STAR QUALITY: THE EFFECT OF CELEBRITY CASTING ON LONDON THEATRES

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the results of research conducted on the effect of celebrity casting on the attitudes of theatre goers. It is specifically concerned with London theatres, although the findings will be applicable elsewhere since the expansion of celebrity casting is a global phenomenon.

The research addresses the question of whether celebrity performers have a positive or negative effect on the brand equity of theatre by investigating four hypotheses: Firstly, that there is a difference between celebrity and fame; secondly, that expertise is considered the most important dimension of credibility for a theatrical performer; thirdly, that celebrities with theatrical expertise will have a positive effect on the brand equity of theatre and, lastly, that celebrities without theatrical expertise will have a negative effect on the brand equity of theatre.

A two-tier (qualitative and quantitative) study was conducted. In the first stage, theatre professionals were interviewed on the topic of celebrity casting and the results were analysed to determine questions for the second stage of the research. The main study was a respondent-completed survey distributed at selected London theatres to assess the effects of celebrity casting on theatre audiences.

The results showed that theatre audiences believed there is a difference between fame and celebrity. The media create celebrity, whereas fame is awarded in recognition of a career achievement. Audiences felt that expertise was the most important dimension of credibility for a performer within the theatre, and that celebrities considered to have theatrical expertise would be more likely to attract them to the theatre.

This study concludes that celebrity performers with theatrical expertise will have a positive effect on the brand equity of theatre, while those without theatrical expertise will potentially have a negative effect. The study also recommends that theatre producers and marketers should adopt a more celebrity-product fit brand management strategy that is in keeping with existing brand management theory on celebrity endorsement.

The results of the survey and interviews clearly demonstrate that theatre-goers are more likely to be attracted to the theatre by celebrities with theatrical expertise and not by "someone known simply through film, television or the all-pervasive gossip columns" (Billington, 2007). Celebrities with a background in theatre and film were seen to draw audiences to the theatre, as opposed to those who grew out of reality TV shows, search for a star shows and famous couples who were very much rejected as being suitable for theatre.
For building brand equity, most audience members felt that a celebrity would increase their awareness of theatre but not necessarily their opinion. In order to establish a truly strong theatre brand, both good awareness and favourable opinions need to be established in the minds of audiences. In this respect theatre brands have much in common with other types of brands; awareness alone is not enough to build a brand. Lastly, the age demographic was seen to play an important role in whether or not celebrity casting would be effective (younger audiences were unsurprisingly impressed by celebrity). However neither 'theatre-going frequency' nor 'percentage of London theatre visits' appeared to have much impact in determining whether celebrity casting would be effective. This finding appears to contradict the previous research which had suggested that celebrity casting encourages those who attend the theatre less frequently to become more interested in attending more.

INTRODUCTION

"It has become increasingly difficult for a straight play to succeed in the West End without a big name attached; and, where once that would have meant a star of the calibre of Maggie Smith or Judi Dench, it now refers to someone known simply through film, television or the all-pervasive gossip columns." (Billington, 2007, p.406)

British theatre has, historically, always cast famous actors to draw in their audiences, particularly in the time of Shakespeare when actors such as Richard Burbage often had scenes written specifically for them so they would play the leading role. However, the criticisms, of Michael Billington regarding the use of 'celebrities' within the theatre are becoming louder, and numerous articles, reviews and blogs appear every time a new theatre production with a 'celebrity' cast is announced. In contrast, there are many who feel that not all 'celebrities' are a bad thing, and can in fact not only enhance theatre- goers' experiences, but also encourage new and larger audiences to attend the theatre. Despite this continued argument as to whether or not celebrities are beneficial to a performance (Billington, 2007, Luckhurst and Moody, 2005), this is the first study which empirically investigates this situation.

In the current economic climate funding has become a key issue for the arts, and in particular the theatre industry, with Arts Council England cutting more than £19 million from the 2011 budget. The topic of celebrity culture has received considerable critical attention within both public and professional theatre discussion and theatrical productions increasingly use celebrities as a marketing tool to draw in bigger audiences. Many critics argue this is simply to generate revenue and may be damaging theatre as an art-form, while others suggest it is a suitable modern day method of encouraging people to go to the theatre who may otherwise have no interest.

"Celebrity is a commonplace term, one variously assigned to political leaders such as George W. Bush and Tony Blair, to actors such as Judi Dench and Robert Deniro, and to professional athletes and coaches." (Faircloth, p.563)., Faircloth (2002) identifies Politics Entertainment and Sport as the main sources of our celebrity culture. This study will investigate the awareness and opinions of London theatre audiences regarding the ideas of celebrity and fame, and the overall effect they can have on the brand equity of the theatrical production. Although extensive research has been carried out on the impact of celebrity endorsement on a products' brand equity (e.g. Costanzo and Goodnight, 2006; Agrawal and Kamakura, 1995), no study has been discovered which investigates the branding effect of the use of celebrities within the theatre industry. Unlike advertising and marketing, celebrities working within theatre cannot be described as endorsers, as they do not endorse the product, they are in fact, part of the product itself. For this reason, this study will refer to celebrity casting and/or celebrity performers rather than celebrity endorsement when referring to the theatre industry.

Overall, the aim of this research is to explore the impact the trend of celebrity casting. The study asks whether the use of celebrity performers affects audiences' awareness and opinion of the theatre, and thereby their likelihood to attend a performance.

In particular there are four main research questions:
1. Does the casting of celebrity performers in theatre productions affect audience awareness and opinion of the theatre, and therefore their attendance?
2. Do different types of celebrity performer, i.e. celebrities with different characteristics or industry backgrounds, affect audience opinion?
3. Does the casting of celebrities, and their different types, affect the brand equity of theatre?
4. What do professionals working within theatre think about this trend and what do audience members think?

This research aims to contribute to the field of marketing by providing information on the impact of celebrities on brand equity of the theatre industry.

The study took place in London theatres in the summer of 2011. The study looked at the opinions of both theatre professionals and audience members, aiming to sample as
wide a range as possible within the demographics of age, theatre going frequency and percentage of London theatre visits. The research will focus on London based theatre due to the much more competitive and diverse nature of theatres in the area compared to regional theatres throughout the country. There are over 800 registered theatres in London compared to between 1 and 100 theatres in other regions of the country (SOLT, 2009) and so London theatre audiences are much more likely to choose to go to a theatre for reasons such as production and casting rather than location. The use of specific theatre names will also be avoided, except where the name is connected to a particular production.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used to provide a mixture of descriptive, interpretative and empirical data. The initial research is qualitative and uses a semi-structured interview methodology to discuss the research topic with theatre professionals. The interview data will then be interpreted in order to establish questions for the main study, which will be a quantitative survey to investigate the effect of celebrity casting on audience members.

BRITISH THEATRE: A (VERY) SHORT HISTORY

London theatre began to flourish following the English Reformation, and the first permanent theatre, known as The Theatre, was built in Shoreditch in 1576 by James Burbage. This was shortly followed by the construction of The Curtain which, along with The Theatre, was used by William Shakespeare's company (Narey, 2006). Over the following centuries, censorship kept a tight rein on what could be shown in theatres, and only patented houses were permitted to produce dramas, while all other theatres were allowed to perform only musical entertainments (Lathan, 2004). Despite this, the end of the seventeenth century saw the emergence of what is known as the West End, when a number of theatres and halls were built, such as the Adelphi on the Strand. The Theatre Act of 1843 relaxed the laws regarding the performance of plays and, with a growth in the popularity of musical hall entertainment, loopholes were found in order to produce drama-based work, known as melodrama, by the clever inclusion of a small element of music (Donohue, 2004). The 1950s and 1960s saw the production of plays in clubs to avoid the restrictions of stage censorship, which was finally abolished by the Theatres Act of 1968 (Lathan, 2004).

The West End theatre district traditionally includes the London area between The Strand in the south, Regent Street in the West, Oxford Street in the North and Kingsway in the East, with some of the most famous theatre streets being Shaftsbury Avenue and Drury Lane (Donohue, 2004). The West End contains approximately 40 venues and has been branded as 'Theatreland' by the Society of London Theatre (SOLT) and Westminster council. Theatre in the West End district usually consists of musicals,

comedies and classic or middle-brow plays. Alongside Broadway in New York, the West End is considered to "represent the highest level of commercial theatre in the English speaking world" (Johansson, 2011) and attending a show there is commonly considered a tourist activity (Innes, 1998). The majority of West End theatres receive productions from elsewhere, known as receiving houses, but there are some that produce their own work, which are called producing houses ("Who works", 2011). The majority of
producing houses, however, are found in other London theatre areas. The main off

WestEnd theatre districts include the Southbank, Waterloo, Southwark and the East

End, and these districts house more non-commercial or government subsidised theatres such as the Royal National Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company the Royal Court Theatre, the Almeida and the Globe ("Theatre List", 2011).

London theatre audiences

London theatre attendance surpassed 12 million for the first time in 2002, and then 13 million in 2007 ("SOLT Annual", 2011), and the latest SOLT annual report revealed a further record breaking number of over 14 million attendances, equating to total revenues of £504 million, and the impact of London theatre on the UK economy at around £2 billion per annum. The Arts Council England (ACE) annual report 2009/10 discusses the statistical findings of the 836 organisations it funds, including London and regional theatres. The 271 London theatres funded by ACE make up 32% of its portfolio, and of all the art-forms funded across the UK theatre is the largest portion with 26%. Total attendance across the country is clearly dominated by London, with 53% compared to the nearest competitor, the North West, with only 10%. Theatre also grosses the highest earned income compared to subsidised income among all the arts. The total income in the arts in the UK increased by nearly £20 million between 2008/09 and 2009/10 alone, but a staggering 40% of all UK tickets sales were generated in London and 48% by theatre organisations (ACE, 2011).

The celebrity casting trend

The annual results were surprising, as many feared that the recession would damage the theatre and significantly reduce attendance (Lawson, 2009), but despite such good financial results, there are still real concerns within the industry about its financial viability (Hartley, 2009) as more funding cuts are imminent. These concerns have led to increased spending by producers on recognised names in the hope they will invoke greater interest and attendance, or raise the profile of a show in a period of decline (Santana, 2009). Some believe that the use of celebrity casting is just as concerning as the financial downturn (Lawson, 2009) and that, while the benefits to the box office of using a familiar name to advertise and produce merchandising are obvious, they may have a damaging effect on productions and, in turn, the theatre in general (Santana,
2009). Some consider the financial gain that a celebrity can bring to a production a positive in today's economic climate, allowing a show to be "more or less sold out before it opened" (Lawson, 2009), while others, such as Sir Jonathan Miller (2008) are clearly in disagreement and consider the modern day "obsession with celebrity" (quoted in Adams, 2008) to be a blight on British theatre.

