

# The Impact of Immersive and Meaningful Experiences for Theatergoers

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## Abstracts

In recent years, theater performing arts has increasingly become a standard product and an important attraction for cities. In the continuous iterative development of theater performing arts, from the initial mirror-frame stage performance, to today's sought-after immersive performing arts, the performance mode and viewing methods continue to innovate. In particular, new audio-visual, artificial intelligence, high simulation, mixed reality, human-machine interaction and other new technology implantation, so that theater performing arts show high investment, large production, super shocking development trend, technology cult characteristics are obvious. Therefore, in the iterative upgrading of theater performing arts, the design of embodied experience is regarded by the industry as a winning formula. However, the survey found that many immersive theater performing arts market recognition is not high, the audience on the high specification hardware and technology configuration response is not enthusiastic, by the audience evaluation as "visual carpet bombing and four sides of the emotional siege, no depth of aftertaste". This phenomenon has caused people to think, theater performing arts really only care about the immersion experience? What kind of satisfaction can the immersion experience in theater performing arts bring to the audience? What is the key to audience satisfaction in theater performance? Does theater performing arts audience satisfaction affect theater audience satisfaction and loyalty? Without a deeper understanding of this, investors will not be able to realize their investments from the design of immersive theater performing arts experiences, and their efforts to leverage new technological innovations in audience experience will have little effect. Through combing the research results related to theater performance, theater experience, immersive experience, audience satisfaction and loyalty, we found that: the research related to theater performance mainly focuses on the elements of audience embodied experience and sensory stimulation, and the immersive experience brought by the combination of these elements for the audience, and few scholars have focused on the conceptual connotation of meaningful experience based on cognitive input in theater performance and its impact on audience satisfaction. Existing theater experience-related research has richly explored the characteristics and connotations of theater experience, but lacks in-depth analysis of the connotations and characteristics of theater experience in different theater scenes; in immersion experience-related research, although a great deal of research has been conducted around immersion experience in the field of environment and theater, few have paid attention to the immersion experience of theater performing arts audience and its impact on theater performing arts audience satisfaction and theater audience satisfaction and loyalty; in audience satisfaction and loyalty-related studies, there is a lack of analysis of the impact of audience experience on audience satisfaction from the perspective of the overall state and depth of audience experience, and a failure to conduct a systematic comparative analysis of the effect of the two dimensions of emotional response and cognitive evaluation on audience satisfaction, although a large number of studies have confirmed the

positive relationship between audience satisfaction and audience loyalty, but Few studies have analyzed in depth whether and how audience satisfaction with theater activities, theater programs or the theater itself affects their satisfaction and loyalty to the theater, in terms of attitude migration and generalization after audience satisfaction, and more specifically.

**Keywords:** Theater; Theater Performing Arts; Immersion Experience

## Introduction

In recent years, theater performing arts has increasingly become a standard product and an important attraction for cities. In the continuous iterative development of theater performing arts, from the initial mirror-frame stage performance, to today's sought-after immersive performing arts, the performance mode and viewing methods continue to innovate. In particular, new audio-visual, artificial intelligence, high simulation, mixed reality, human-machine interaction and other new technology implantation, so that theater performing arts show high investment, large production, super shocking development trend, technology cult characteristics are obvious. Therefore, in the iterative upgrading of theater performing arts, the design of embodied experience is regarded by the industry as a winning formula. However, the survey found that many immersive theater performing arts market recognition is not high, the audience on the high specification hardware and technology configuration response is not enthusiastic, by the audience evaluation as "visual carpet bombing and four sides of the emotional siege, no depth of aftertaste". This phenomenon has caused people to think, theater performing arts really only care about the immersion experience? What kind of satisfaction can the immersion experience in theater performing arts bring to the audience? What is the key to audience satisfaction in theater performance? Does theater performing arts audience satisfaction affect theater audience satisfaction and loyalty? Without a deeper understanding of this, investors will not be able to realize their investments from the design of immersive theater performing arts experiences, and their efforts to leverage new technological innovations in audience experience will have little effect. Through combing the research results related to theater performance, theater experience, immersive experience, audience satisfaction and loyalty, we found that: the research related to theater performance mainly focuses on the elements of audience embodied experience and sensory stimulation, and the immersive experience brought by the combination of these elements for the audience, and few scholars have focused on the conceptual connotation of meaningful experience based on cognitive input in theater performance and its impact on audience satisfaction. Existing theater experience-related research has richly explored the characteristics and connotations of theater experience, but lacks in-depth analysis of the connotations and characteristics of theater experience in different theater scenes; in immersion experience-related research, although a great deal of research has been conducted around immersion experience in the field of environment and theater, few have paid attention to the immersion experience of theater performing arts audience and its impact on theater performing arts audience satisfaction and theater audience satisfaction and loyalty; in audience satisfaction and loyalty-related studies, there is a lack of analysis of the impact of audience experience on audience satisfaction from the perspective of the overall state and depth of audience experience, and a failure to conduct a systematic comparative analysis of the effect of the two dimensions of emotional response and cognitive evaluation on audience satisfaction, although a large number of studies have confirmed the

