



Motives for attending live stand-up comedy: an audiences' perspective

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Abstract

Traditional arts institutions like theatres are battling to sustain audiences due to an abundance of competing leisure and entertainment activities as well as fewer of the young generations showing interest in live theatre performances. Arts institutions are therefore increasingly focused on capturing, satisfying and sustaining audience by means of understanding their audience's needs in terms of art consumption. Research exploring performing arts consumption from an audiences' perspective is, however, very limited. Indeed, relatively little is known about what really is of significance for audiences when they visit the theatre and is particularly true in the South African theatre context. Furthermore, motives appear to differ from genre to genre suggesting that arts audiences are heterogeneous in terms of their motives. This article therefore explores the motives of a particular theatre genre: live stand-up comedy as this genre, despite being an increasing popular mode of entertainment, has been overlooked in most theatre studies. The research findings contribute to understanding the profile and motives of the comedy theatre market in South Africa, and the study narrows the gap in arts literature regarding theatre audiences for a particular type of theatre production. It is suggested that knowledge of audiences' motives be used as a differentiating strategy to assist in creating a competitive advantage over the abundance of permanent live stand-up comedy venues in Cape Town, South Africa.

Keywords: audience, live stand-up comedy, motive, South Africa, theatre.

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive world, traditional arts institutions such as inter alia theatres, battle to sustain audiences, especially considering the abundance of modern day leisure and entertainment activities these institutions compete with (Passebois & Aurier, 2004:76). Swanson et al. (2008:317) argue that knowledge of the motives driving performing arts attendance can assist theatres' competitiveness in a crowded market place. In addition, Scollen (2007:47) warns that "... with an ageing population, and fewer of the younger generations attending live theatre performances, it appears that audiences are declining". In responding to this crowded marketplace and lack of support from younger generations, arts institutions are now focused on capturing, satisfying and keeping audience by means of understanding their audience's needs in terms of art consumption (Passebois & Aurier, 2004:78).

Investigations exploring performing arts consumption, particularly from a motivation perspective, is very limited (McCarthy & Jinnet, 2001:11; De Rooij, 2013:20). Indeed, theatres, including researchers, still know relatively little about the significance of visiting theatres (Lindelof & Hansen, 2015:235). Kruger and Saayman (2015a:4) argue that this is particularly true in the South African context as few empirical investigations have focused on the South African theatre audience.



Walmsley (2011:336) states that the lack of research is due to performing arts being "... a complicated pastime, bridging the fields of arts and leisure and the drivers of aesthetics, hedonics, emotions, education and entertainment." Furthermore, theatre is said to be perishable, intangible and people oriented (Hume et al., 2007:136) which makes theatre a "... social, situational and experiential phenomenon rather than a fixed or tangible product" (Walmsley, 2011:336). Many theatre marketers and event managers, therefore, miss the mark as they are unable to critically reflect on why their audiences engage with theatre, resulting in their marketing not connecting with their audiences and ticket sales suffering accordingly (Walmsley, 2011:336).

This article proposes to explore the motives of attending theatre performances, and is focused on a particular theatre genre: live stand-up comedy, which involves "... a single performer standing in front of an audience, talking to them with the specific intention of making them laugh" (Double, 2005:18). The appeal of stand-up comedy from the audiences' perspective, albeit being an increasingly popular theatre genre, has been overlooked in performance studies, comedy studies, cultural studies, sociology, and media and communications (Lockyer & Myers, 2011:183). In addition, Kruger and Saayman (2015a:13) found that the motives of audiences at a particular theatre genre (e.g. musical) cannot be applied to audiences at other theatre genres (e.g. comedy). They argue that motivation is "... a dynamic concept that may vary from one person to another, from one market segment to another, from one event to another, and from one decision-making process to the next" (Kruger & Saayman, 2015a:3). The research was therefore motivated by the limited knowledge of the comedy theatre audience and built on the call of Kruger and Saayman (2015a:3) for further consumer research on the motives of audiences for attending different types of productions. This paper determines the profile and motives of audiences at a live stand-up comedy production in South Africa, the Jive Cape Town Funny Festival (hereafter referred to as "Funny Festival"), the brainchild of Eddy Cassar who started the event in 1997; now considered as one of Cape Town's premier events that runs annually at the popular Baxter Theatre which is an iconic landmark in Cape Town (Eddy Cassar Public Relations and Promotions, 2017).

Understanding audience motives for attending performing arts

Motivation is classically defined as "... a state of need, a condition that exerts a push on the individual towards certain types of action that are seen as likely to bring satisfaction" (Moutinho 1987:16). From a socio-psychological standpoint, Iso-Ahola (1982:258) argued that motives are "... aroused when individuals think of certain activities they could, should, or might do in the future, activities that are potentially satisfaction-producing". Mitchell (1982:81) defined motivation as "... those psychological processes that cause arousal, direction, and persistence of voluntary actions that are goal oriented". Attending a theatre production, for example, is a voluntary action initiated by a desire to meet a certain need (Crompton & McKay, 1997:425), while needs are seen as the "... forces which arouse motivated behaviour" (Boekstein, 2012:85). Theatre marketers and event managers should, therefore, be informed of the needs that audiences seek to satisfy (Park et al., 2008:162) in order to sustain theatres.