The increasing trend of celebrity casting has run parallel to the growing number of reality TV programmes aired, particular those of a specific TV-to-Theatre casting nature, such as "I'd Do Anything". These programmes, also referred to as 'search for a star' shows, are audition-like on-air competitions that the general public can enter, and the winner (as voted by the viewing public) is cast as the next lead role in a West End musical. Allot (as quoted in Lawson, 2009) writes:

"the BBC and ITV have been able to do more to promote the West End in the past few years than the best intentioned arts departments of those broadcasters ever could."

His views are substantiated by the figures that two-thirds of theatre tickets sold in 2007 were for musicals and that the most popular of those were the shows that had been cast from the Saturday night television casting shows (Singh, 2008). This is consistent with Lathen (2011) who discusses how the 2006/7 increase in new

theatre-goers was "buoyed by 2006's glut of new musical productions and Andrew Lloyd Webber's venture into reality TV", and goes on to suggest that this method of casting is a trend that is unlikely to slow down. These casting choices are clearly not without their critics, and in articles and reviews concern has been voiced about the artistic damage this could do to theatre "in favour of something shinier and more easily marketable, built around TV and celebrity" (Hartley, 2009).

It is not only musicals where the celebrity casting trend is visible; plays, which have been gaining in popularity, have closely followed suit (Lathan 2011). Arguments in favour of using celebrities include the fact that they are likely to encourage a newer and younger audience to attend the theatre (Lawson, 2009) and are an effective way of marketing and promoting shows in order to draw in better audiences, reputation and energy (Pincus, 2001). Poyhonen (2010) writes:

"...have the theatres actually done something amazing there – by drawing people into the theatre using the celebrity brand, the theatre is making money, the fans are getting their fix and are simultaneously watching a brilliant piece of theatre..."

This is driven by the stars ability to gain media awareness through their own public presence and influence their fan base using the personal connection that audiences feel for them (Marshall, 1997). However, this personal connection that the public can have with a celebrity also has the potential to change and possibly damage their effectiveness in a live performance (Pincus, 2001). Quinn (1990), as actor and director, discusses the effect celebrities can have on a theatre performance, stating that all actors bring to the stage some element of previous roles, and in the case of celebrities this also includes their public persona. This "overexposure of his or her personal life' (Fordham, 2009-2010**,** p.156) means audiences become more aware of the celebrity than the character they are trying to portray, making the performance unbelievable (Stephenson, 2007),and this in turn is damaging to the whole production.

The theatre critics' view of celebrity casting

Theatre critics agree that celebrity casting can detract from the production as a whole, particularly when more than one celebrity is in a production (Fordham, 2009-2010). Such a situation was highlighted in a review of Resurrection Blues at the Old Vic in 2006, described as a "bizarrely awful" (Taylor, 2006) piece of theatre that, due to the overuse of celebrity casting, was not given a chance to shine as a whole production (Billington, 2006). Quinn (2009) discusses how the celebrity actor not only affects the performance for the audience but also for the critics. They feel that they are unable to evaluate the performance due to the pre-existing judgements about the media persona of the person, regardless of whether they are renowned and skilled actors or not (Fordham, 2009-2010).

However, not all theatre critics share this view, and although they may feel that "the number of shows *without* an established star in them is ever-diminishing" (MJGREVIEW, 2008), they are indeed able to distinguish between the different calibres of celebrity performers, of which there are those who "give the whole idea a bad name" (Crompton, 2007) and those who reap substantial accolades (Hartley, 2009). Overall, the critics seem to feel that if a celebrity can perform well they will be reviewed and applauded accordingly, and if not they will be considered as miscast and given no approval. Spencer (2007) comes to the conclusion that if the celebrity is sufficiently talented, any existing associations the audience may have with them will be put aside. One widely debated celebrity casting choice was that of David Tennant as Hamlet for the RSC in 2008, which spawned a huge amount of press on both sides of the debate. Sir Jonathan Miller (cited in Adams, 2008) referred to Tennant as "that man from Dr Who" while others described his performance as the best Hamlet they had ever seen. The back and forth discussions raised the question of whether all celebrities are tarred with the same brush, along the lines of Quinn (2009), or whether they can be categorised into those who are worthy of their stage roles and those who are not.

This argument is seemingly clear cut from the reviews, articles and blogs researched, where comments suggest that "It's the talent that matters, not the profile" and that people would "pay a big sum to see Patrick Stewart or Ian McKellen, who will almost certainly be brilliant" (both in response to Billington, 2008). However, if theatre-going

audiences are only interested in seeing celebrities with a background in theatre or proven acting ability, it begs the question why producers continue to cast celebrities who have neither. It is this financially-driven practice that may have lead critics and directors, as well as theatre-going audiences, to be cynical about whether there is a true demand for celebrity performers who are from other media backgrounds, and often untrained actors (Santana, 2009), to play a prominent part in the London theatre scene.

Celebrity endorsement

Marshall (1997) wrote "within society, the celebrity is a voice above others, a voice that is channelled into the media systems as being legitimately significant" (p. x). His theory is supported by Newbury (2000), who believes "the production of celebrity requires an elaborate organization of media behind it" (p.276). Both the idea that celebrity is directly linked to the media and whether celebrities are seen as having legitimacy are widely discussed within cultural, marketing and branding theory.

Within marketing there is a long history of using celebrities to influence consumers and promote products (Seno and Lukas 2007), and this is commonly referred to as celebrity endorsement (e.g. Keller 2008; Till 1998, Seno and Lukas 2007). Celebrity endorsement has become so widely used by marketers that in 2001 approximately one in five UK campaigns featured a celebrity endorser in some form (Erdogan et al, 2001). McCracken (1989) who wrote the first systematic work on celebrity endorsement, defines a celebrity endorser as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (p.310). A study by Agrawal and Kamakura (1995) analyses the economic worth and effect of celebrity endorsement announcements within advertising, concluding that there can be both positive and negative responses to celebrity endorsement. This is consistent with Till (1998), who discusses how, despite the popularity of celebrity endorsement, it is not always a success. The dramatic falls from grace of Tiger Woods and Lance Armstrong are a recent reminder of the perils of celebrity endorsement.

The positive effects created by celebrity endorsement are widely documented, and include the ability to draw attention to a product and alter the perception consumers have of a product by way of inferences consumers make based on what they know of that particular celebrity (Keller, 2008). A product can become instantly more popular and likeable when linked to a celebrity and their endorsement of a product, and this can greatly influence consumer purchase likelihood (Petty and Cacioppo, 1983). Celebrities have been found to be more effective endorsers than non-celebrity endorsers, for example company managers, consumers or professional experts (Friedman and Friendman, 1979; Atkin and Block, 1983). However, this has recently been contested by Mehta (1994), who concluded there were insignificant differences between the effect of celebrity endorsers and non-celebrity endorsers on advertising, brand or purchase intention. This is consistent with Horowitz (1993, cited in Costanzo and Goodnight) who found that the importance of celebrity endorsers in influencing purchase decision was diminishing. This theory was further developed by Raphel (1997), who concluded that in fact customer testimonials were more effective than a celebrity endorsement.

When an associative link forms between a brand and a celebrity they create a concept group that becomes meaningfully related to the brand (Meyers-Levy, 1989; Till 1998). For example, David Beckham endorsing a football brand would create a concept group involving football, success and sport, as these are the endorsers' qualities that become linked to the brand. Therefore, a celebrity is a channel by which meaning can be directly transferred to a brand (McKracken, 1989), and as such they become a powerful tool for brand equity management (Petty et al, 1983). This demonstrates the strategic reasons for using celebrity endorsers in the brand management process. The transference of the celebrity persona to the brand also poses the threat that a declining celebrity (for example Tiger Woods) can bring negative associations to the brand. The connection with the theatre study is that declining celebrity performers (for example David Hasselhoff) can create negative associations with both the production and the theatre in general.

Another key type of brand meaning is brand image. Keller (2008) defines brand image as the "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in the consumer memory" (p.3) and that it is "the way people think about a brand abstractly, rather than what they think the brand actually does" (p.65). These abstract associations with a brand can be formed through sources such as word of mouth, advertising or the consumers' own experience, and can include elements such as history and experiences, user profiles and purchase and

usage situations (Aaker, 1991).For example, the personal experience of a theatre-goer enjoying a production at a particular venue may form a positive association with that usage situation, i.e. going to the theatre. Hence. key demographic factors such as age and income can form brand associations (Aaker, 1991).

Celebrity credibility

A celebrity's attributes are imperative to the successful transference of association and image (Byrne et al, 2003) and those identified by the research include *credibility, attractiveness and power* (Kelman, 1961; Ohanian, 1990; Belch and Belch, 1995). As an attribute, power is most commonly connected with a spokesperson, and is more difficult to apply in advertising (Byrne et al, 2003). Fowles (1992) discusses the power a celebrity can hold over the public, and how he believes that it is not power of a historical nature, whereby it is seen as a legitimate way to exert control, but a more modern power "by which few have license to influence on a vast scale" (p.176). A source's credibility is the degree to which the consumer sees them as having the expertise or skill, combined with trustworthiness, to deliver objective and impartial information (Goldsmith et all, 2000; Ohanian, 1990), and can have a positive effect on influencing consumers about the product they are endorsing (Seno and Lukas, 2007). A study by Ohanian (1990) examines celebrity endorser credibility and tests the creation of a scale to measure this based on specific dimensions of credibility. The resulting dimensions are **trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness**, and these are affirmed in several other studies (e.g McKracken, 1989; Lord and Putrevu, 2009).

Source attractiveness can invoke likeability in consumers as a result of their "affection for the source due to their physical appearance, behaviour or other personal characteristics" (Byrne et al, 2003, p.292). The consumer can identify with the source if they hold similar preferences or beliefs (Belch and Belch, 1995), and so source attractiveness can have a positive and persuasive effect on the consumer (Till and Busler, 1983). Physical attractiveness combined with celebrity status is a key combination for advertisers when choosing celebrity endorsers and is thought to increase the recall and likeability of a brand (Kahle and Homer, 1985), providing a potentially powerful source of brand image (Kamins, 1990). Despite the majority of the literature agreeing that celebrity attractiveness enhances consumer attitudes of brands, there is some debate as to whether or not this will lead to actual purchase intention (Byrne et al, 2003).

Celebrity-product fit

A number of studies highlight the importance of the 'fit' between a celebrity endorser and the brand (Till and Busler, 1998) and research suggests that the image portrayed by the celebrity should be consistent with the message conveyed by the brand in order to achieve strong communication with consumers (Kamins, 1990). The appropriate choice of endorser is therefore key, and the attributes of the product being endorsed must be carefully defined in order to correctly match them to the characteristics of the celebrity (Misra and Beatty, 1990). When this congruent pairing is made successfully,

the endorser serves to reinforce a brand's existing associations and establish new ones (O'Cass and Frost, 2002). Adversely, a poor fit between endorser and brand characteristics will act as the main cause of an unsuccessful endorser campaign (McKracken, 1989). The more similarity between two stimuli, i.e. the brand and its endorser, the easier it is to build an associative link and to differentiate against other, less successfully matched stimuli within the competitive market (Einhorn and Hogarth, 1986, cited in O'Cass and Frost, 2002). Combining this with the discussions on brand image it can be suggested that, where congruent celebrity-product fit is considered as having a positive effect on brand image, and in turn brand image is considered as having a positive effect on brand equity, a congruent celebrity-product fit will have a positive effect on brand equity (Seno and Lukas, 2007).