positive relationship between audience satisfaction and audience loyalty, but Few studies have analyzed in depth whether and how audience satisfaction with theater activities, theater programs or the theater itself affects their satisfaction and loyalty to the theater, in terms of attitude migration and generalization after audience satisfaction, and more specifically, audience satisfaction with theater activities, theater programs or the theater itself.

## **Research Objectives**

- 1.What kind of audience satisfaction does the immersive experience in theater performing arts actually bring to the audience?
- 2.What are the keys to influencing audience satisfaction in theater performing arts?
- 3.Does theater performing arts audience satisfaction affect theater audience satisfaction and loyalty?

## **Literature Review**

### **1.Theater performing arts**

In the existing research on theater performing arts, although scholars have defined the concept of theater performing arts differently, it generally shows that theater performing arts is the association of theater activities and performing arts programs with five elements: performing arts venues, performing arts forms, performing arts contents, performing arts characteristics, and performing arts audiences. Among them, the performing arts form is the original, indigenous or innovative cultural expression, performing arts content is theater history and culture or folk culture, etc.. Different combinations of performing arts forms and performing arts content, on the one hand, make theater performing arts presented as immersive, live-action, theater, video four main types, on the other hand, affect the audience's perception, experience and satisfaction with theater performing arts. Focusing on audience satisfaction of theatrical performing arts, scholars have explored and determined the influence of theatrical performing arts constituent elements on audience satisfaction, compared and analyzed the level of audience satisfaction with different types of theatrical performing arts constituent elements and the strength of the effect of different types of constituent elements on satisfaction. However, the existing studies lack a comparative analysis of the classification of audience experience types based on the content and form of theatrical performing arts, core service attributes and peripheral service attributes, and their impact role and effect on audience satisfaction. In addition, a few existing studies have found the role of emotion, expectation, and evaluation in forming theater performing arts audience satisfaction, but lack systematic studies that analyze the formation mechanism of theater performing arts audience satisfaction from the integrated perspective of theater performing arts information transmission and audience analysis and processing.

### **2. Theater experience**

In the existing research on theater experience, scholars generally emphasize the subjectivity and dynamism of theater experience, arguing that theater experience is the result of the joint action of individual factors and contextual factors, with common characteristics of the masses and individual uniqueness. Theater experience is both a process and a result, both interactive and participatory. Theater people in the theater process through the interaction with theater objects, in the physical and mental, emotional and cognitive, material and spiritual levels, resulting in overall feelings and overall attitude, which both rely on the surface of things

to observe, but also indulge in the rational world of deep thinking. Therefore, the theater experience is rich in connotations and presents differentiated characteristics in different theater contexts. Regarding the influencing factors of theater experience, domestic and foreign scholars have mainly focused on the influence of subjective and objective factors on theater experience. Although existing studies have shown the positive or negative influence effects of relevant factors on theater experience, they have failed to conduct in-depth research on the types of theater experience based on relevant influencing factors and their effects. Especially in the context that new technologies such as smartphones, virtual reality and artificial intelligence are increasingly used in the theater industry, what kind of impact they will bring to the theater experience needs to be studied in depth. Regarding the effect of theater experience, the existing literature mainly focuses on the effect of theater experience on theatergoers' attitudes and behavioral intentions, theatergoers' own development and growth, and the research on the effect of theater experience on theater also mainly focuses on the audience's attitudes and behavioral intentions toward theater. The differences in the effects of different types of theater experiences on theatergoers' attitudes and behavioral intentions and the mechanisms of their effects have been ignored, and the relevant studies are weak. In addition, the existing literature lacks systematic studies on the effects of single theater activity experiences on the overall attitudes and behavioral intentions of theaters.