A number of authors, as discussed below, have discerned specific audience motives for attending performing arts. Bergadaà and Nyeck (1995) steered one of the first and most comprehensive investigations of audience motivation. These authors found four core motives for attending theatre: personal enrichment, entertainment/escapism, social hedonism and edutainment. After isolating underlying values behind these core motives, they concluded by suggesting two distinct motivation typologies: sensory experience and intellectual stimulation. Boudier-Pailler (1999) found three main goals for attending performing arts: intellectual enrichment, social hedonism and arousal of emotions. Caldwell (2001) referred to enrichment (transcendence, intellectual enrichment, affective stimulation), reduction (finding tranquility, escapism, recuperation), communion (celebrity



attachment, family/friendship bonds, unity), and distinction (superiority, social comparison, self-determination, uniqueness). Johnson and Garbarino (2001) suggested two goal orientations for theatre attendance: leisure (relaxation, entertainment, social goals) and enrichment (including emotional and educational experience).

Boter (2005) found excitement, aesthetic stimulation, need for stories and empathy as well as fun and enjoyment. Swanson et al. (2008) found that audiences at live performances are motivated by social interaction, recreation, education, aesthetics, escape and enhancement of self-esteem. Walmsley (2011) investigated the specific motives of visitors to the *West Yorkshire Playhouse* in the United Kingdom (UK) and the *Melbourne Theatre Company* in Australia. The core motive driving attendance was the desire to maximise the emotional impact of the experience, followed by escapism and edutainment. Furthermore, Walmsley (2011) adapted Morris Hargreaves McIntyre's (2007) matrix on why people visit museums and galleries in the UK and transposed it to theatre. The matrix suggests multiple motives that are divided into five key drivers for attending theatre: spiritual, sensual, emotional, intellectual and social. These drivers are mapped against audiences' stated needs and motives and also against Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which classifies motivation into a hierarchy of human needs and include, in order of decreasing importance, basic physiological needs; the need for safety and security; love, belonging and affection needs; self-esteem needs; and the need for self-actualisation.

Lockyer and Myers (2011) examined the appeal of live stand-up comedy to largely UK audiences and found five main motives to seeing live stand-up comedy: sharing the comic experience; expecting the unexpected; respecting the stand-up comedian; opportunities for interaction; and proximity and intimacy. Kruger and Saayman (2015a) found four motives for attendees at the South African musical theatre production of *RAIN! A tribute to the Beatles*: group affiliation, artist affiliation and entertainment, social interaction and unique experience, and identified two attendee segments: *Music lovers* and *Beatle maniacs*. Saayman and Saayman (2016) investigated audiences' motives of attending the *Philharmonic Orchestra Festival* in South Africa and found three core motives: escape, socialisation and event attractiveness from which they identified three segments: the *Vintage males*, the *Vintage females* and the *Modern enthusiasts*. Kruger and Saayman (2017) identified five core motives for attending Andrew Lloyd Weber's *The Phantom of the Opera*: group affiliation and fun, unique experience, entertainment, appraisal and socialisation from which they identified two segments: *Phantom lite* and *Phantom deluxe*.

De Rooij (2013) conducted a literature review of the totality of performing arts-related motives and distinguished between intrinsically and extrinsically motivated people. An intrinsically (or culturally) motivated person is either interested in arts in general or in a specific performance, performer or genre, while an extrinsically (or socially) motivated person's interest extends beyond the actual product, for example, enjoying a nice evening out with friends and/or family (Schippers, 2015:15). While there is no agreed model in the current literature on how to categorise, conceptualise and operationalise consumption motives in the performing arts (Swanson et al., 2008) as can be seen in the studies discussed above, De Rooij (2013:38) identified eight dominant motives found in the arts literature: entertainment, variety and novelty, reduction, aesthetics, cognitive stimulation, bonding, distinction and transcendence. De Rooij (2013:155-156) developed a framework which distinguishes between the cultural character and social character of consumption motives and suggests that cultural aesthetics, cultural reduction, cultural stimulation, social duty, social attraction, social distinction and social bonding (Figure 1), are the key motives of attending performing arts:

- Cultural aesthetics are regarded as the core motivation of theatre audiences. They desire to get touched or affected by aesthetics and want to enjoy performing arts.

- Cultural reduction refers to attendees wanting a pleasant, carefree, enjoyable evening out by means of cultural amusement. These attendees divert and are passive consumers of performing arts. This motive primarily combines entertainment and reduction, but also extends to variety and novelty and aesthetics.
- Cultural stimulation refers to attendees seeking an enjoyable experience by means of artistic inspiration. These attendees are active consumers of performing arts: some are just regular consumers, while others are amateurs or even professionals who perform themselves. Although primarily relating to cognitive stimulation, this motive includes elements of reduction, variety and novelty as well as aesthetics.
- Social attraction refers to attendees who prefer spending their leisure time with like-minded individuals, however, it is a mostly subconscious or concealed motive.
- Social distinction refers to those attendees distinguishing themselves from others by making favourable impressions and appears to be another subconscious motive.
- Social bonding refers to attendees wanting social engagements with friends and/or family and choose a performing arts performance as a social activity.
- Social duty refers to attendees supporting friends, family, or relatives performing on stage.