Although the use of celebrity endorsers has been seen to have positive effects on brand equity, it does require careful management in order to choose the correct endorser in terms of both characteristics and fit, and comes with a level of risk (Shanklin, 1994, cited in Costanzo and Goodnight). The public image of a celebrity defines their ability to increase brand equity, but is also the source of risk to the brand as the marketer is unable to control the actions of the celebrity, the reactions of consumers, or the changeable nature of the public media from which the celebrity's image has developed (Tom et al, 1992). If a strong association has been formed between celebrity and brand, any negative information regarding the celebrity could then become directly associated with the

brand and have a damaging negative effect (O'Cass and Frost, 2002). Given this potential risk, it is imperative for marketers to be cautious in their choice of celebrity endorser and conduct appropriate research to reduce these risks. In light of this, there is a surprising lack of empirical research on the subject, which is an area which this study proposes to address.

Silvera and Ausetad (2004) also examined possible factors that shape celebrity endorser effectiveness and their study focuses on both celebrity motivation and the celebrity-product fit. It questions whether celebrities endorsing several products may have a detrimental effect as they are not loyal to one brand. Celebrities endorsing multiple products may be seen by consumers as insincere, thereby damaging the endorsements' effectiveness due to a lack of specific celebrity-product meaning (Keller, 2008). Many examples of this can be seen in advertising, and particularly within sport celebrity endorsement, for example Anna Kournikova, who endorsed a wide variety of products including Xbox, Berlei lingerie, Lycos search engine and Omega watches (Isidore, 2002). However, this argument may not apply to theatre, as actors are expected to move from one production to another, but may be of relevance to Quinn's (1990) theory that actors' previous roles or public image can change audiences' perception of their performance.

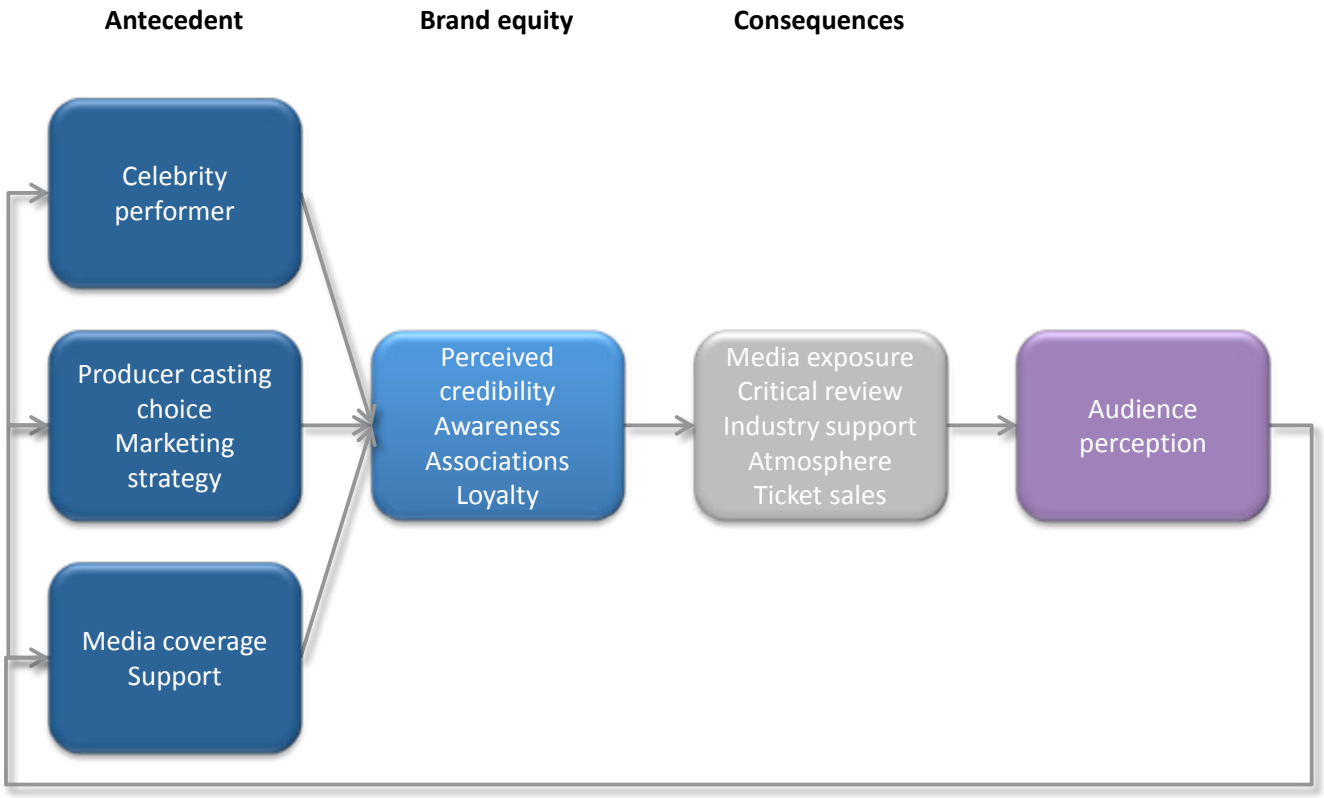
In order to ascertain a celebrities' potential to increase brand equity within theatre, the study will look specifically at their brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness will be ascertained using recall and recognition techniques, such as asking audience members to name the first celebrities that come to mind and whether or not they known who certain celebrities are. Brand image will be determined for both the recall and recognition categories of celebrity by asking whether each of the celebrities in these categories have a positive or negative effect in the audience members' likelihood to attend a theatre production if the celebrity were to be cast in it. The constructs of awareness and image will then be compared and analysed to determine whether or not they both need to be present in order to successfully create brand equity and increase audience attendance.

CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

.Ohanian's (1990) dimensions of celebrity credibility have been particularly influential in suggesting research methods to answer the questions within this study. Principles of sociocultural theory suggest the idea that psychological processes stem from intentional social interactions between people, specifically within a cultural environment. This is consistent with brand management theory, whereby brand image is "the way people think about a brand abstractly, rather than what they think the brand actually does" (Keller, 2008, p.65).

Figure 1, below, outlines the theories and concepts for the research. It demonstrates the relationship between the concept of celebrity performers and the concept of brand equity within the theatre industry. It shows that the relationship between these two concepts is a direct result of the effect that celebrity casting has on audience members, and this effect then feeds back into the original concept of the celebrity performer. This constant flow of cause and effect demonstrates the causal nature of this study.

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK DIAGRAM



INTERVIEW FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The respondents were asked to rank the three dimensions of credibility – trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness – in order of importance. The results are summarised in Figure 1.

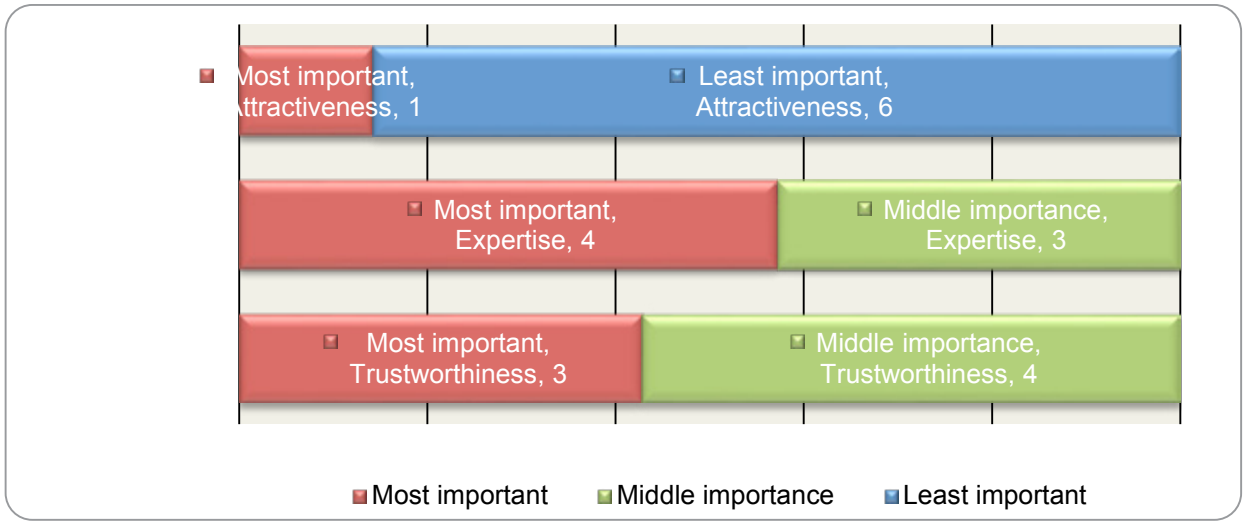


FIGURE 1.RANKING THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF CELEBRITY CREDIBILITY; ATTRACTIVENESS, EXPERTISE, TRUSTWORTHINESS,.

A total of 213 surveys were completed for the quantitative stage. This was considerably larger than the 100 responses determined from the power calculation for 95% accuracy with a 10% margin of error to be able to generalise to a wider population. The 213 sample group size returns a 95% level of accuracy with a 6.7% margin of error.

Questions 4 was used to establish whether audience members considered there to be a difference between a famous person and a celebrity. Figure 2 indicates that a significant proportion of respondents, 86%, considered there to be a difference between someone
who is a celebrity and someone who is famous.

