

How Dance Audiences Engage: 2010 Field Study

Summary of Key Themes and Observations

Research Commissioned by Dance/USA, with funding support from the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and The James Irvine Foundation

- A majority of dance buyers are dancing themselves, either socially or more formally. For the purposes of analysis, three cohorts of respondents were defined:
 - **“Active or Serious Dancers”** are people who “regularly” take dance lessons, perform in front of live audiences or choreograph. They constitute 19% of all buyers (avg. age=43).
 - **“Social Dancers”** are people who dance socially, either regularly or occasionally, but who are not “Active or Serious Dancers.” They constitute 38% of all buyers (avg. age=50).
 - The average age of respondents who do not fit into either of these two cohorts is 56 (**“Not Dancers”**).
- “Active or serious dancers” are, by far, the most engaged audiences; they are most interested in all forms of engagement, especially those that involve movement. A quarter of all dance buyers take dance lessons or classes at least occasionally, and another 33% used to, earlier in their lives. Another 17% haven’t, but would like to try. Only a quarter of dance buyers are not interested in taking dance lessons or classes. Results point to a direct link between attendance and active forms of participation. Any long-term approach to audience development must take an ecological view that encompasses attendance, media-based consumption and active participation.
 - **How can the links between these different parts of the system be strengthened? Professional dance cannot survive in the long run without a support system of participatory dance programs.**
- Dance buyers who attend with their parents are 15 years younger, on average, than those who attend with their children or grandchildren (38 vs. 53, respectively). Similarly, those who attend with co-workers are approximately seven years younger than those who do not (44 vs. 51, respectively).
 - **Audience development schemes with incentives to “bring your parents” or “bring your co-workers” will naturally attract younger buyers.**
- A significant amount of interest was expressed for attending dance performances at which “audience members themselves actually dance or move around.” One in four respondents indicated that they haven’t done this, but would like to try. This underscores other findings suggesting a need for more kinetic involvement opportunities. Bear in mind, however, that many audience members are not dancers and are unlikely to respond to activities that involve movement.
- The dominant motivation for attending is spiritual (i.e., “to be inspired or uplifted”). Five distinct but overlapping motivational factors were discerned:
 - 1) **Stimulate the Mind** (intellectual/creative stimulation)
 - 2) **Nurturing** (social/family fulfillment)
 - 3) **Repertoire-Driven motivations** (either to see “great works” or new work)
 - 4) **Emotional/Spiritual motivations**
 - 5) **Social Bridging and Bonding motivations** (i.e., to grow closer to one’s own culture, or to learn about cultures other than your own)

