

Measuring intrinsic benefits of theatre with the Arts Audience Experience Index

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Summary

This paper summarises the early development of the Arts Audience Experience Index by researchers and arts organisations in Australia. It is an adaptable tool that can be used to measure the intrinsic impacts of attendance at arts events across four general themes: knowledge, risk, authenticity and collective engagement. The Index is a way of generating comparable and quantifiable scores for the way in which arts organisations benefit their audiences. The score is arrived at by asking audience members about a range of statements that test the degree to which the performance they have just seen matches their expectations.

A series of focus groups were used to arrive at the four themes of the Index

These took place amongst regular and first-time attenders at a handful of live music and theatre venues in Australia. People were asked to reflect on the performance that they had seen, and their experience of it. Four general themes emerged that impact on how people derive benefits by attending: knowledge (whether people are equipped to appreciate what they are seeing), risk (whether people feel like they are 'ready' for a particular performance – and that they are getting value for money), authenticity (whether the experience is 'believable' and performers fully and sincerely engaged with the work) and collective engagement (whether it is an interactive shared experience with performers and other audience members).

The research focused on two organisations who refined the framework for their own specific aims. In the first instance the themes of the Index were interrogated by a focus group to refine the kind of experience that the theatre might offer patrons, and in the second a theatre surveyed audience members to calculate an Experience Index score that they could track over time.

Keywords

theatre **focus group** **Australia** **audience** **index** **experience** **attendance**

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