

Theatre-going as a type of 'rational addiction'

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This research was conducted by **Concetta Castiglione and Davide Infante** at the **University of Bologna and University of Calabria, Italy**

Summary

This study looked at whether 'rational addiction' theories may help explain theatre-going in Italy. It took data across a 34-year period to discover that a rational addiction model of habit-formation can actually help explain and predict patterns of theatre attendance. In essence, attending more tends to predict an increase in future attendance, although this is sensitive to ticket prices. Education and disposable income are also found to influence theatre attendance.

The study is based on Italian data

Specifically, it used a statistical analysis of theatre-going in the 20 Italian regions over a 34-year period (1980-2013). These data are gathered at the regional level and derived from two sources: the Italian Society for Authors and Publishers and the Italian Institute of Statistics.

Theatre is addictive

Theories of so-called 'addictive' behaviours account for the fact that past choices influence future consumption, while 'rationality' corresponds to a full knowledge of the expected consequences of one's actions. Rational addiction theory can help explain behaviour in relation to 'beneficial' addictions such as theatre-going, although so far it has been used to describe addictions perceived as 'harmful'.

Public policy can respond to this research

In Italy and elsewhere theatre is publicly subsidised, so policy-makers need to adopt strategies to support theatre attendance that better understand the models that underpin behaviour. For example, if theatre-goers are fully rational (as this paper suggests), government could influence theatre attendance by different policy tools, such as ticket prices, and so reduce or increase the level of public expenditure, but all efforts need to be based on an understanding of the 'rational addiction' model of human behaviour.

This summary is by **Barbara Bravi, King's Knowledge Exchange Associate**

Keywords

theatre **demand** **Italy** **price**

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