

Digital broadcasts of live events do not reduce audience numbers

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This research was conducted by **Hasan Bakhshi and David Throsby** at the **National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, UK** and **Macquarie University, Australia**

Summary

This paper tackled the question of whether digital broadcasts of live events lead to an increase or reduction in the number of attendees at those live events. The competing theories are that either audiences substitute their live experience for a more convenient digital one, or that the digital broadcasts bring in new audiences to the live experience. To test this the authors looked at a broadcast of the National Theatre's production of *Phedre* (which was broadcast live in cinemas). They found that people who lived near a cinema showing *Phedre* were actually more likely to book for a live performance of the play during its run at the National Theatre, and this likelihood increased depending on how near to the National Theatre people lived.

More than 50,000 people saw the performance of 25 June 2009 as it was broadcast live to 280 cinemas worldwide (70 in the UK)

The research compared the audience for the run of *Phedre* with the audience for two other plays at the National Theatre that were not broadcast to cinemas. These were productions of a similar type at a similar time of year, which National Theatre staff believed would have attracted a similar audience profile to *Phedre*. This technique allowed the researchers to identify what difference the cinema broadcasts made to the audience numbers and profile.

Increased publicity seems to have made the difference

Publicity generated by local cinemas showing the play may have increased people's awareness or motivation to book for the live experience. This is borne out by further analysis showing that people living near participating cinemas who booked to see the play live did so at a steady rate through the run of the season, but there was a jump in the number of bookings after an early blast of publicity by the National Theatre and participating cinemas prior to the run beginning.

Keywords

digital **theatre** **UK** **audience** **cinema** **box office** **live** **broadcast**

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