. This condition would resemble the below figure (2), where the consumer belongs to an isolated category, that of Entertainer in this case.



*Figure 2. Entertainer's Cultural Consumption*

## Discussion

The objective of this research was to examine the motivations and determining factors that drive audiences to engage with cultural experiences, particularly in the performing arts, with the ultimate aim of assisting arts organizations in developing more strategic and targeted marketing plans. To address this issue, the present paper, recorded the main motivations/needs of a group of people with many differences, but also few similarities in personal factors, such as the educational level. Additionally, the sample under investigation consisted of Greek citizens. Considering this national context, it is worth mentioning that Greece is lacking on the research of the audiences' behaviour in consuming performing arts. Occasionally, little research has been done, on public or private initiatives<sup>1</sup>, but it seems that the focus between them differs. However, research on the audiences of other Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) is available, often conducted through public bodies, with a primary focus on museum audiences<sup>2</sup>. This study addressed part of this research gap by enriching the literature on Athenian audiences' engagement with the performing arts, while simultaneously contributing to the enhancement of arts marketing strategies.

Additionally, this study also offers enriched data regarding consumers' motivations for cultural consumption, data that confirms existing research (Blackwell et al., 2001; Botti, 2000; Ciceo, 2012; Cooper & Tower, 1992; Gordon, 2011; Hill et al., 1995; Kotler & Scheff, 1997; Manolika et al., 2015; McGuire, 1976; Slater, 2007; Walmsley, 2011; Wilcox & Nolte, 1995), but also contradicts it. In detail, it slightly conflicts with existing research, where is mentioned that needs for arts consumption are not related or little related to arts (Hill et al., 1995). This research's results show that some participants have needs related to arts; these are the discerning connoisseurs and not the majority of attenders. The results though reassure also needs that are not related to arts (Bergadaa & Nyeck, 1995; Botti, 2000; Cooper & Tower, 1992; Hume et al., 2007; Manolika et al., 2015; Walmsley, 2011). The research confirms that, unlike other forms of consumption, art consumption is based more on emotional aspects (Botti, 2000). Additionally, it is partly in contrast with the claim that social and esteem needs are the main reasons for attending live performing arts (Ciceo, 2012).

The research on consumer behaviour is inextricably linked to the managerial implication in arts sector. The findings of this research offer actionable insights that arts organizations can utilize to enhance their marketing strategies, adjusting to the specific financial ability of each organisation, in response to societal, technological, and financial changes. By understanding the diverse motivations driving cultural consumption, arts organizations can adopt the following approaches: Segmentation and targeting, tailored experiences, content diversification, embracement of technological advancements, development of flexible pricing models, and fostering community engagement and partnerships. By integrating these approaches, arts organizations can not only attract and retain a broader audience base but also adapt to evolving market conditions, ensuring both cultural relevance and financial sustainability. This research provides a foundation for these strategies, aligning theoretical insights with practical solutions to support long-term growth in the performing arts sector.

Additionally, this study contributes to enhancing Athens' cultural market by improving the quality and diversity of offerings, potentially driving greater cultural participation. It also

---

<sup>1</sup> One public research that can be mentioned is the one from National Centre for Social Research (Εθνικό Κέντρο Κοινωνικών Ερευνών-EKKE) in 2015 with the title "*Socioeconomic Class, Social Status and Consumption: Stratification, Mobility and Urban Consumption in Athens (Κοινωνικο-Οικονομική Τάξη, Κοινωνική Θέση και Κατανάλωση: Διαστρωμάτωση, Κινητικότητα και Αστική Κατανάλωση στην Αθήνα)*". The private research was conducted by MRB on behalf of OCC in 2015. Its title was "Exit survey for OCC".

<sup>2</sup> Such as <http://www.statistics.gr/el/home>.



provides Athenian audiences with insights into how their cultural behaviour is shaped by their needs, fostering greater awareness.

The findings serve as a benchmark for future research, enabling comparisons over time and across urban contexts to explore evolving audience needs and motivations. By integrating these results with studies from other European cities, researchers can use quantitative methods to generalize findings, enriching the fields of sociology and cultural studies while supporting evidence-based strategies for cultural engagement.

