CultureCase

Education levels determine theatre attendance

This research was conducted by **José María Grisolía, Ken Willis, Colin Wymer and Andrew Law** at **Newcastle University, UK**

Summary

This paper reports a study that used box office data to compare areas in northeast England where regular theatregoers live with those with areas that have no theatre-going residents. By profiling the those neighbourhoods they found that education was the most important factor in determining the likelihood that someone would attend the theatre, with religiousity (or lack thereof), occupation and socio-economic status also playing a role. However they found that the profile of audiences varied according to the type of theatre production.

Box office data were combined with census data

They used a form of statistical analysis to compare the residents of the very highest attending neighbourhoods within 50km of the theatre (Northern Stage in Newcastle Upon Tyne) with those that were home to no attendees whatsoever. Box office data was used to identify the neighbourhoods; census data was used to profile residents in those areas.

Different productions had different audience profiles

Whether it was Shakespeare, comedy or family shows. In all three cases people's levels of education was the strongest determinant of attendance. But they did find that being in full time education or self-employed played a secondary role in determining attendance at comedy and family shows.

Some people seem to derive a sense of entitlement from their education

The authors ponder why education was such a strong determinant, especially when people with high-status occupations did not behave in the same way in relation to theatre attendance as the well-educated. To reach new or diverse audiences the authors suggest that progamming needs to cater to the interests and tastes of non-elite sections of society. Taste, expectation and entitlement is embedded early in life, suggesting that reaching out to young children will lead to a more representative audience for theatre in the future.

Keywords

theatre **UK** **audience** **education** **box office** **attendance** **census** **profile**

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