CultureCase

People like performances with large casts and small ticket prices

This research was conducted by **Kristien Werck and Bruno Heyndels** at **Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium**

Summary

This paper tries to explain what motivated people to attend the theatre in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium. A sense of artistic growth and development in recent decades has been accompanied by steadily declining audience numbers. From analysing box office data the authors found that audiences preferred plays by Dutch-speaking playwrights, productions with large casts, and revivals of old successful plays. Increases in ticket price and decreases in people's income suppressed their appetite to buy theatre tickets.

The research was premised on the principles that 'characteristics, not goods themselves, are relevant to consumers' and that theatre productions can be classified according to various characteristics

It was also in the context of a 40 per cent decline in theatre audiences between 1980 and 2000. They used box office data from 59 theatres in Flanders. Over that time the average ticket price increased by around 50 per cent. About half of the theatres were subsidised by the government, and the sample was a mix of resident and touring theatre companies (they accounted for this difference in their analysis).

In their analysis they look at five characteristics about a play: its language, playwright's age, whether it was an adaption, cast size and whether it was a new work

Their analysis also included factors such as the per capita income of their target audience, ticket prices (both for the theatre and alternative attractions such cinemas) and other salient factors. In the 20 years between 1980 and 2000 productions were more likely to be smaller in cast size, by a living playwright, in Dutch, and be adaptations. They found that factors under the control of the theatre (particularly cast size) contributed to the decline in attendance over the 20-year period that was covered by the data.

Keywords

decision-making **theatre** **audience** **box office** **Belgium** **preference**

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