## Bibliography

- Acocella, I. (2012). The focus groups in social research: Advantages and disadvantages. *Quality & Quantity*, 46(4), 1125–1136. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-011-9600-4>
- Arksey, H., & Knight, P. (1999). *Interviewing for Social Scientists: An Introductory Resource with Examples*. Sage Publications.
- Bergadaa, M., & Nyeck, S. (1995). Quel marketing pour les activites artistiques : Une analyse qualitative comparee des motivations des consommateurs et producteurs de theatre. *Recherche et Applications En Marketing*, 10(4), 27–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/076737019501000402>
- Blackwell, R. D., Miniard, P. W., & Engel, J. F. (2001). *Consumer Behavior* (9th ed.). Harcourt College Publishers.
- Botti, S. (2000). What Role for Marketing in the Arts? An Analysis of Arts Consumption and Artistic Value. *International Journal of Arts Management*, 2(3), 14–27.
- Ciceo, A. (2012). Attending Live Performing Arts Experiences. Why And How Is The Decision Taken? *Annals of Faculty of Economics*, 1(1), 1119–1126.
- Cooper, P., & Tower, R. (1992). Inside the Consumer Mind: Consumer Attitudes to the Arts. *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 34(No. 4, October), 299–311.
- Gemini, L., & Brilli, S. (2018). Il pubblico del teatro contemporaneo: Fra auto-osservazione e processi di fruizione. *Comunicazioni Sociali*, 2018(3), 448–462. [https://doi.org/10.26350/001200\\_000031](https://doi.org/10.26350/001200_000031)
- Gordon, Averill. (2011). *Public relations*. Oxford University Press.
- Hill, E., O'Sullivan, C., & O'Sullivan, T. (1995). *Creative arts marketing*. Butterworth Heinemann.
- Hume, M., Mort, G. S., & Winzar, H. (2007). Exploring repurchase intention in a performing arts context: who comes? and why do they come back? *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12(2), 135–148. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.284>
- Kim, K., & Tucker, E. D. (2016). Assessing and segmenting entertainment quality variables and satisfaction of live event attendees: A cluster analysis examination. *Journal of Convention and Event Tourism*, 17(2), 112–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15470148.2015.1101035>
- Kolhede, E. J., & Gomez-Arias, J. T. (2016). Segmentation of infrequent performing arts consumers. *Arts and the Market*, 6(1), 88–110. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAM-04-2014-0015>
- Kotler, P., & Scheff, J. (1997). *Standing room only: strategies for marketing the performing arts*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Le, H., Jones, B., Williams, T., & Dolnicar, S. (2016). Communicating to culture audiences. *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*, 34(4), 462–485. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-05-2015-0102>

- Manolika, M., Baltzis, A., & Tsigilis, N. (2015). Measuring Motives for Cultural Consumption: A Review of the Literature. *American Journal of Applied Psychology*, 3(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.12691/AJAP-3-1-1>
- Mauri, C. A., & Wolf, A. F. (2021). Battle of the ballet: Household decisions on arts consumption. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 45(3), 359–383. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-020-09395-z>
- McGuire, W. J. (1976). Some Internal Psychological Factors Influencing Consumer Choice. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2(4), 302–319.
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Pearson Education Limited.
- Slater, A. (2007). ‘Escaping to the gallery’: understanding the motivations of visitors to galleries. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing*, 12(2), 149–162. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nvsm.282>
- Souza Olegario, L., Estevéz, M., González-Mohino, A., Madruga, M. S., & Ventanas, S. (2021). Cross-cultural emotional response to food stimuli: Influence of consumption context. *Food Research International*, 142, Article 110194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodres.2021.110194>
- Stewart, D. W., Shamdasani, P. N., & Rook, D. W. (2007). *Focus Groups: Theory and Practice*. Sage Publications. [https://books.google.com.om/books?id=Rb9KlLtpGe8C&printsec=frontcover&hl=ar&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](https://books.google.com.om/books?id=Rb9KlLtpGe8C&printsec=frontcover&hl=ar&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Taylor, S. J., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource* (3rd ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Walmsley, B. (2011). Why do people go to the theatre: A qualitative study of audience motivation. *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 10(4), 335–351. <https://doi.org/10.1362/147539211X13210329822545>
- Walmsley, B. (2019). The death of arts marketing: A paradigm shift from consumption to enrichment. *Arts and the Market*, 9(1), 32–49. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAM-10-2018-0013>
- Wilcox, D. L., & Nolte, L. W. (1995). *Public relations writing and media techniques* (2nd ed). HarperCollins College Publishers.