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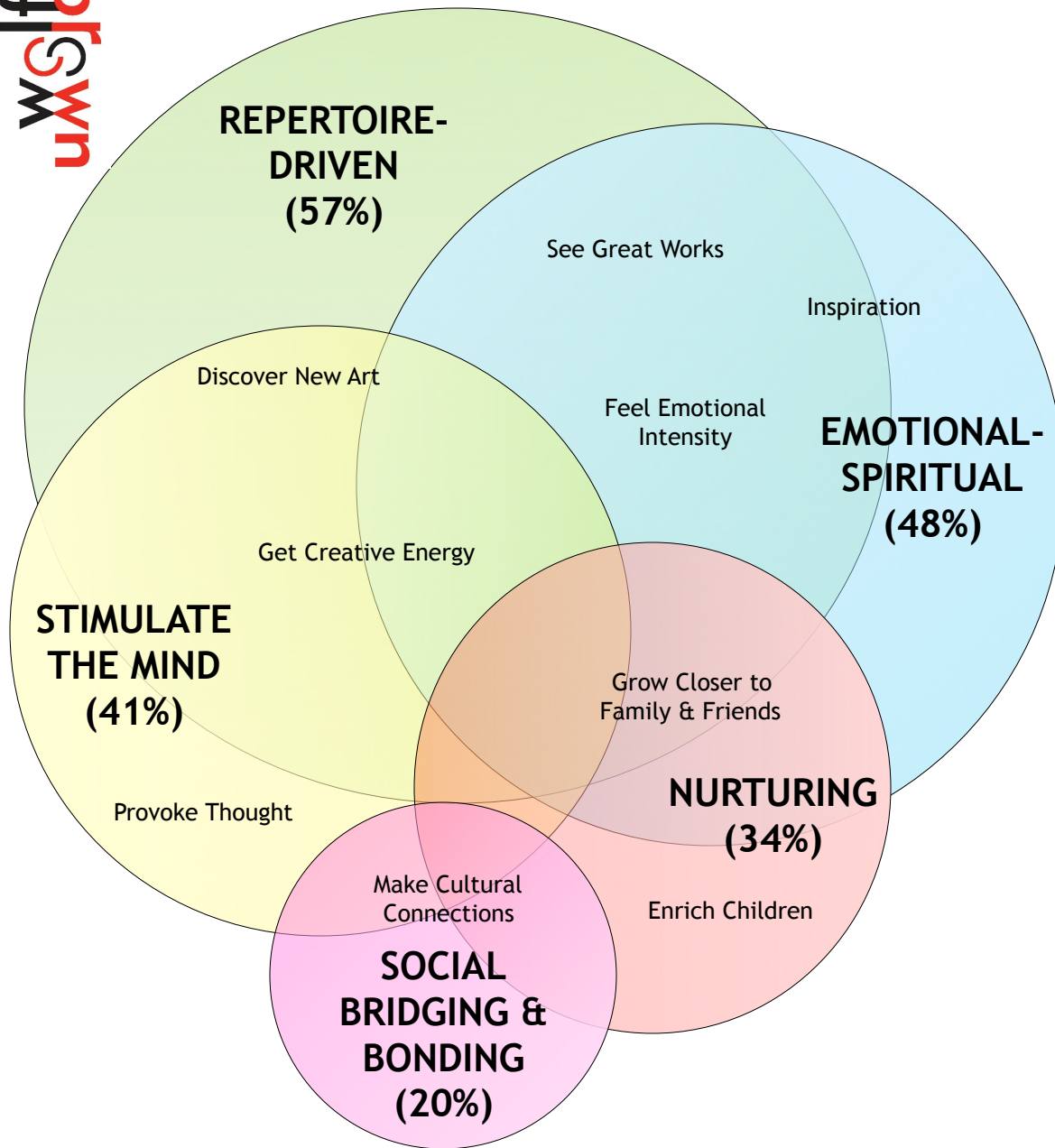
Summary of Key Themes and Observations - Continued

- Many dance buyers desire to be further engaged before, during, and after performances. However, most fall within the “big middle” of the engagement curve – they want to engage *a little more*, but not a lot. In other words, they may never stay for a post-performance discussion, yet they aspire to engage somewhat more deeply.
- With respect to pre-performance engagement, dance buyers expressed a strong latent desire to watch rehearsals. Other activities with the highest latency scores include: 1) learning a few dance steps from a visiting choreographer or dancer; 2) attending a pre-performance talk about the program; 3) watching a video of the artist(s) talk about their work; 4) listening to the choreographer or artistic director talk about an upcoming program; and 5) watching video excerpts of pieces that the artist or company will be performing.
 - One might infer from this a need for a new, field-wide strategy of “opening up the creative process.” What would be the implications of such a strategy for presenters, touring artists, and artist training programs?
- With respect to post-performance engagement, the dominant activity – by a wide margin – is informal discussion on the way home. In other words, the predominant way that dance buyers ‘make meaning’ of a dance performance is by talking about it with the people they came with, on the way home (i.e., outside of the venue).
 - While much energy has been focused on in-venue discussions, the field is clearly in need of a better strategy for catalyzing informal, self-guided discussion outside of our venues.
- Analyzing the levels of involvement, both current and desired, in 30 different engagement activities suggests five underlying dimensions or “factors”:
 1. **Critical Assessment (48%):** filtering information through trusted critics and writers
 2. **Watching and Talking (46%):** gathering information and talking about the experience informally
 3. **Deep Context & Insight (44%):** seeking insight through talks, lectures, discussions, rehearsals
 4. **Live Interpretation (35%):** real-time commentary and interpretive assistance at performances (e.g., spoken introductions)
 5. **Digital Interactives (33%):** express an opinion in an online forum, post to Facebook
- These five factors may provide the field with a framework for thinking about audience engagement, and a way to prioritize further research and development.
- A major shift towards technological means of engagement is underway with younger audiences, but is slow in coming.
 - Younger audiences are categorically more interested in all forms of technology-based engagement, especially through social media. On the whole, however, most dancer buyers are not very interested in consuming dance in digital format, except for free videos.