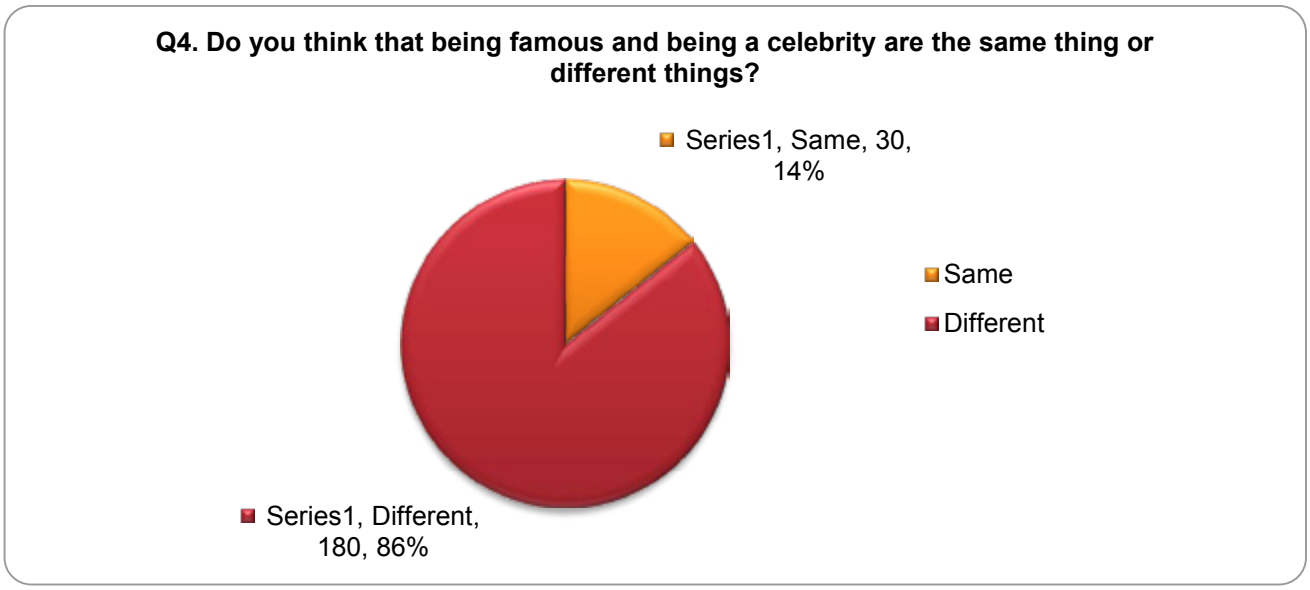


FIGURE2.WHETHER AUDIENCES BELIEVE THAT BEING A CELEBRITY AND BEING FAMOUS ARE THE SAME THING OR DIFFERENT.N = 211.

Question 5 was used to examine the definition that audience members would most likely use for 'celebrity'. The 7 categories given were the emergent categories from the qualitative data findings. Figure3 illustrates that more than half of respondents, 55.2%, would define a celebrity as 'Someone with a lot of media exposure and coverage'. No other category gained more than a 12% share of the results, with the next highest being "Someone who is a household name" with 11.9%.

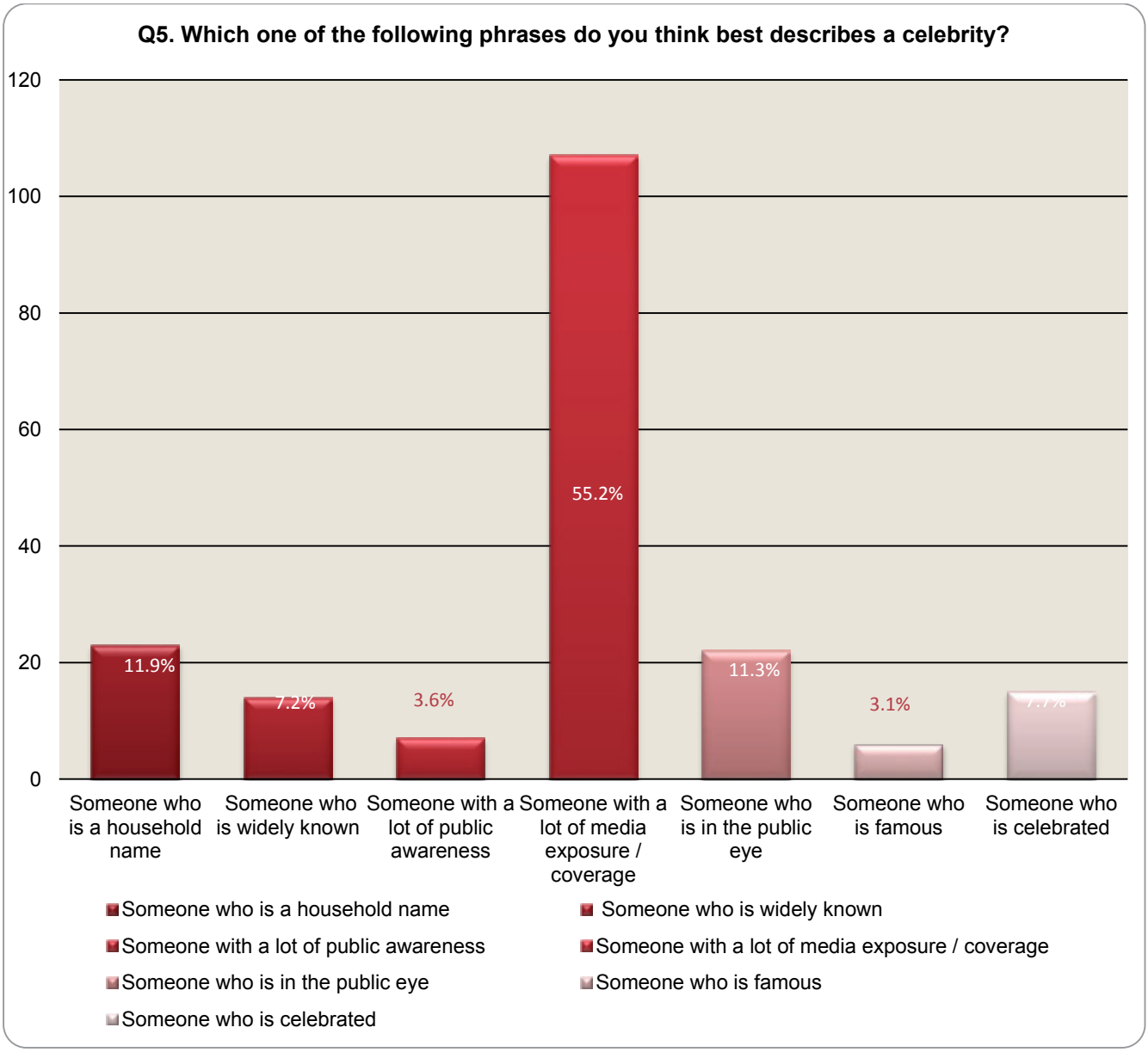


FIGURE 3. PHRASES USED TO DEFINE THE TERM CELEBRITY.N = 194.

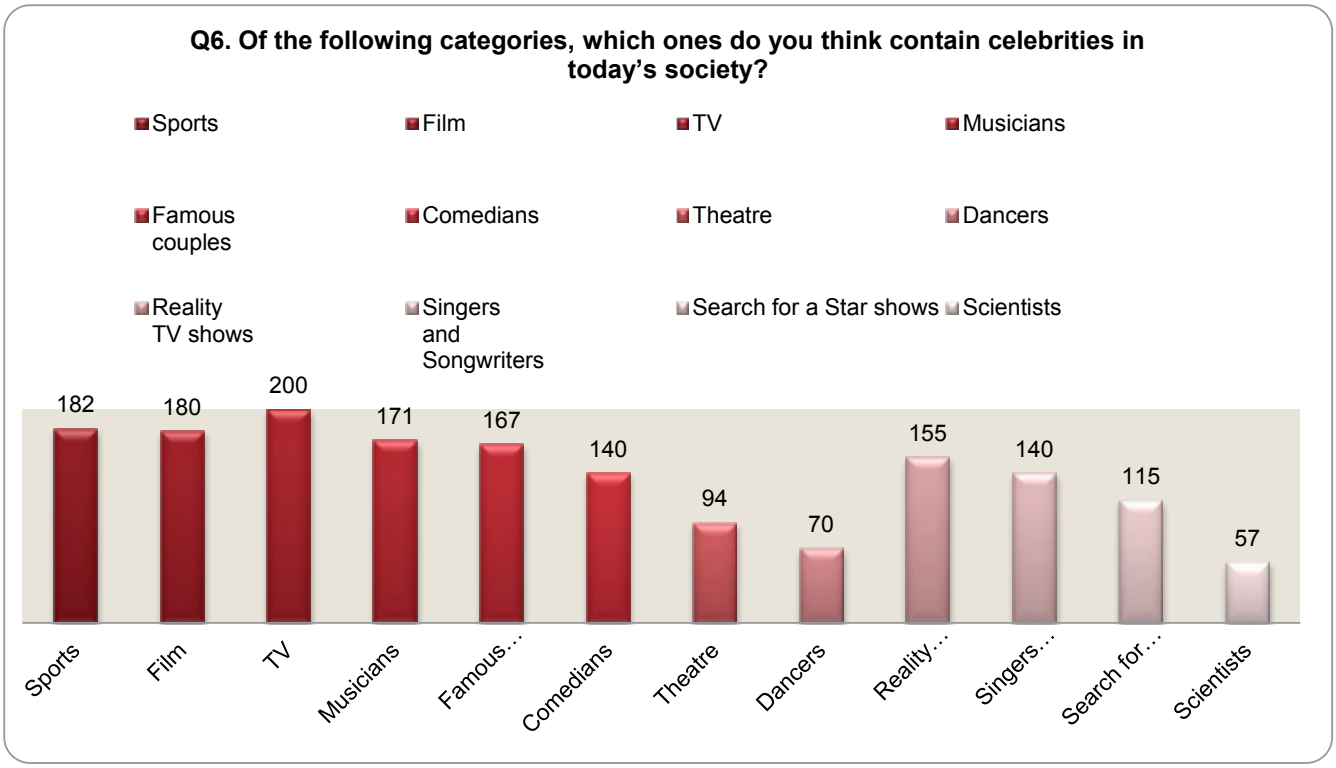


FIGURE 4. WHICH CATEGORIES ARE CONSIDERED TO CONTAIN CELEBRITIES IN TODAY'S SOCIETY. N = 211.

In order to further investigate respondents' views of what constitues a celebrity, they were given 12 categories, developed during the qualitative stage, and asked which they believed contained celebrities in today's society. Figure 4 shows that TV was the highest ranking category, while Theatre, Dancers and Scientists were the three lowest ranking categories.

Respondents were asked which of the same 12 categories would be most likely to attractthem to attend the theatre. Figure 5 below illustrates that film was the highest resulting category (count: 58) and Theatre was the second highest (count: 53). Both of these categories were much higher than any other category, and together made up 64%of total responses.