Figure 1: Framework for consumption motives to attend performing arts
Source: Adapted from De Rooij (2013:155)

Although there are some similarities in the motives for attending performing arts in the studies discussed above, Kruger and Saayman (2012:199) warn that motives not only differ from genre to genre, but results also differ from location to location, implying that the results of one study cannot be applied to other areas, regions, or countries. Therefore, arts audiences should not be viewed as a homogeneous group of consumers (Kruger & Saayman, 2015b:56). By implication, the findings by Lockyer and Myers (2011) on live stand-up comedy in the UK cannot equally apply to South African theatre audiences. Furthermore, profiling and determining the motives of live stand-up comedy productions has not previously been investigated in the local South African context.

By measuring the main needs that theatre audiences seek to satisfy, and which motivational factors drive attendance to a particular genre such as orchestras, opera, musicals plays, stand-up comedy, contemporary dance and ballet (Scollen, 2008:49), a more detailed profile of the audiences can be



obtained which is important because this, in turn, allows managers and marketers to improve their planning in terms of addressing these needs of audiences with a tailor-made production programme and artist line-up (Yen & Yu, 2012a:214; Dikmen & Bozdağlar, 2013:730), as well as ultimately improving audience attendance at live theatre performances (McCarthy & Jinnat, 2001:18). Audiences are crucial to the success of live stand-up comedy performances. Indeed as argued by Double (2005:106) "... take the audience away from stand-up comedy and it starts to look weird ... stand-up comedy without an audience is only half there". Therefore, with this knowledge, theatre marketers and event organisers could engage performers (artists/comedians) that are attuned to the needs and preferences of the comedy audience, thus ensuring competitive and sustainable theatre productions (Kruger & Saayman, 2015a:17). Furthermore, measuring motives may assist in differentiating one production from another (Yen & Yu, 2012b:35; Dikmen & Bozdağlar, 2013:730), serve as a useful basis to improve positioning the production in the minds of prospective and existing audiences (Yen & Yu, 2012b:34) and increase satisfaction levels (Walmsley, 2011:336; Kitterlin & Yoo, 2014:120).

It is for the above reasons imperative that the Baxter Theatre marketers and the event manager of the Funny Festival know who their target audience is, and why theatre audiences attend live stand-up comedy as it can assist in the future sustainability and competitiveness of this production as well as increase satisfaction with the theatre experience, especially considering the increasingly crowded and competitive marketplace in which theatres operate. This research therefore contributes to understanding the profile and motives of the comedy theatre market in South Africa and narrows the gap in arts literature regarding theatre audiences for a particular type of theatre production.

Methodology

Sampling method and data collection

The Baxter Theatre and festival director had been informed about the research and had given the necessary permission to proceed with the fieldwork. Fieldworkers ensured that they followed the ethical requirements of the festival and that participant's feedback remained anonymous. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before the distribution of questionnaires. Respondents were not coerced nor incentivised, thus respondents participated voluntarily. Furthermore, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

A quantitative methodology was employed by using a self-administered structured questionnaire. Research was conducted onsite at the Funny Festival in the foyer and bar area of the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. The production ran over four weeks, the first performance started on 10 July and the last performance was on 6 August 2017. Fieldworkers visited the theatre on a pre-determined date sequence: data was collected on Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Sunday during week one. For week two, data was collected on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. Weeks three and four followed the same sequence.

A spatially-based, systematic purposive sampling method considers selecting every *n*th element of the target population in which the first participant is chosen randomly and every *n*th participant will be chosen thereafter (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008:89). Floyd and Fowler (2009:25) assert that the randomised beginning ensures an unplanned collection technique. The fieldworkers were therefore spatially based inside the Baxter Theatre and randomly selected any person to sample who passed through the bar and foyer areas at a particular point. Thereafter every third person was approached. The production attracted approximately 19 000 attendees (Cassar, 2017). To achieve a 95% confidence level, a sample size (*n*) of 377 is recommended for any defined population (*N*) of 19



000 (Sekaran, 2000:295). In total, 384 questionnaires were distributed of which 307 were completed and returned, which when worked back, equated to a 90% confidence level and an 80% response rate.

The questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was developed which included mostly closed-ended questions (fixed-response questions) with one final open-ended question. The questionnaire was divided into two main sections including audiences' profile (demographics), and audiences' motives to attend the production, which was measured by using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = not at all important, 2 = unimportant, 3 = neither important nor unimportant, 4 = important, 5 = very important). The final open-ended question asked participants to elaborate on what they would like to add to the production to make it more appealing. Attendees were required to rate 21 motivation factors representing seven categories, as adapted from the "Framework for consumption motives to attend performing arts" (Figure 1). Specific motive statements were borrowed and adapted as required from similar studies (Swanson et al., 2008; Walmsley, 2011; Kruger & Saayman, 2015a, 2015b; Schippers, 2015; Hattingh & Swart, 2016; Saayman & Saayman, 2016; Kruger & Saayman, 2017). The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 was used to code, capture and analyse the data from the 307 completed questionnaires. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the audience's profile as well as the most important motives for attending the Funny Festival.