Natural Groupings of Motivations

Exploratory Factor Analysis of 11 Motivations for Attending Live Dance (Principal Components Analysis)	Rotated Component Matrix(a)				
	Component				
	Stimulate the Mind	Nurturing	Repertoire-Driven	Emotional / Spiritual	Social Bridging and Bonding
To engage intellectually with the dance or choreography	0.67				
To energize your own creativity	0.64				
To expose others to the arts		0.82			
To spend quality time with family or friends		0.56	-0.42		
To see great works by the masters			0.45		
To discover new choreographers and companies that you've never seen before		-0.48	0.38	-0.39	
To relax and unwind			-0.73		
To be inspired or uplifted				0.69	
To have an intense emotional experience				0.66	
To celebrate or observe your cultural heritage					0.74
To learn about cultures other than your own					0.73

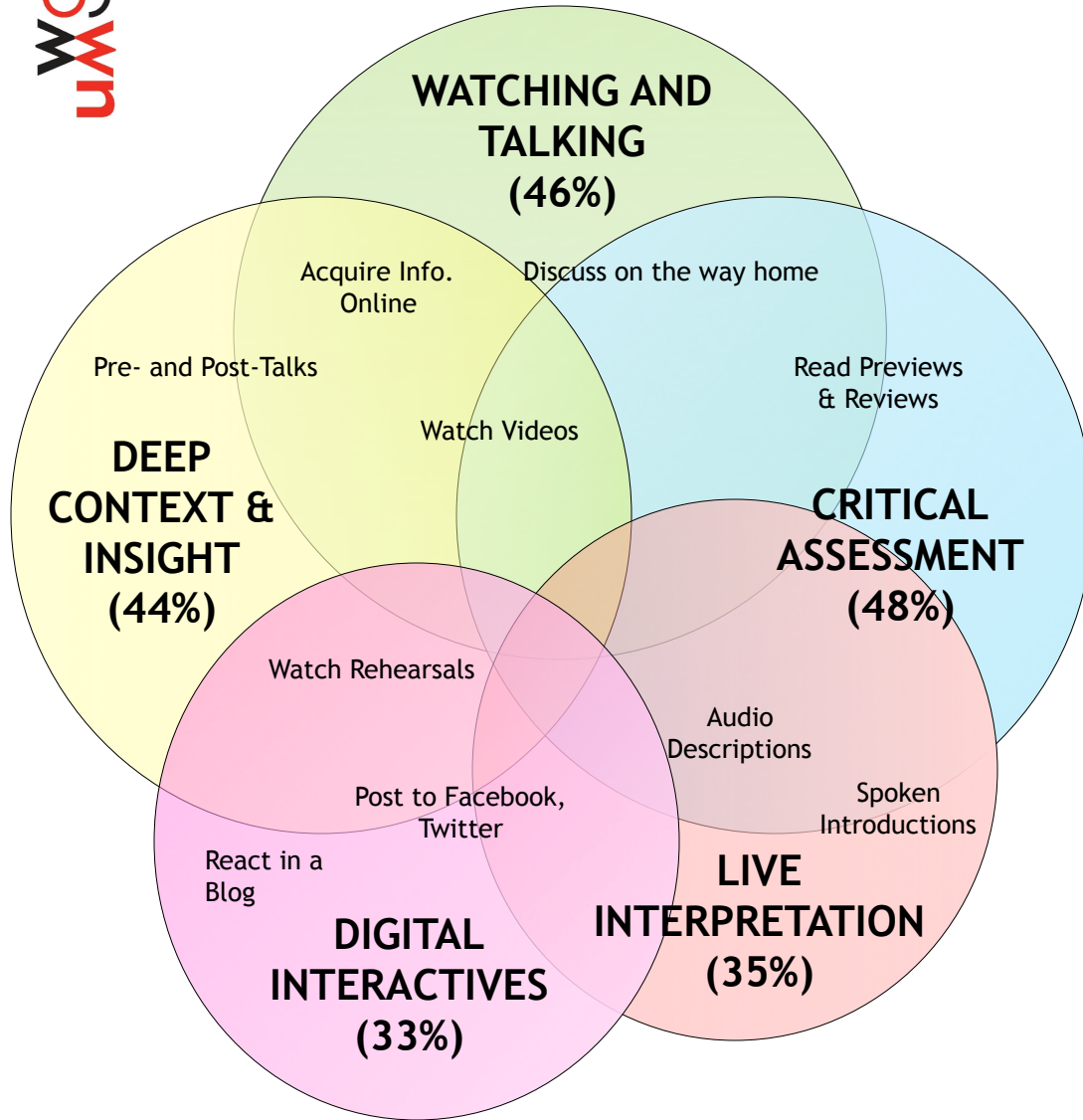
- The 12 motivations tested in the survey were further analyzed to see if natural groupings or “factors” could be discerned.
 - One item was dropped, “To become a better appreciator of dance,” because it did not positively associate with any factor.
 - Negative factor loadings in the table at left indicate negative associations with the factor; for example, “to relax and unwind” is negatively associated with the “repertoire-driven” factor.
- Five factors emerged as having intuitive value, as illustrated in the table at left:
 - 1) Stimulate the Mind (intellectual/creative stimulation)
 - 2) Nurturing (social/family fulfillment)
 - 3) Repertoire-Driven motivations (either to see “great works” or new artists/new work;
 - 4) Emotional/Spiritual motivations
 - 5) Social Bridging and Bonding motivations (i.e., to grow closer to one’s own culture, or to learn about cultures other than your own)