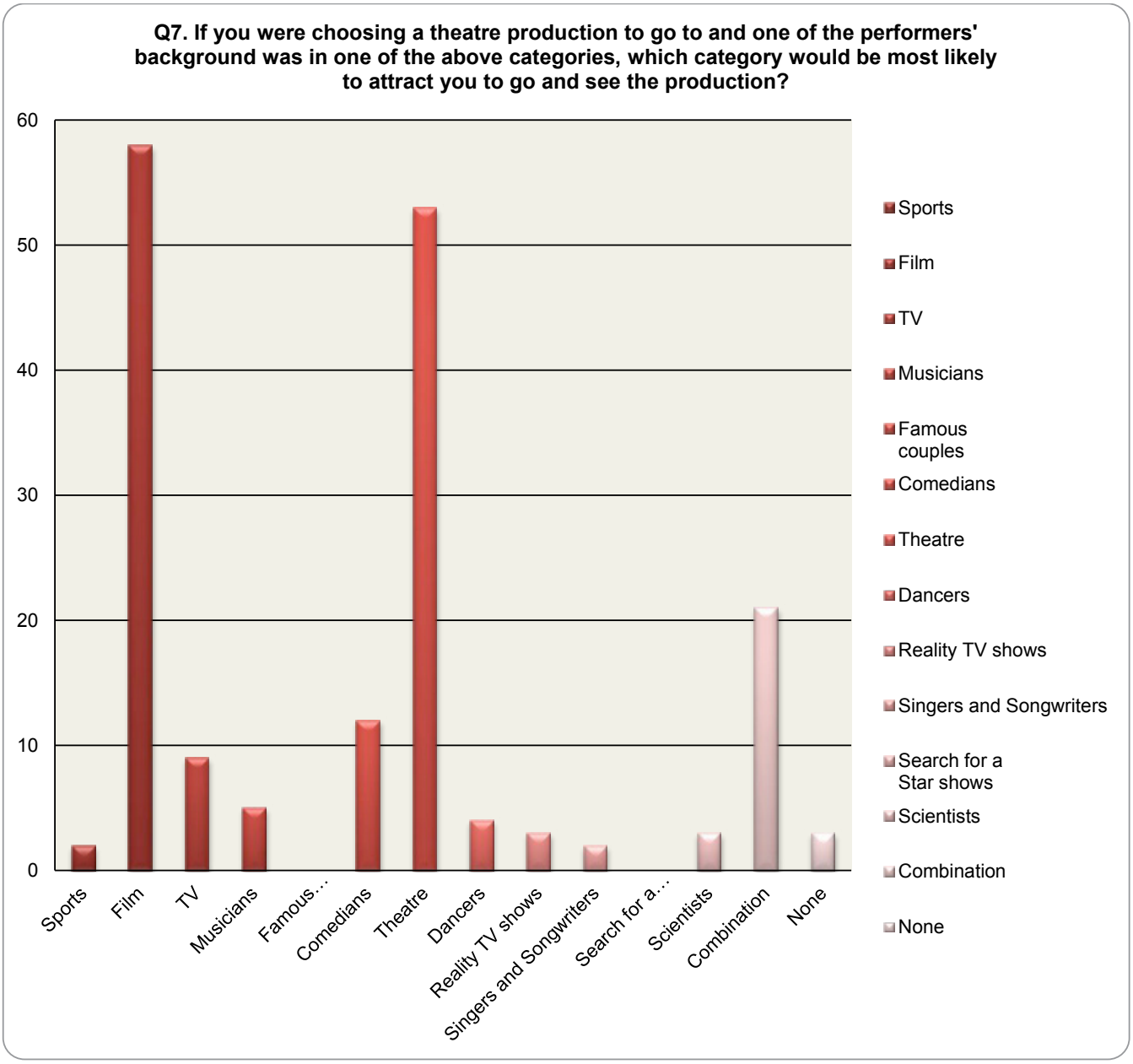


FIGURE 5. WHICH CATEGORIES OF CELEBRITY WOULD ATTRACT AUDIENCE MEMBERS TO THE THEATRE. N = 175.

In order to establish why respondents believe whether celebrity and fame were the same or different, and the reasons behind their choice of definition, Questions 8 –11 were developed to establish their general view of the celebrity phenomenon.

Figure 6 below shows the results to Question 8, which asked respondents to name their favourite celebrity. Only reults for celebrities who were named more than once are shown here, but a total of 101 different celebrities were mentioned. (For a full list, see Appendix7).

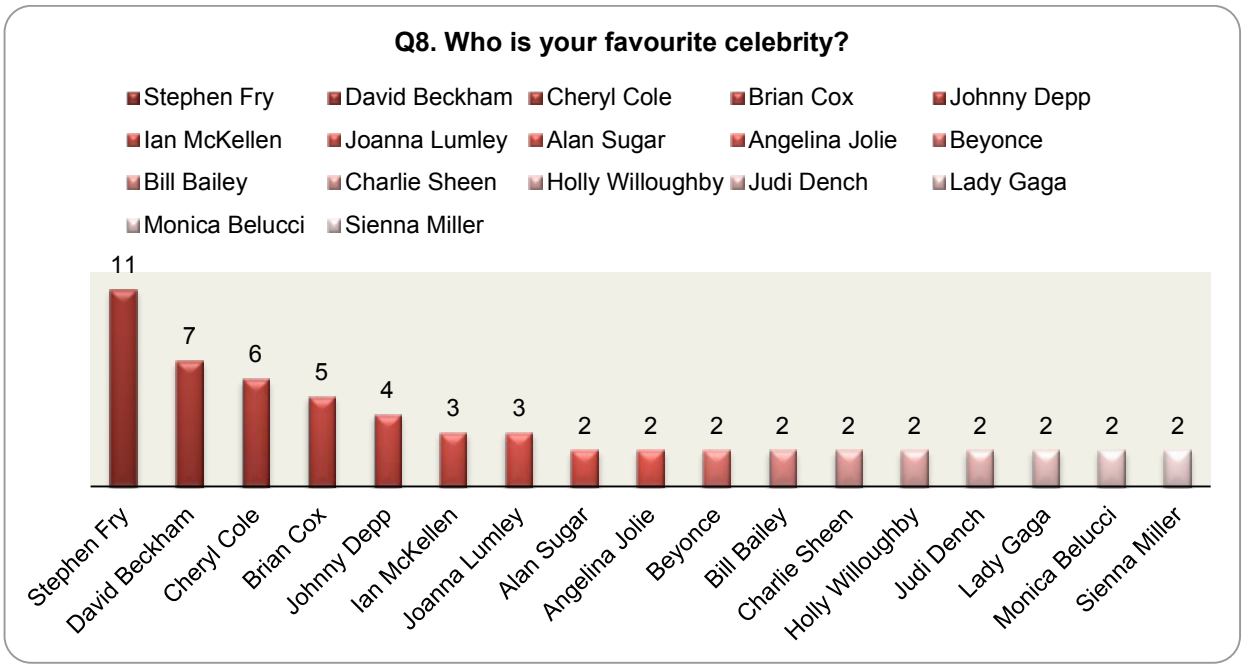


FIGURE 6. AUDIENCE MEMBER'S FAVOURITE CELEBRITIES. N = 192 (NOTE: THIS GRAPH DISPLAYS ONLY THOSE CELEBRITIES MENTIONED MORE THAN ONCE. 101 CELEBRITIES WERE MENTIONED IN TOTAL).

Figure6shows that Stephen Fry was the most chosen favourite celebrity, with a count of

11. This is a surprisingly high portion(6%) given the total number of celebrities named.

Figure7 indicates that a greater number of respondents would be less likely to attend a theatre production with a celebrity in it (21%) than would be more likely (15%). However, the vast majority (64%) said that it would depend on the celebrity.

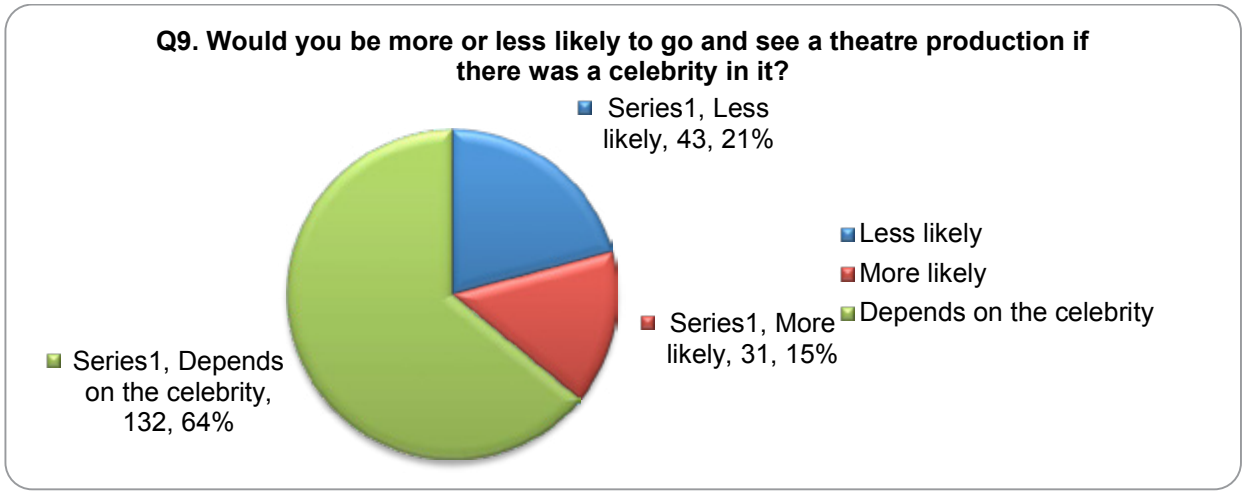


FIGURE 7. THE LIKELIHOOD OF RESPONDENTS TO ATTEND A THEATRE PROUCTION WITH A CELEBRITY IN IT. N = 216.

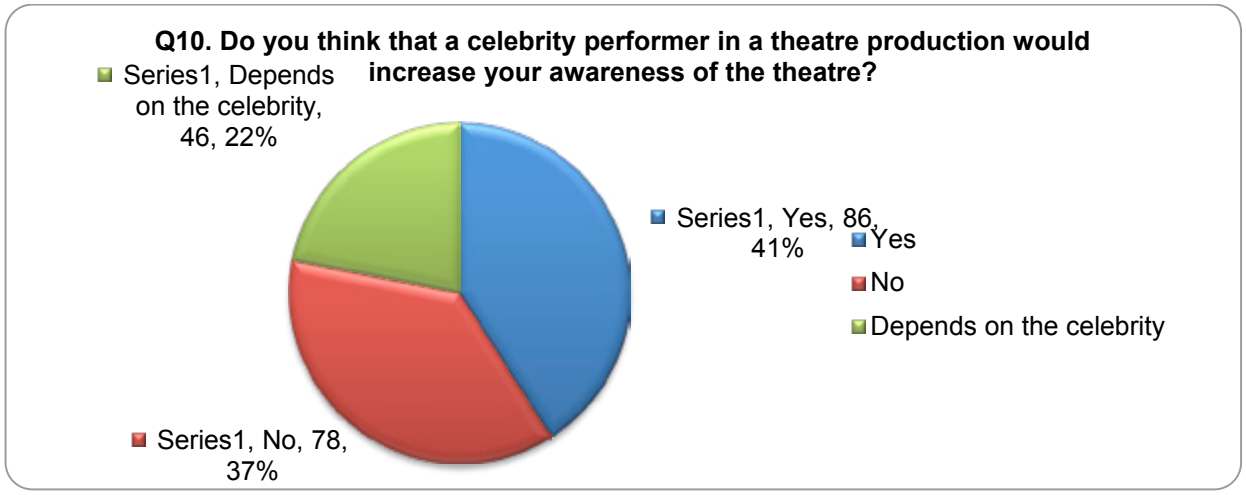


FIGURE 8. WHETHER A CELEBRITY PERFORMER WOULD INCREASE AN AUDIENCE MEMBER'S AWARENESS OF THE THEATRE. N = 210.