### 3. Immersive experience

In the existing research on immersion experience, scholars differ in their interpretation of the concept of immersion experience, but there is a basic consensus on its generation mechanism and constitutive dimensions. That is, immersion experience arises from a particular stimulus in a certain environment, and its constitutive dimensions include goal clarity, immediate feedback, balance of skills and challenges, unity of knowledge and action, full attention, potential sense of control, loss of consciousness, distortion of sense of time, and purposeful experience. The influencing factors of immersive experience in online theater consumption include the personal traits of the experiencing subject, the specific elements of the experiencing object such as function and technology, the interaction between the experiencing subject and the experiencing object or other experiencing subjects, and the audience perception in four aspects. In specific theater activities, scholars' research on the influence factors of immersion experience mainly stays in the composition dimension of immersion experience, and lacks in-depth analysis of the influence effect of specific elements in specific situations.

Regarding the effect of immersion experience, research results in the field of theater are limited and mainly focus on two aspects of behavioral intentions, such as audience satisfaction and loyalty, and audience willingness to consume and use. In the context of new audiovisual, artificial intelligence, 5G, AR, VR and other technology applications, immersion experience has entered an advanced stage and developed into a new type of industry formed by the integration of culture and technology today, and the research on its effect needs to be expanded and deepened.

#### 4. Meaningful experience

Scholars have explored the connotation of meaningful experience, pointing out that meaning originates from individual self-construction and emphasizing that meaningful experience is individual, contextual and subjective. Although the connotation of meaningful experience has received attention from scholars, empirical studies on the factors influencing meaningful experience and its effects are obviously insufficient. Although existing theater research has emphasized the importance of meaningful experience, it lacks in-depth exploration of the connotation and characteristics of meaningful experience in the theater, and few studies have focused on the influencing factors and effects of meaningful experience in the theater. However, theater is an important way for people to pursue the meaning of life (Tao YanChen, Bai Changhong, Wang Lin, 2020). Although research results on meaningful experience in theater are relatively few, the sense of life meaning, which is closely related to meaningful experience, is a more mature concept and has received extensive attention in domestic and international research. The influencing factors of the sense of meaning in life mainly include both environmental factors and factors related to individuals themselves, and the effects mainly include positive emotions, life satisfaction and subjective well-being. Therefore, the research related to the sense of meaning of life will provide reference and reference for this paper to explore the connotation and characteristics of meaningful experience of theater performing arts audience, the influence of meaningful experience on the satisfaction of theater performing arts audience and the satisfaction and recommendation intention of theater audience.

### Research Methodology

#### 1. Questionnaire survey method

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument, existing scales that have been used in domestic and international literature were used as far as possible, and modified according to the purpose of this study based on the recommendations of relevant experts, and then used as a tool for collecting empirical data. Before the finalization of the questionnaire and the implementation of the large sample survey, a pre-test was conducted on some subjects to assess the appropriateness of the design and wording of the questionnaire, to correct the wording of the questionnaire, and to delete the items that were not discriminative and had low reliability and validity, on the basis of which the final questionnaire was formed.

#### 2. Data analysis methods

This paper focuses on the use of Smart PLS 3.3.2, SPSS 21.0, and MPLUS programs for data analysis. Among them, Smart PLS 3.3.2 was used for reliability and validity analysis, measurement model analysis, structural model analysis, and moderating effect analysis because PLS has more relaxed requirements for data samples and residual distributions, and is suitable for the construction and measurement of new theories; the Hayes plug-in PROCESS program was used in SPSS 21.0 for mediating effect analysis; the MPLUS program was used. The MPLUS program was used to test for differences in mediating effects.