Results and discussion

Audience profile

Table 1 indicates that the 'average' attendee was a mixture of men (50.5%) and women (49.5%) who were relatively young; when combined, 74% were between 18 and 40 years old. The age profile does not support Scollen's (2007:46) concern that theatre audiences are an ageing market. It most likely depends on the genre or type of production on offer at the theatre.

This finding suggests that stand-up comedy is more popular among younger theatre audiences, essentially answering Kruger and Saayman's (2015a:14) question: "what is it that young people enjoy, in other words, what motivates young people so that theatres can attract them?" The 'average' attendee was mostly coupled (36%), held a position in admin/sales (15%), while many were government employees (12%) and educators (12%), and had a tertiary qualification (86%). Scollen (2008:5) argued that the higher the level of education, the more inclined a person will be to attend theatre productions, since s/he has the "... intellectual/aesthetic knowledge to engage". Event and theatre marketers can now improve their target marketing strategies as the findings suggest an audience consisting of mostly younger and educated attendees.

The production further attracted mostly coloured (mixed race) attendees (47%) from the Western Cape Province (84%) who did not regularly attend theatre productions (53%). Therefore, more than half were not avid theatre supporters, suggesting that the Funny Festival could be a unique production attracting this kind of audience to the Baxter Theatre. It is evident that attending live stand-up comedy is considered by many as a social experience as attendees attended in groups ranging between two to three (62%) with a partner (32%) or family (24%) and friends (20%).



Table 1. Descriptive profile of respondents (n = 307, in %)

Variable	%	Variable	%
Gender Male Female	49.5 50.5	Race African White Coloured Indian Asian	22 20 47 9 2
Age 18-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61 and older Confidential	8 38 28 15 5 1 5	Event Companionship Partner Family Friends Alone Colleagues	32 24 20 14 10
Education No formal education Primary completed Secondary completed Certificate/diploma Undergraduate degree Post-graduate degree	4 1 9 37 26 23	Group size One Two to three Four to five More than five	14 62 21 3
Marital status Single Relationship Married Divorced	33 36 28 3	Regular attendance of theatre productions Yes No	47 53
Occupation Student Education Admin/sales Manager/executive Business professional Technical Government employee Self-employed Unemployed Retired Homemaker Medical professional	11 12 15 9 10 9 12 9 5 1 2 5	Attendance at this event First time Two to five Six to ten More than ten times	41 50 8 1
Province of residence Western Cape Gauteng Eastern Cape Free State Mpumalanga Northern Cape & Limpopo Kwazulu-Natal	84 4 4 3 2 1 2	Revisit intention Yes No Maybe	90 1 9

Surprisingly, 41% were first-time attendees, while half (50%) of respondents had attended between two and five times, suggesting that at least half of all attendees are *somewhat* loyal. Furthermore, attendees indicated very high rates of future revisit intention (90%). Revisit intention is considered to be an important factor in a saturated marketplace (Puad Mat Som et al., 2012:39) in which



competing leisure activities' survival depend on how well they adjust their marketing strategies in order to grow attendee loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). It is understood that return attendees not only generate positive word-of-mouth, serve as a steady source of revenue, and increase market share, but also minimise the marketing and operational costs (Khuong & Ha, 2014:491). Ultimately, return attendees are vital to the sustainability of theatre audiences to ensure continued success (Kitterlin & Yoo, 2014:120).

Audiences' motives for attending the Funny Festival

While the main purpose of this paper was to determine the motives to attend a theatre production, or a live stand-up comedy production more specifically, the lack of comedy audience research required the analysis of motives and the comparison of the findings with previous research, to be directed by the broader framework of special events such as festivals, live performances and theatre productions in general.

The standard deviation (SD) describes the extent to which data values differ from the mean (Saunders et al., 2009:445) and provides a reflection of how homogeneous or heterogeneous a sample is (Ramchander, 2004:121-122). All motives received ratings from the lowest (1) to the highest (5), with comparatively high SDs suggesting a relatively heterogeneous sample. The means of individual motives were calculated to determine the importance scores. The mean importance scores were used to rank each motive (Table 2). Higher means reflect higher importance, while lower means reflect less importance.

Table 2. Motives' mean scores (n = 307)

Rank	Motive	Mean Score	SD
1.	To be entertained by my favourite comedian(s)	4.30	0.763
2.	To enjoy the unique atmosphere	4.12	0.770
3.	To socialise with friends, family or colleagues	4.10	0.747
4.	To relax and have fun	4.07	0.834
5.	Because I enjoy comedy (i.e. crying from laughter)	4.01	0.934
6.	To share the festival with someone special	3.92	0.911
7.	To explore/learn new things (new/unknown comedians)	3.91	0.852
8.	To meet/interact with my favourite comedian	3.87	1.049
9.	To support the performing arts industry	3.85	0.862
10.	To learn about international cultures	3.83	0.904
11.	For a chance to be with people who enjoy performing arts	3.79	0.911
12.	To enjoy the sound, sights & costumes associated with theatre	3.77	0.979
13.	To meet new people with similar interests	3.69	1.032
14.	To experience community pride	3.68	0.887
15.	To escape from my daily routine and responsibilities	3.67	1.123
16.	Annual commitment	3.62	1.091
17.	To learn about South African cultures	3.56	1.000
18.	To tell others that I've seen a live performance by my favourite comedian(s)	3.54	1.132
19.	To support my friend or family member performing on stage	3.41	1.250
20.	Boredom	2.94	1.290
21.	Out of curiosity	2.93	1.248