Figure 8 shows that the number ofrespondents who felt a celebrity performer would increase their awareness of theatre was closely matched by the number who felt it would not increase their awareness; 41% and 37% respectively. 22% respondents said that it would depend on the celebrity.

A Chi-squared test was performed to determine whether there was a relationship between the likelihood that a celebrity performer would increase a respondent's awareness of the theatre and the previous question of whether a respondent would be more or less likely to go to a theatre production with a celebrity in it. There was a strong relation between the two which was highly significant (Chi=26.127, $p < 0.001$). This means that those who were more likely to have increased awareness of a theatre production based on having a celebrity present were also more likely to go to a theatre production with a celebrity in it.

Figure9 illustrates that the vast majority of respondents (68%) felt that the use of a celebrity performer in a theatre production would not improve their opinion of theatre. A mere 4% indicated that it would improve their opinion of theatre, and 28% answered that it would depend on the celebrity.

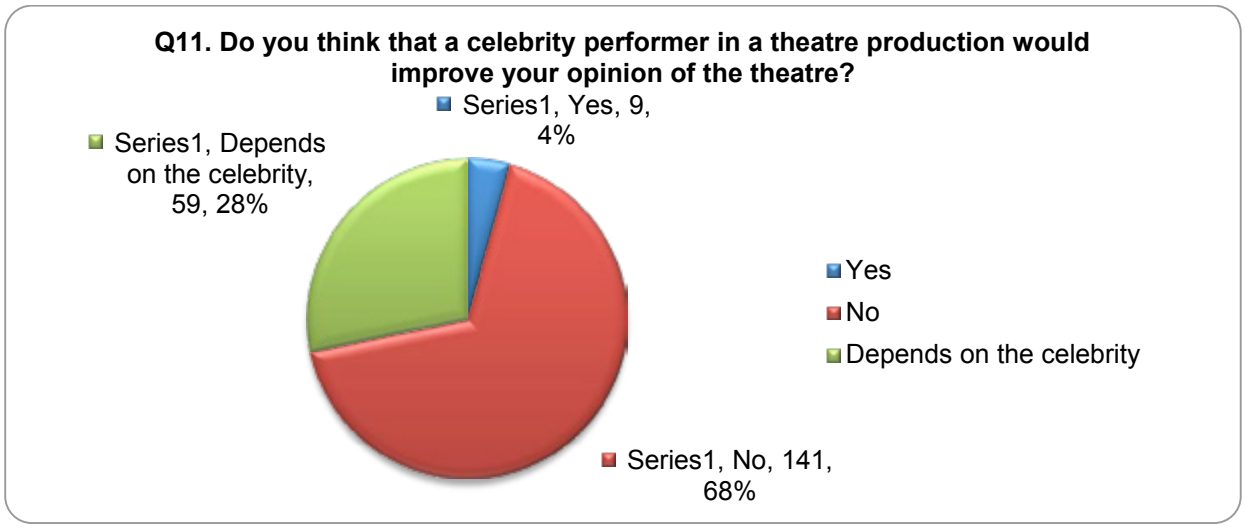


FIGURE 9.WHETHER A CELEBRITY PERFORMER WOULD IMPROVE AN AUDIENCE MEMBER'S OPINION OF THE THEATRE.N = 209.

Chi-squared was used to determine whether there was a relationship between the likelihood that a celebrity performer would improve a respondent's opinion of the theatre and whether a respondent would be more or less likely to go to a theatre production if there was a celebrity in it. There was a strong relation between the two which was highly significant (Chi=32.006, p=<0.001). This means that those who were more likely to have their opinion of a theatre production increase based on having a celebrity present were also more likely to go to a theatre production with a celebrity in it.

Chi-squared was performed to determine whether there was a relationship between the likelihood that a celebrity performer would improve a respondent's opinion of the theatre and the likelihood that a celebrity performer would improve a respondent's awareness of the theatre. There was a strong relation between the two which was highly significant (Chi=40.488, p=<0.001). This means that those who were more likely to have an increasedopinion of a theatre production based on having a celebrity present were also more likely to have increased awareness of a theatre production based on having a celebrity present.

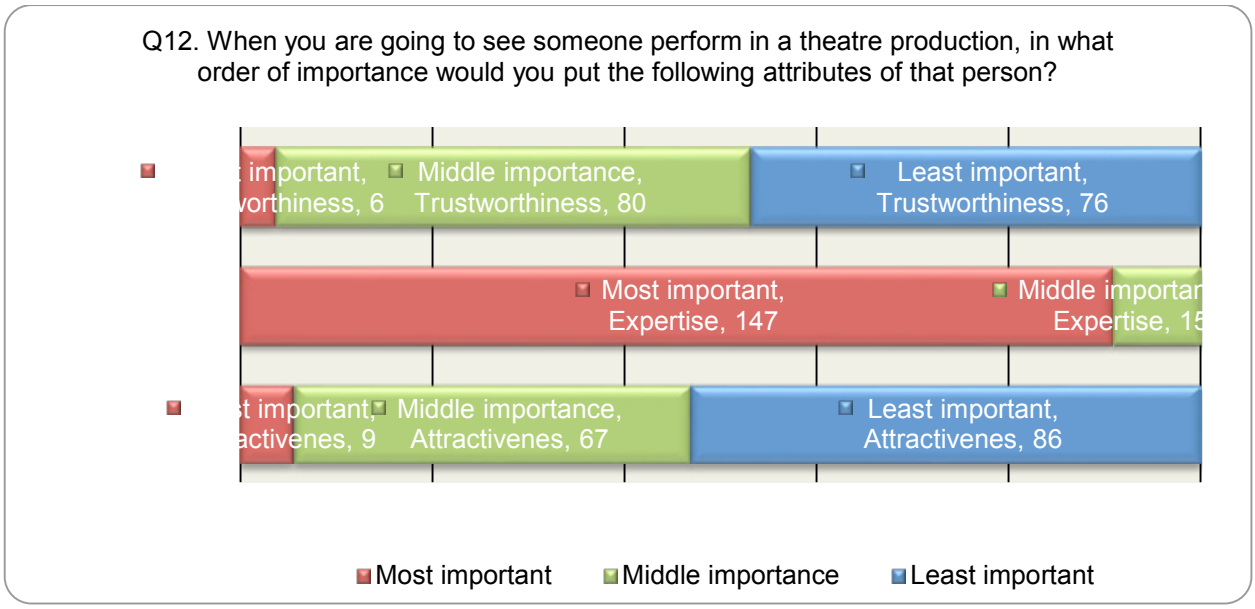


FIGURE 10.AUDIENCES' RANKING OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE THREE DIMENSIONS OF CREDIBILTIY. N = 162.

Question 12 was used to determine which particular celebrity characeristic might result in an outcome of less likely / more likelyor yes / no in the case of those respondents who said it would depend on the celebrity in Questions 9 – 11. Respondents were asked to consider the three dimensions of celebrity credibility; Attractiveness, Expertise and Trustworthiness in the context of a theatre performer.

The results in Figure 10 clearly indicate that Expertise was considered the most important dimension of credibility for someone performing in a theatre production, with 91% of responses. Attractiveness was considered the least important dimension of credibility, although there was a narrow margin between Attractiveness and Trustworthiness, with a split of 53% and 47% respectively.

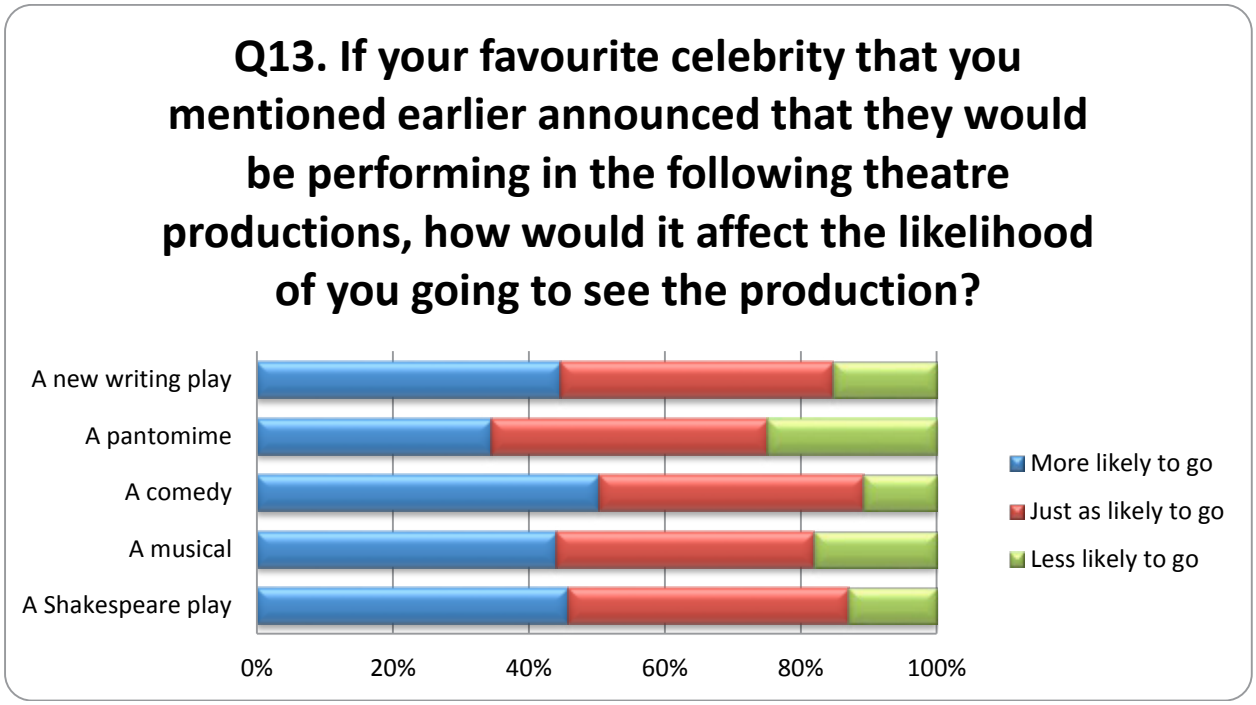


FIGURE 11. LIKELIHOOD OF AN AUDIENCE MEMBER TO ATTEND DIFFERENT TYPES OF THEATRE PRODUCTION IF THEIR FAVOURITE CELEBRITY WAS PERFORMING IN THEM. N = 177.

Figure 11 shows the breakdown of how likely respondents would be to go to different types of theatrical productions if their favourite celebrity were performing in it. Very little variation is seen between the different production types, but a clear majority of respondents said they would be just as likely or more likely to attend. The respondents who would be less likely to attend any of the theatre production types accounted for no more than 25% in any of the 5 production types.

