CultureCase

How seasonality and segmentation affect the demand for live theatre

This research was conducted by **Jonathan Corning and Armando Levy** at the **Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City, USA**.

Summary

This study took box office data from three venues used by a theatre company based in southern California, the Pacific Conservatory of the Performing Arts (PCPA), to analyse the preferences of single ticket buyers. The findings revealed that audiences have pre-existing preferences for five genres of performance (Shakespeare; Comedy; Drama; Holiday; Musical) and that on the whole these inclinations remain, regardless of changes in festival programmes, specific times of year or seasonal offers. Both positive reviews and the seasonality of the performance in the year had little effect on the demand of single ticket buyers, though prime times (Friday evenings/weekends/evenings) remained consistently popular.

Research analysed data collected between 1990 and 1998

The aim of the research was to establish whether a theatre goer’s purchase of a ticket for a single performance matched with the existing preferences shown by that venue's audience. It explored to what extent other factors such as seasonal ticket discounts, time and season of the performance, critics’ reviews and past attendances at the theatre had an impact on their behaviour. The findings revealed that year-round offerings of one venue which catered for the audiences’ preferred performance genre encouraged loyalty from that audience and helped establish a habit of theatre going amongst them.

Existing audience preferences shape demand for theatre

The researchers pointed out that attending the theatre is a time-intensive activity, which often includes an additional cost of a restaurant meal. Considerations of time commitment and expense could be contributing factors to audiences sticking to performance genres they already know they enjoy. The research showed that if audiences were affected by past experience then it could be worth cultivating demand for a specific genre of performance to garner loyalty.

This summary is written by **Charlotte Fereday, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

theatre **USA** **audience** **box office**

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