Table 3 illustrates a more detailed analysis of individual motives, and is categorised according to Figure 1 as proposed by De Rooij (2013:155): cultural reduction, cultural aesthetics, cultural stimulation, social bonding, social attraction, social duty and social distinction. The 'strong motive' category refers to the percentage of respondents regarding these motives 'important' or 'very important', the 'neutral motive' category refers to the percentage regarding them as 'neither



important nor unimportant' and the 'weak motive' category refers to the percentage regarding them as 'unimportant' or 'not important at all'. The average for 'strong motive' in each category of motives is given to illustrate the relative importance of the categories in relation to one another. All seven motive groups (categories) had a 'strong motive' average of 50% or more, thereby validating De Rooij's (2013) "framework for consumption motives to attend performing arts".

Table 3. Motives grouped into categories (n = 307 in %)

Category	Motives	Weak motive	Neutral motive	Strong motive	Average (Strong motive)
Cultural reduction	To be entertained by my favourite comedian(s)	2	9	89	62
	To relax and have fun	3	16	81	
	To escape from my daily routine and responsibilities	13	20	67	
	Boredom	33	30	37	
	Out of curiosity	35	28	37	
Cultural stimulation	To explore/learn new things (new/unknown comedians)	5	21	74	68
	To learn about international cultures	6	25	69	
	To learn about South African cultures	11	29	60	
Cultural aesthetics	To enjoy the unique atmosphere	3	12	85	79
	Because I enjoy comedy (i.e. crying from laughter)	8	12	80	
	To meet/interact with my favourite comedian	12	11	77	
	To enjoy the sound, sights and costumes associated with theatre	10	17	73	
Social attraction	For a chance to be with people who enjoy performing arts	8	22	70	69
	To meet new people with similar interests	12	21	67	
Social distinction	To tell others that I've seen a live performance by my favourite comedian(s)	18	23	59	59
Social bonding	To socialise with friends, family or colleagues	3	10	87	76
	To share the experience with someone special	8	16	76	
	To experience community pride	7	29	64	
Social duty	To support the performing arts industry	5	22	73	65
	Annual commitment	14	22	64	
	To support my friend or family member performing on stage	22	20	58	

Cultural reduction motives

The first group, 'cultural reduction motives', had three 'strong motives' with more than 50% of respondents regarding these as important. A large majority of respondents (89%) attended in order to be entertained by their favourite comedian(s), which ranked as the most important overall motive (Table 2). This finding, therefore, supports the argument of Lockyer and Myers (2011:174) in that



“... the appreciation of the comic skills involved in live stand-up comedy is one of the main features attracting audiences to live stand-up comedy”. Furthermore, Kruger and Saayman (2015a:8) found that ‘entertainment and artist affiliation’ was the most important motive for attending *RAIN’s theatre production – A tribute to the Beatles*. Irrespective of the fact that the theatre genre (musical) differs to this study, the most important motive to attend a theatre production, or a live comedy show in this case, appears to be for entertainment by a favourite artist, i.e. a comedian.

Opportunities to relax and have fun, and to escape from daily routine and responsibilities are classical physiological motives found in most event and festival studies (Yuan et al., 2005; Kruger & Saayman, 2010; Saayman, 2011; Hattingh & Swart, 2016). De Rooij (2013:147) defines reduction as “... feelings of recuperation, escaping from day to day life, finding tranquility and recovering energy and strength”. Therefore, to relax and have fun and to escape daily routines and responsibilities form part of reduction motives. For this study, 81% of respondents attended the Funny Festival to relax and have fun, which was also the fourth most important motive overall (Table 2), while a further 67% were motivated to attend in order to escape their daily routines and responsibilities. These findings support those of Caldwell (2001), Johnson and Garbarino (2001) and Swanson et al. (2008) regarding the importance of reduction, i.e. recuperation, relaxing, diversion and escapism in attending performing arts.

The ‘cultural reduction motives’ that were less important were to attend out of boredom and out of curiosity. These motives were also the least important overall motives to attend the Funny Festival (Table 2) and are therefore, ‘weak motives’, as only 37% of respondents attached importance to these motives respectively. These findings contradict that of Earl (2001:345-353) who argued that a major benefit of attending live performances includes fulfilment of curiosity, and that of De Rooij (2013:151) who argued that curiosity is an important motive for those attending unknown performing arts. This is especially interesting given the fact that almost half of the respondents were first-time attendees to the Funny Festival (see Table 1), therefore, the performances and experiences were unknown to them.

