CultureCase

Word-of-mouth and reviews make the biggest difference to people's theatre-going choices

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

Summary

The paper describes a study that examined how people in northeast England made decisions about what theatre performances to attend. Word-of-mouth and reviews were the most significant factors determining whether or not people chose to attend a particular performance (and bad reviews put people off more than good reviews enticed them).

A series of focus groups identified the key components that determine how people choose to attend the theatre

These were: ticket price, reviews (poor, average etc.), word-of-mouth (as with reviews), author (known or unknown), genre of play, repertory classification (classic, adaptation etc.), venue (five theatres in the Newcastle area were chosen as alternatives). The data for the research were gathered using a survey distributed to theatregoers at Northern Stage. The survey asked people to identify the attributes of a theatre experience that they valued most. A total of 332 questionnaires were returned.

The exceptions to the rule

There was one group of people who proved to be an exception: people who were already frequent theatregoers and who had high levels of education paid less attention to reviews and word of mouth.

Because the research asked about the influence of price on people's decision to attend a performance, the researchers were able to undertake a few 'willingness to pay' calculations with the data. (Their results varied hugely [between £58.26 and 61p] depending on people's circumstances and their perception of the show's likely quality.)

Key recommendations

Due to the importance of word-of-mouth they emphasise the need to cultivate a buzz about a performance, perhaps through existing social networks or social media. The authors also suggest that theatres should offer different price points for the same performance.

Keywords

theatre **UK** **reviews** **choice** **preference** **survey** **willingness-to-pay** **word-of-mouth**

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