CultureCase

Subsidised performances are more innovative and imaginative

This research was conducted by **Joshua Edelman and Maja Šorli** at the **University of London, UK** and the **University of Ljubljana, Slovenia**

Summary

Findings from a study conducted in 2014 indicate that subsidised performances were considered more challenging than commercial performances. Amateur performances were rated of lower quality but participants praised the effort that was put into them and considered them good ‘value for money’. Subsidised performances led audience members to use their imagination, see reality differently and depicted their story in a more surprising way compared to commercial performances.

How can the experience of a performance be measured?

Over 1,800 people who attended theatre and dance shows in Tyneside, northeast England took part in the study. They completed surveys about their personal characteristics, theatre-going habits, and experience of the performance they had just attended. The survey was conducted at 26 different dance and theatre productions which were either subsidised, amateur or commercial. The survey data was supplemented by group discussions conducted after nine different performances.

The authors found that the quality of a performance can be characterised by a range of descriptors categorised as ‘Impressive’ and ‘Challenging’. Impressive characteristics included ‘exciting’, ‘inspiring’ and ‘beautiful to look at’. Challenging aspects of a performance depicted ‘confrontational’, ‘complicated’ and ‘painfully surprising’ audience experiences.

Why does audience experience differ across type of production?

The authors suggest that funding arrangements lead artists to create different types of performances that in turn provide a different experience for audience members. These methods are a useful way to evaluate the relationship that the audience has with a performance, helping us to understand what value theatre and dance brings to society.

This summary is by **Tanya Graham, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

theatre **focus group** **UK** **audience** **subsidy** **survey** **performance**

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Author email	**joshua.edelman@cssd.ac.uk**

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