Cultural stimulation motives

Dikmen (2011:28) defined ‘learning’ as exploring other cultures where people learn about different cultures through practices and celebrations. More specifically relating to performing arts, De Rooij (2013:146) equates cognitive stimulation to an individuals’ knowledge enrichment. For example, attendees may wish to familiarise themselves with new or different theatre genres, therefore, this motive is related to a type of ‘learning’ (De Rooij, 2013:147). For this study, all three ‘cultural stimulation motives’ had three ‘strong motives’, to explore/learn new things (new/unknown comedians), to learn about international cultures and to learn about South African cultures. More than two-thirds (74%) of respondents were motivated to explore/learn new things, i.e. to discover new/unknown comedians. This finding is supported by McCarthy and Jinnat (2001:83) and Kruger and Saayman (2015a:8) who found that learning/exploring new things is among the most salient motives for attending live performances such as the Funny Festival.

Festivals bring a variety of different cultural experiences to the destinations where they occur (Dikmen, 2011:5). This might explain why more attendees were motivated to learn about international cultures (69%) than to learn about South African cultures (60%), as they are most likely familiar with South African cultures more so than international cultures. The ‘cultural stimulation motives’ category suggests that audiences attending live stand-up comedy are motivated to explore/learn new things, and to learn about local and international cultures.

Cultural aesthetics motives



Aesthetics relates to "... an immediate experiential pleasure or enjoyment in terms of beauty, evoked by works of art by which senses are stimulated" (De Rooij, 2013:145). For example, audiences want to enjoy "... the beauty of the sound, sight, scenery, and costumes, and they want to see performer's facial expressions". In addition, as argued by De Rooij (2013:145) some attendees seek an opportunity to interact with artists during (on stage or while seated) or after the performance.

Almost all respondents (85%) were motivated to attend the Funny Festival to enjoy the unique atmosphere, which ranked as the second most important overall motive (Table 2). This finding supports that of Yen and Yu (2012a:219) who found the festival atmosphere of the *Lemonade Fair* in the United States to be the second most important motive for attendance. The description used by authors to refer to this motive varies across studies and types of events. Lee (2000), Lee et al. (2004) and Saayman (2011) referred to this motive as 'festival attraction', which Allan et al. (2006:866) believe emanates from the desire to enjoy the unique atmosphere or environment of a festival. Therefore, this finding suggests that the unique atmosphere offered by a live performance is one of the main motives for attending.

A further 80% of respondents were motivated to attend because they enjoyed comedy, which was also the fifth most important motive overall (Table 2), suggesting that one of the most important motives to attend live performances is for 'transcendence'. According to De Rooij (2013:152), transcendence relates to "... a spiritual experience allowing the consumer to break loose and to rise in this world, experiencing extraordinary states of being, and being uplifted". For example, those who get tears from laughing may be motivated by transcendence (De Rooij, 2013:152). A further 77% attended to meet/interact with their favourite comedian, also referred to as 'celebrity attachment' (De Rooij, 2013:38) or 'hero worship' (Schippers, 2015:19), while 73% attended to enjoy the sound, sights and costumes associated with theatre, which supports the statement of Lockyer and Myers (2011:177) that close proximity and intimacy with the 'spectacle' (the comedian) is particularly important in live stand-up comedy. It appears that 'cultural aesthetic motives' strongly attracted attendees to the Funny Festival. Therefore, this study supports the findings of De Rooij (2013:155-156) in that the *core* or *central* motive of attending performing arts is related to 'cultural aesthetic motives'. This study found that 'cultural aesthetics motives' were the most important overall category of motives with an average of 79% of attendees regarding these motives as important, and can therefore be regarded as the 'strongest motive'.

Social attraction motives

Socialisation appears to be one of the most important reasons for visiting festivals as this factor was found to be significant in nearly all the literature studies reviewed (Kim et al., 2002; Weiler et al., 2004; Yuan et al., 2005; Kruger & Saayman, 2010; Kruger & Saayman, 2015a, 2015b; Hattingh & Swart, 2016). Crompton and McKay (1997:431) split socialisation into two dimensions, e.g. 'known-group socialisation', referring to interaction with family, friends or colleagues, and 'external interaction/socialisation', referring to socialising with new friends whom they meet at the festival. 'Social attraction' specifically refers to the desire to spend leisure time with like-minded individuals, although, according to De Rooij (2013:156), this is a mostly concealed or subconscious motive.

Surprisingly, for this study, more than two-thirds (70%) attended for a chance to be with people who enjoyed the performing arts, while 67% attended to meet new people with similar interests, suggesting that 'external interaction/socialisation' and 'social attraction motives' are not as concealed as De Rooij (2013:156) may have thought. These findings support those of Caldwell (2001), Swanson et al. (2008) and Kruger and Saayman (2012) regarding the importance of



meeting new people and the opportunity to be with likeminded people at live performances.

Social distinction motives

Caldwell (2001:504) and Passebois and Aurier (2004:82) referred to this motive as 'distinction' or 'social discrimination', and related it to the need of demonstrating membership with a particular social group, distinguishing oneself from others, and making favourable impressions. Sayre and King (2003:246) assert that this need for distinction or status could be fulfilled by appearing at and attending a theatre production. For this study, 'social distinction motives', i.e. to tell others that they have seen a live performance by their favourite comedian(s), was a less important motive category, when compared to other motive categories, as 59% of respondents attached importance to this motive. However, given that more than half of respondents regarded this motive to be important, it should nevertheless be regarded as a 'strong motive'. This finding is supported by De Rooij (2013:150) who found that some theatre attendees distinguish themselves from other social groups as attending theater gives way to self-expression and obtaining status.