## Research Conceptual Framework

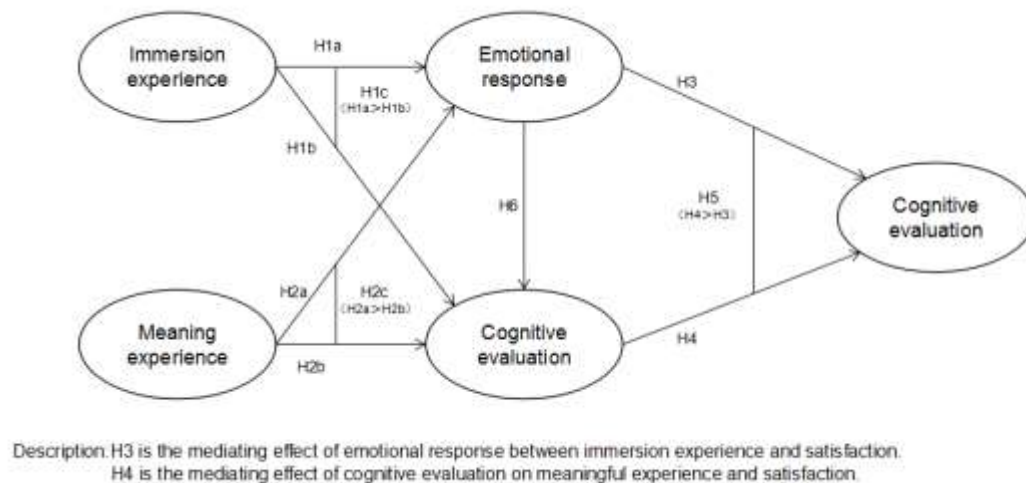


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

## Research Results

Table 1: Results of Descriptive Statistics for Valid Samples *Source:* Questionnaire data

	Type	Number	Frequency
Gender	male	314	47.60%
	female	345	52.40%
Age	age 25 and under	213	32.30%
	26 to 34 years old	204	31.00%
	35 to 54 years old	135	20.50%
	55 to 64 years old	53	8.00%
	age 65 and above	54	8.20%
Education	senior high school and below	62	9.40%
	junior college	97	14.70%
	undergraduate	263	39.90%

	postgraduate or above	237	36.00%
Occupation	civil servant	67	10.20%
	employees of enterprises and public institutions	103	15.60%
	farmer	21	3.20%
	student	359	54.50%
	retirees	91	13.80%
	other	18	2.70%
Monthly income	RMB 2000 and below	293	44.50%
	2001~4000 yuan	63	9.60%
	4001~6000 yuan	105	15.90%
	6001~8000 yuan	107	16.20%
	8001~10000 yuan	66	10.00%
	More than 10,000 yuan	25	3.80%

Table 2: Reliability Coefficients, Convergent Validity and Correlations for Each Construct

Source: Questionnaire data

Construction	Mean variance extraction (AVE)	Combination reliability coefficient (CR)	Kronbach Coefficient	1.FE	2.ME	3.AFF	4.COG	5.STPA	6.STD	7.RTD	8.PF
1.Flow Experience (FE)	0.803	0.953	0.939	<b>0.896</b>							
2.Meaning Experience	0.73	0.95	0.938	0.404	<b>0.854</b>						

(ME)											
3.Affcctive (AFF)	0.647	0.936	0.922	0.488	0.31	<b>0.804</b>					
4.Cognitive Evaluation (COG)	0.764	0.951	0.938	0.321	0.519	0.381	<b>0.874</b>				
5.Theater Performance audience satisfaction (TPAS)	0.868	0.952	0.924	0.58	0.529	0.494	0.646	<b>0.932</b>			
6.Theater audience satisfaction (TAS)	0.749	0.9	0.833	0.546	0.464	0.439	0.486	0.612	<b>0.865</b>		
7.Theater Audience recommendation n intention (TARI)	0.785	0.916	0.864	0.394	0.426	0.414	0.493	0.482	0.712	<b>0.886</b>	
8.Perception Match (PF)	0.937	0.978	0.966	0.388	0.35	0.385	0.567	0.603	0.515	0.426	<b>0.968</b>



Table 3: Structural Model Test Results *Source:* Questionnaire data

Construction	Decision Factor (R <sup>2</sup> )	Predictive Correlation (Q <sup>2</sup> )	Affcctive (AFF)	Effect size(F <sup>2</sup> )			
				Cognitive Evaluation (COG)	Theater Performance audience satisfaction (TPAS)	Theater audience satisfaction (TAS)	Theater audience recommendation intention (TARI)
Flow experience (FE)			0.183	0.003			
Meaning experience (ME)			0.02	0.195			
Affcctive (AFF)	22.50%	0.143		0.05	0.12		
Cognitive evaluation (COG)	29.00%	0.218			0.388		
Theater performance audience satisfaction (TPAS)	43. 1%	0.371				0.175	
6.Theater audience satisfaction (TAS)	36.40%	0.263					0.595
Theater audience recommendation intention (TARI)	37.30%	0.289					
Perception match (PF)						0.079	
Theater performance audience satisfaction*Perception match (TPAS*PF)						0.052	

Table 4: Path Comparison Test Results *Source:*Questionnaire

Path coefficient	Results	Conclusion
$\beta_{FE \rightarrow AFF}$ VS. $\beta_{FE \rightarrow COG} = 0.308^{**}$ VS. 0.067	$t=2.981$	$\beta_{FE \rightarrow AFF} > \beta_{FE \rightarrow COG}$
$\beta_{ME \rightarrow AFF}$ VS. $\beta_{ME \rightarrow COG} = 0.110^*$ VS. 0.600 <sup>**</sup>	$t=-5.823$	$\beta_{ME \rightarrow AFF} < \beta_{ME \rightarrow COG}$