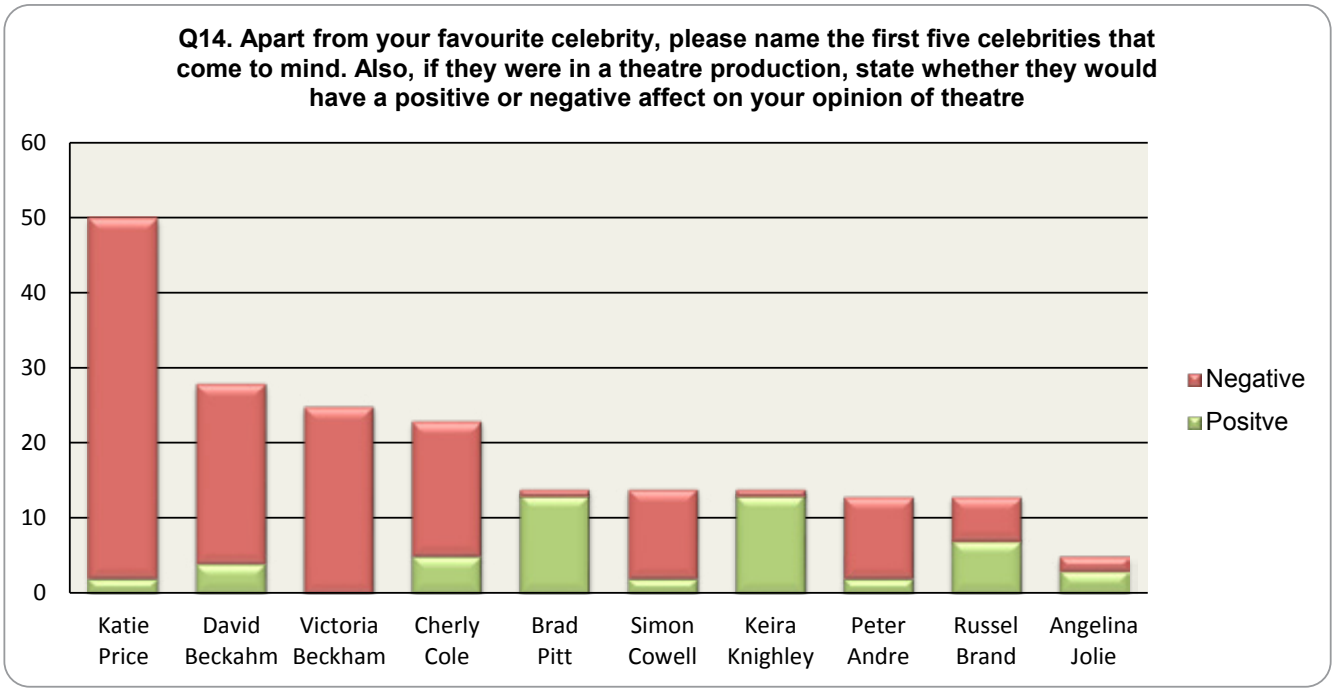


FIGURE 12. THE TOP TEN MOST MENTIONED TOP-OF-MIND CELEBRITIES. N = 172.

Respondents were asked to name the first five celebrities who came to mind, excluding their favourite celebrity, and whether they would have a positive or negative effect on
the respondents' theatre-going likelihood if they were in a theatre production. Figure12 displays the top 10 mentioned celebrities along with the divide between whether they would have a positive or negative effect. For a full list of the celebrities mentioned see Appendix 8. Katie Price (also referred to as Jordan) was significantly the most mentioned celebrity (7% of the 841 celebrities mentioned). She also received the highest number of 'Negative' responses for any celebrity, but in terms of percentage split for a single celebrity, Victoria Beckham has the most 'Negative' votes with 100%.
Of the top 10 celebrities mentioned, 6 resulted in an overall negative effect rating.

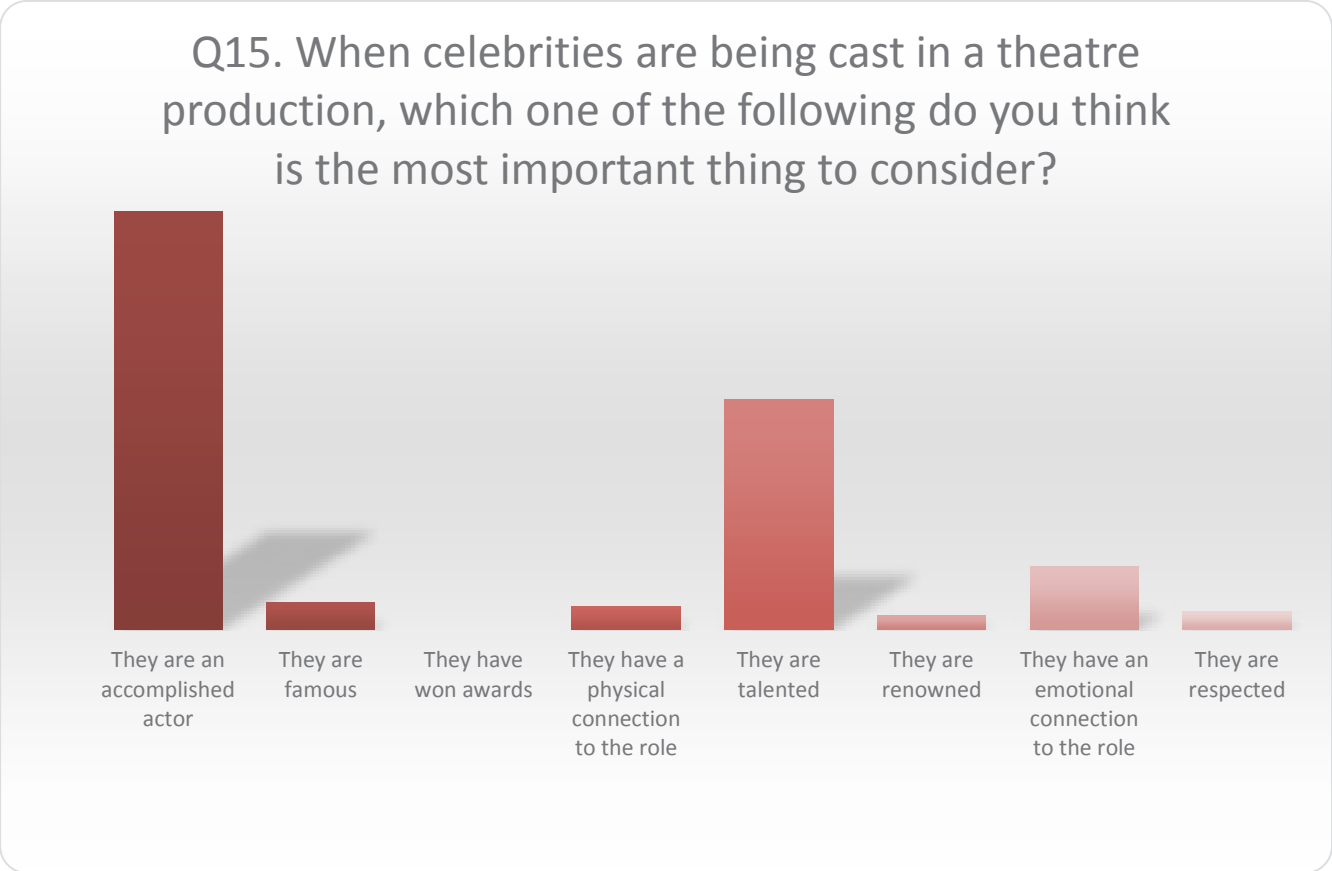


FIGURE 13.AUDIENCE MEMBERS' MOST IMPORTANT CRITERIA FOR A PERFORMER IN A THEATRE PRODUCTION.N = 176.

Figure 13 indicates that more than half (53%) of respondents felt that the most important characteristic of an individual being cast in a theatre performance is that they are an accomplished actor. The second highest response was that they are talented (29%). No other category achieved more than 8% of the result.

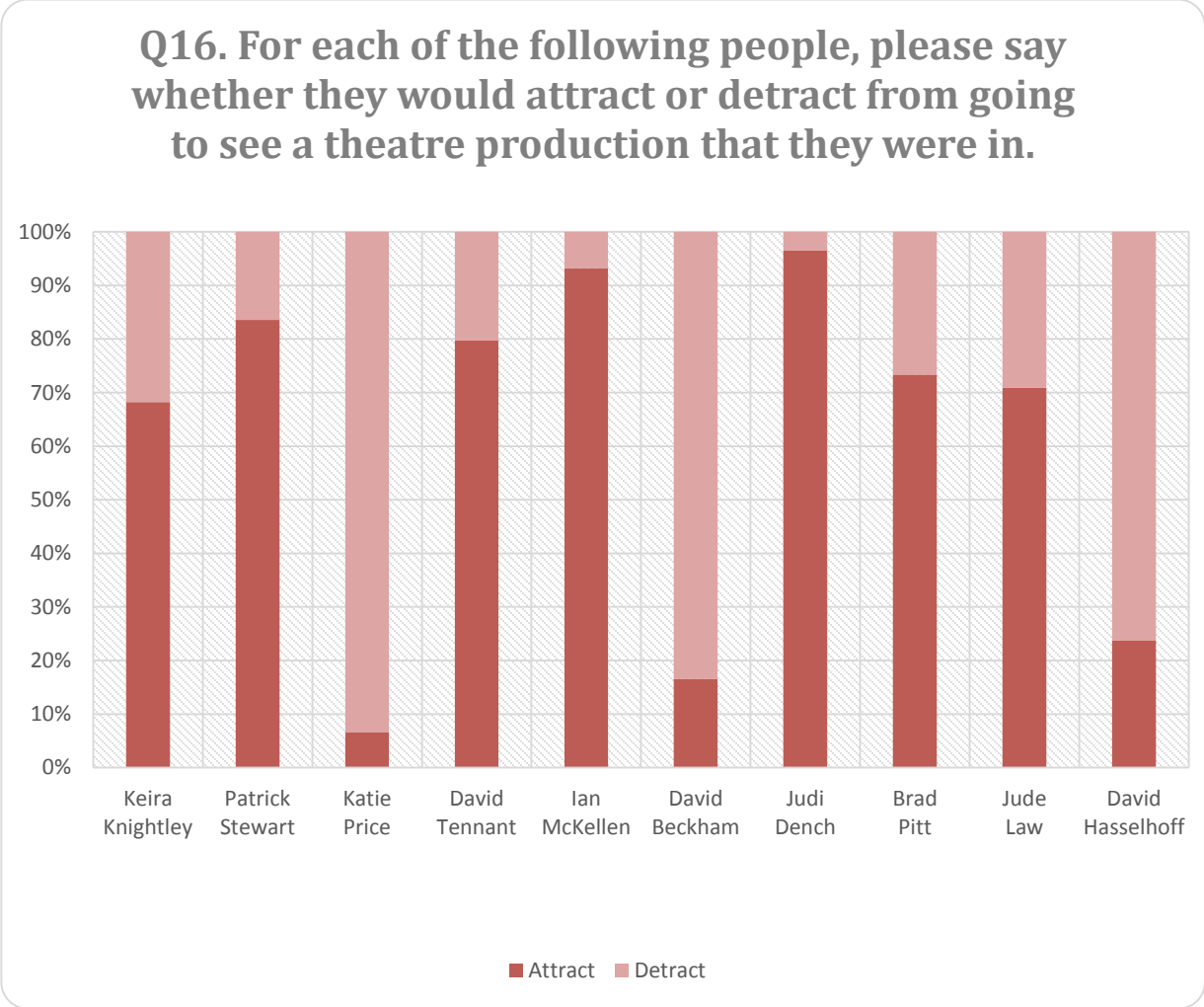


FIGURE 14. WHETHER AUDIENCE MEMBERS WOULD BE ATTRACTED TO OR DETRACTED FROM THE THEATRE BY 10 SPECIFIC CELEBRITIES. N = 202.