Social bonding motives

Bonding collectively relates to "... sharing experiences, creating a community or being related or attached to other people", i.e. socialising with family, friends or colleagues (De Rooij, 2013:148). A large majority of respondents (87%) were motivated to attend in order to socialise with friends, family or colleagues, which ranked as the third most important overall motive (Table 2). This finding suggests that 'known-group socialisation' was more important than 'external socialisation' (see 'social attraction motives' category). A further 76% of respondents attended to share the experience with someone special. Some studies refer to this motive category as 'group affiliation' (Tomljenovic et al., 2001; Kruger & Saayman, 2012, 2015a), while others report on 'family togetherness' (Van Zyl, 2006; Schofield & Thompson, 2007; Wooten & Norman, 2008; Dikmen, 2011). Family togetherness, as explained by Dikmen (2011:12), involves seeking the chance to be with friends and family to do things together to create better 'family cohesion'. The need for family cohesion and building friends and family ties is a powerful free time motivator for many people (Dikmen, 2011:10). However, the importance level of this motive depends on the type of event. For example, Formica and Uysal (1996) and Lee (2000) found family togetherness to be among the lowest motives for attending the *Umbria Jazz Festival* in Italy and the *Kyongju World Cultural Expo* in Korea respectively. However, according to Dikmen (2011:27), family togetherness is more important to married couples compared with those who are single. In contrast, Kim et al. (2006) found motives related to family togetherness and socialisation to be the most significant in attending the *International Festival of Environmental Film and Video (FICA)* in Brazil. Dikmen (2011:21) found family togetherness to be the most important factor for visiting the *Streatham Festival* in the UK.

Fostering civic pride and building community cohesion, identity and trust are major benefits of organising events such as festivals (Yolal et al., 2009). More specifically relating to performing arts, Auslander (2008:65) argued that this sense of community pride derives from "... being part of an audience, and the quality of the experience the community derives from the specific audience situation, not from the spectacle for which the audience has gathered". Van Zyl (2006) examined the motives of local residents for attending the *Aardklop National Arts Festival* in South Africa and found that community pride was one of the most influential motives for attending this festival. For the Funny Festival, more than two-thirds (64%) of attendees were motivated to experience community pride. Interestingly, Lockyer and Myers (2011:182) warn that "... in live stand-up comedy the comedian and his/her understandings of what topics can or cannot be joked about are fundamental to the sense of community". They argue that this sense of community may be jeopardised if all does not share the stand-up comedian's understanding, as the joke is unlikely to



create laughter.

The 'social bonding motives' category was found to be the second most important overall motive category with an average of 76% of attendees regarding social bonding motives to be important, and could therefore be considered as the second 'strongest motive'.

Social duty motives

Social duty motives, as explained by De Rooij (2013:156), relates to watching theatre productions whereby friends, relatives or family perform on stage. Johnson et al. (2008:353) refer to a 'normative commitment' to the arts based on moral obligation and duty, while McCarthy and Jinnat (2001:84) refer to this motive as 'civic duty/responsibility'. To support the performing arts industry was an important factor motivating 73% of the respondents to attend the Funny Festival, while 64% attended, as it was an annual commitment to do so.

Surprisingly, more than half of the respondents (58%) attended to support a friend or family member performing on stage, suggesting that the artists/performers (comedians) have a large support base. While McCarthy and Jinnat (2001:84) found 'social duty motives' to be less important motives for participating in the arts, it was found to be a relatively important motivating category with an average of 65% of attendees regarding 'social duty motives' to be important, and could therefore be considered as a 'strong motive'.

Audiences' requests to the Funny Festival organisers

In an open-ended question participants were asked what they would like to add to the festival to make it more appealing. Of the responses and comments received, five themes emerged: (i) improved bathroom facilities, (ii) a wider variety of comedians, (iii) entertainment prior to the opening of the show, (iv) improved parking, and (v) requests for 'freebies', discussed below.

(i) Improved bathroom facilities: Some respondents indicated that they had difficulty accessing the bathrooms, especially during break times when there were influxes of attendees to the bathroom facilities. The queues were too long and therefore many did not have a break during the show as it was spent queuing for bathrooms.

(ii) Wider variety of comedians: Various respondents indicated that a wider variety of comedians were required. Trevor Noah was the most popular celebrity comedian that appeared in the open-ended answers, followed by (in order of popularity), Schalk Bezuidenhout, Kevin Hart, Loyiso Gola, Barry Hilton, David Kau and Emo Adams.

(iii) Pre-event entertainment: emerged as one of the main aspects attendees wanted the organisers to improve on. The suggestions ranged from a "... cheese and wine tasting prior to the event", "... offering wine as welcome drinks" to "... a local band or comedy act to entertain people prior to the event and during break time".

(iv) Improved parking: Some attendees felt that the parking at the Baxter Theatre was insufficient, especially on sold-out shows. One respondent felt that the organisers should "... appoint more car guards to signal where open spaces are", while another felt that they "... could not find parking at all" and was therefore late for their show.