Approximate Prevalence of Motivational Factors

- The Venn Diagram on this page roughly illustrates the overlap between and among motivational factors, as well as the overall prevalence (size of membership) of each factor.
- Most respondents are associated with two or three of the five factors.
 - Only 19% of respondents associate with only one of the factors, illustrating the complexity of motivations.
- “Active or Serious Dancers” are significantly more likely to be associated with the “Stimulate the Mind,” and “Repertoire-Driven” factors.
 - How can the dance presenters become more adept at messaging all five of these motivational factors?





Approximate Prevalence of Engagement Factors

- A factor analysis was conducted on a total of 30 different engagement activities in order to identify underlying dimensions or “factors.” This analysis is based on frequency of current activity (not desired future activity). The Venn Diagram on this page describes the five factors and roughly illustrates their prevalence and the overlap between and among them.
 - **Critical Assessment (48%):** filtering information through trusted critics and writers
 - **Watching and Talking (46%):** gathering information and talking about the experience informally
 - **Deep Context & Insight (44%):** seeking insight through talks, lectures, discussions, rehearsals
 - **Live Interpretation (35%):** real-time commentary and interpretive assistance at performances (e.g., spoken introductions)
 - **Digital Interactives (33%):** express an opinion in an online forum, post to Facebook
- How can the dance field develop engagement strategies for all five of these dimensions?