Attention: \*means  $p < 0.05$  , \*\*means  $p < 0.01$

Table 5: Process Intermediate Test Results *Source: Questionnaire*

Path and Comparison	Effect	Boot ULC	Boot SE	Boot LLCI
Flow experience→Affective→Satisfaction (FE→AFF→SAT)	0.168	0.038	0.104	0.253
Meaning experience→Cognitive evaluation→Satisfaction (ME→COG→SAT)	0.337	0.049	0.242	0.433
Mediation effect comparison ( $\beta_{FEA \rightarrow FF \rightarrow SAT} -$ $\beta_{ME \rightarrow COG \rightarrow SAT}$ )	-0.163	0.072	-0.304	-0.022

## Discussion

In this study, the sample characteristics were specifically analyzed, and the reliability and validity of the construct scales were analyzed using Smart PLS, and the results showed that the reliability and validity of the scales met the requirements. Secondly, the results of testing the overall model of this study showed that the goodness of fit and other indicators of the research model performed well and met the general application criteria. Again, the structural equation model was used to test the previously proposed research hypotheses, verify the mediating effects and conduct a comparative analysis. Finally, this study tested the moderating effect of perceptual matching and confirmed the moderating role of perceptual matching in the effect of theater acting audience satisfaction on theater audience satisfaction.

## Conclusion

This study thoroughly explores the connotation and characteristics of immersion experience and meaningful experience in theater performing arts, and systematically analyzes the effect and mechanism of the effect of immersion experience and meaningful experience on audience satisfaction in theater performing arts. The main findings are as follows:

1. In the theatrical performance context, immersive and meaningful experiences have a common impact on audience satisfaction, but the intensity of their impact differs.

Through literature review, this study found that meaningful experience essentially reflects the audience's perception and reflection of themselves during the performance, and is a feeling of experiencing self-progress and growth, which continues after leaving the theater performance context and brings the audience a lasting satisfaction. The immersion experience, on the other hand, is limited to the temporary immersion in the moment of watching the theater performance, and dissipates once it is removed from the theater performance story context. Through empirical research, we further found that the meaningful experience based on the

storyline, cultural connotation and audience's own connection has a stronger effect on audience satisfaction than the immersion experience mainly based on embodied engagement and sensory stimulation.

2.Differences in the mechanisms of immersion and meaningful experiences on the satisfaction of theater performing arts audiences.

The findings of this study further expand and deepen the proposition of the existence of both traditional attitude- and behavior-based and affective factor-based evaluation paths of audience satisfaction with theater performance as proposed in theater performance-related studies, confirming that audience satisfaction with theater performance is the result of the combined effect of two paths: affective response and cognitive evaluation.

3.Audience's emotional response to theater performance affects their perceived evaluation of theater performance.

In the theater performing arts experience, the audience's emotional response is seen as a useful piece of information that can influence the directionality of the cognitive process and prompt the audience to think and judge the theater performing arts at a holistic level.

4.The audience's satisfaction with the theater's performance influences their satisfaction with the theater and further influences their willingness to recommend the theater.

In the theater acting experience, the audience's immersion and meaningful experiences influence audience satisfaction through emotional responses and cognitive evaluations. When audiences are satisfied with theater acting, this attitude of theirs generalizes, expands and extends to feeling satisfied with the theater through the association of theater acting with the theater.

5.Perceptual matching plays a moderating role in the influence of theater performing arts audience satisfaction on theater audience satisfaction.Theater performing arts products and projects are located in theaters, and theaters have a certain degree of relevance.

## **Suggestions**

This study provides ideas and methodological guidance for theater performing arts product content design and theater audience satisfaction enhancement. This is reflected in the following five areas:

1.Investors and operators need to deepen their understanding of the immersive and meaningful experience for theater performing arts audiences.

2.The overlapping effect of the two types of experiences should be brought into play in the design of theatrical performances.

3.To strengthen the content design that evokes emotional response and deepens the audience's cognitive evaluation.

4.To strengthen theater performing arts supervision and management, as a way to improve theater performing arts audience satisfaction and theater audience satisfaction and loyalty.

5.Theater administrations should select theater performing arts programs that match the local area, thus strengthening the positive impact of theater performing arts audience satisfaction on theater audience satisfaction and willingness to recommend.

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