(v) 'Freebies': A final theme that emerged was the use of the word 'freebies'. It appears that many attendees would appreciate some sort of free gift. These ranged from "festival memorabilia", to



snacks and refreshments, specifically wine and beer. It therefore appears that some attendees sought more value for their money.

Conclusions

Although visiting the theatre is a popular leisure activity in South Africa, very little is known about theatre audiences and what motivates them to attend (Kruger & Saayman, 2015a:1). Through a quantitative audience investigation, this paper uses De Rooij's (2013) "framework for consumption motives to attend performing arts" to explore the motives of attending live stand-up comedy, and narrows the gap in arts literature regarding comedy theatre audiences in the country.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the research findings. First, the findings validate De Rooij's (2013) framework in that all seven motive groups (categories) had a 'strong motive' average of 50% or more, which support Slater's (2007:160) argument that theatre audiences often seek to fulfil multiple motives simultaneously. However, in analysing the audiences' motives for attending the Funny Festival in more detail, it becomes clear that the *core* or *central* motive of attending performing arts (Figure 1), in particular live stand-up comedy, is related to 'cultural aesthetic motives', followed by 'social bonding motives'. This study finds that 'cultural aesthetics motives' are the most important overall category of motives and can therefore be regarded as the 'strongest motive'. This finding suggests that comedy audiences want to 'cry from laughter' and to be emotionally touched or affected by aesthetics. Furthermore, the 'social bonding motives' category was found to be the second most important overall motive category and could therefore be considered as the second 'strongest motive'. It is evident that comedy audiences used the Funny Festival to satisfy their social needs by seeking interaction with friends, family and colleagues (known-group socialisation). These findings compare with that of Lockyer and Myers (2011:183) who argued that "... live stand-up comedy is a habitual social event for many" and that "... live stand-up comedy entices audiences and encourages them to attend for a number of particular aesthetic, practical and social reasons". The implications for theatre marketers and event managers are that imagery and ad copy should highlight a mixture of cultural aesthetic needs and social bonding needs, i.e. entertainment that will lead to crying from laughter as well as opportunities to socialise with comedians (both on and off stage), friends and family in a relaxing, fun and sociable atmosphere, which could significantly extend and deepen the audiences' theatre experience. Clearly, failing to meet 'cultural aesthetic' needs and 'social bonding' needs in future live-stand up comedy productions may hinder revisit intent, and affect the future sustainability of the Funny Festival. It is suggested that knowledge of audiences' motives be used as a differentiating strategy to assist in creating a competitive advantage over the abundance of permanent live stand-up comedy venues in Cape Town.

Second, after combining age categories, the audiences attending the Funny Festival over the one month period were mostly between 18 and 40 years of age, suggesting that stand-up comedy is more popular among younger theatre audiences. This paper, therefore, does not support Scollen's (2007:46) concern that theatre audiences are an ageing market, at least not for comedy productions. In addition, event and theatre marketers can now improve their target marketing strategies as the findings suggest an audience consisting of mostly younger and educated attendees.

Third, seeing that both first-time as well as repeat audiences play an important role in ensuring the future sustainability of live performances (Kitterlin & Yoo, 2014:120), their feedback need to be taken seriously. Focus areas should include: additional parking arrangements on sold-out shows, controlling the influx of attendees to bathrooms during intervals, or alternatively, consider temporary bathroom facilities, entertainment prior to the opening of the show as well as the provision of



'freebies' to improve the perception of added value. The event organiser should continue to invite major celebrity comedians, especially considering the importance attached to celebrity 'worship'. Special consideration should be given to well-known comedians including Trevor Noah, Schalk Bezuidenhout, Kevin Hart, Loyiso Gola, Barry Hilton, David Kau and Emo Adams. Comedians that are less well-known should change annually to maintain interest in the production.

Fourth, this paper rectifies the imbalances in theatre audience research as it is, according to the author's knowledge, the first of its kind in South Africa to examine live stand-up comedy from the audiences' perspective.

This research clearly indicates the importance of aesthetics and socialisation in comedy audiences' motives. It supports much of the existing arts literature, perhaps most evidently the work of De Rooij (2013) who developed a "framework for the consumption motives of attending performing arts"; this study confirmed his research and its validity to comedy theatre audiences. Slater's (2007:160) and De Rooij's (2013:154) insights into multiple motive fulfillment and Lockyer and Myers's (2011:183) insights into the importance of aesthetics and social motives were all confirmed.

Limitations and future research

This research was done at only one live stand-up comedy production; results should therefore not be generalised to all live comedy productions. As stand-up comedy is merely one form of many differing types of comedy (Lockyer & Myers, 2011:184), longitudinal research should be conducted at Cape Town's permanent comedy venues such as the Cape Town Comedy Club. Comedy audiences could be segmented according to their dominant motives, which can assist in identifying opportunities presented by the different segments by using a technique known as cluster analysis. Quantitative research, according to Pincus (2004:375), is also "... insufficient to account for the behavioural and emotional meaning of unmet needs"; hence future studies should consider employing additional qualitative techniques such as depth interviews and participant observation to explore audience's motives for attending theatre.

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