

Perception of value, not simply price, attracts young people to arts events

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Summary

This paper used a survey to explore what factors shape the arts-attending behavior of university students. The results showed that the cost of attendance was a factor in people's considerations, although what mattered most was whether or not they thought the event would be good entertainment.

Survey respondents were studying at Westminster University in London in 1995

In total there were 181 responses from students aged 19-24. 38% of respondents had been to a performing arts event since starting university. Non-attenders were asked to select from a list the reasons why they did not attend. The most common reason was cost (31% of people selected that), then came a belief that it might be boring (29%), a lack of information (19%), an 'inability to understand the arts' (12%) and finally 'social pressure not to attend' (12%).

The survey used a variety of questions to understand the importance of price

When people were asked elsewhere in the survey to simply state why they might not attend only 1.5% spontaneously mentioned price, and (also elsewhere) when asked to rank possible factors for not-attending, price was ranked 10th (the top-ranking factors related to the quality of the experience).

Non-arts-attenders spent the same as arts-attenders on a night out

'The usual assumption made about the youth market is that non-attenders lack the money to attend.' Hence lowering the cost of attendance should increase the number of people attending. But the data revealed reasons to be suspicious of the claim that price is a key factor. Males and ethnic minorities spend the same (or more) than average on entertainment, despite being less likely to attend the arts. Many of the higher-spending students understood that they could afford to attend the arts if they wanted to.

Increased quality of experience and reduced prices are both required to increase attendance

'To successfully attract non-attending students, performing arts events must be reasonably priced, be perceived as entertaining and have built into them opportunities to socialise.'

Keywords

young people UK students performing arts price survey

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