Finally, respondents were asked whether or not 10 specific celebrities, which were determined using the qualitative data findings, would attract of detract them from going to see a theatre production that the celebrity was in. All 10 celebrities showed a clear majority in one of the 'Attract' or 'Detract' categories. The celebrity with the highest proportion of Attract responses was Judi Dench (96%), and the celebrity with the highest proportion of Detract responses was Katie Price (93%).

Further analysis was undertaken in order to establish whether there was a connection between a celebrity's perceived quality(i.e. their theatrical expertise)and whether they will attract or detract an audience member to/ from the theatre.

The 10 celebrities were divided into two categories: those with theatrical expertise and those without theatrical expertise. These categories were firstly created blind by the researcher, and then by two other respondents. Two respondents matched 100% on their categories, and the third person matched 90% of their categories. To determine the outcome for the celebrity that did not match 100%, qualitative data from the 'Why?' section of the question was also consulted and discussed among the three respondents. Table 12 displays the resulting categories.

Theatrical Expertise	No Theatrical Expertise
KeiraKnightley	KatiePrice
Patrick Stewart	DavidBeckham
DavidTennant	DavidHasselhoff
IanMcKellen	
JudiDench	
BradPitt	
JudeLaw	

TABLE 12. CELEBRITIES DIVIDED INTO CATEGORIES OF THEATRICAL EXPERTISE AND NO THEATRICAL EXPERTISE.

The answers from Question 16 were then divided according to these categories and summed. The results are shown in Figure 15 below.

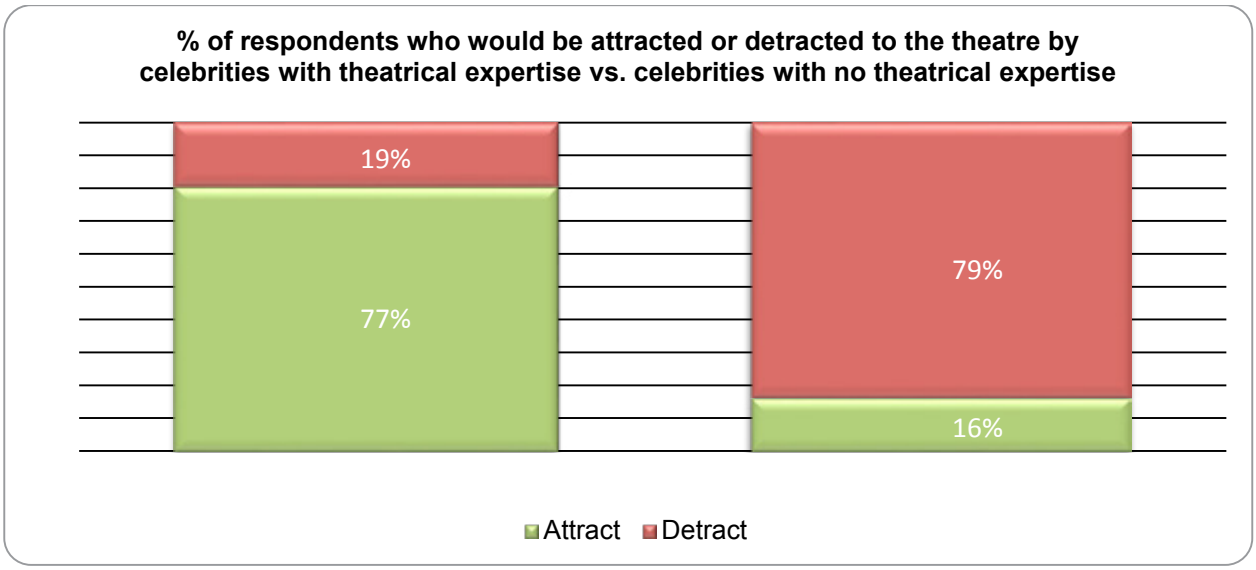


FIGURE 15.THE EFFECT OF THEATRICAL EXPERTISE ON AN AUDIENCE MEMBER'S LIKELIHOOD TO BE ATTRACTED TO OR DETRACTED FROM A THEATRE PRODUCTION WITH A CELEBRITY PERFORMING IN IT.

The relationship between demographics and celebrity effect was also analysed. Firstly the demographic of age was tested, as shown in Figure 16

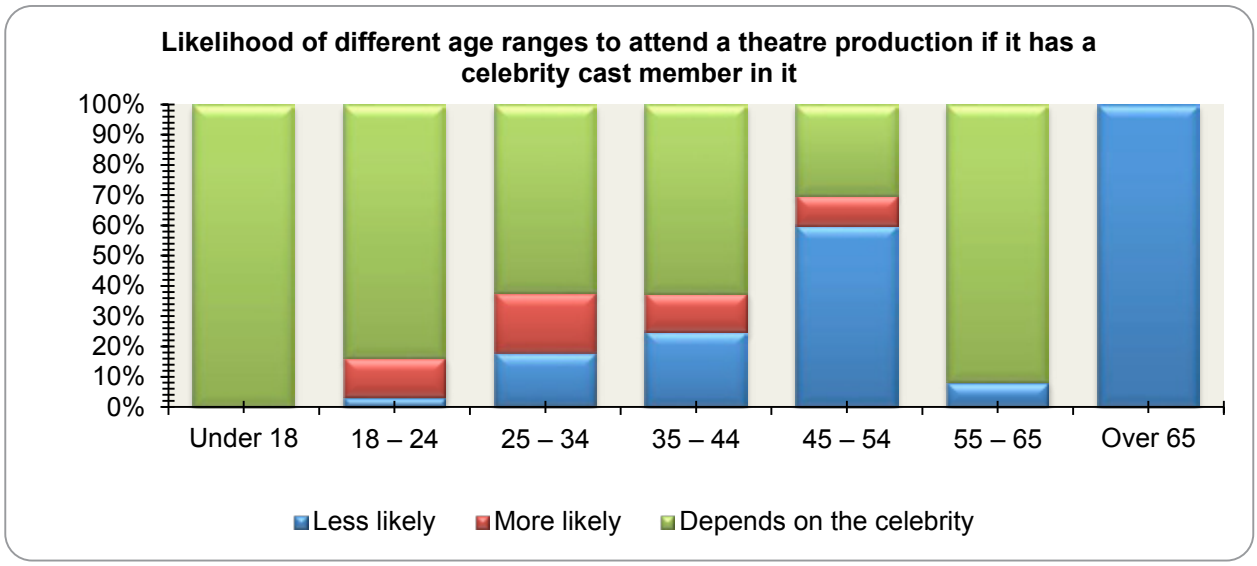


FIGURE 16.AGE RANGE VS. LIKELIHOOD TO ATTEND A THEATRE PRODUCTION USING A CELEBRITY PERFORMER.

With the exception of the 55 – 65 age range, the data implies that the higher the age range the less likely the audience member is to attend a performance with a celebrity cast member in it. Spearman's rho was used to confirmthis relationship. There was acorrelation between the two which was moderately significant ($r = -0.198$, $p = <0.01$).

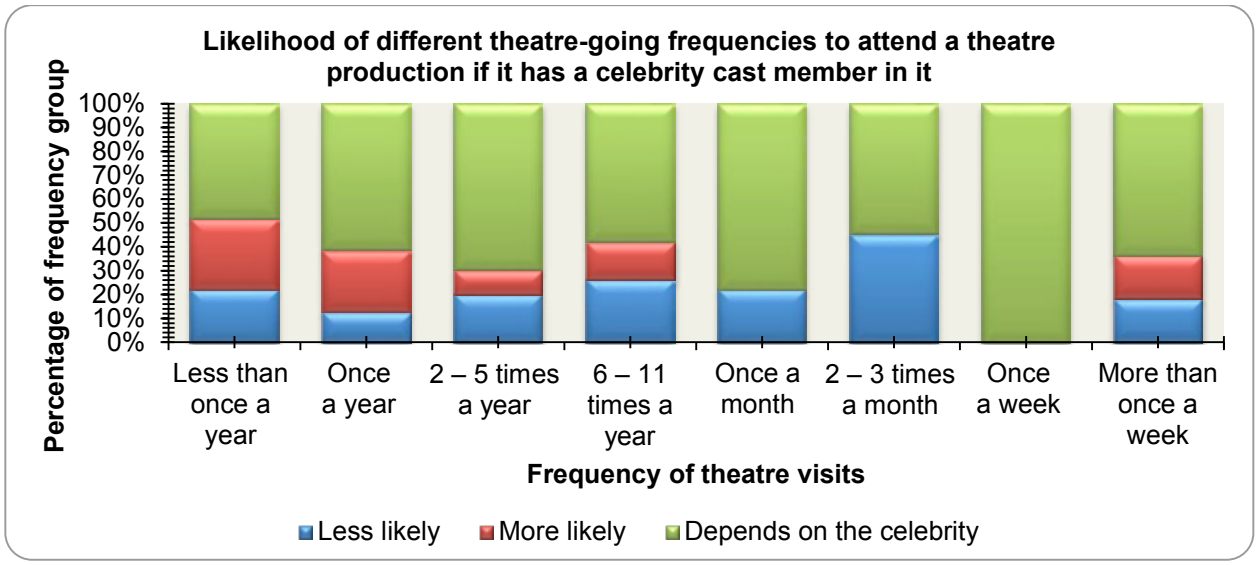


FIGURE 17.THEATRE-GOING FREQUENCY VS. LIKELIHOOD TO ATTEND A THEATRE PRODUCTION USING A CELEBRITY PERFORMER.

Spearman's rho was used to determine whether or not there was a relationship between audiences'theatre-going frequency and likelihood to attend a production using a celebrity performer. No statistically significant relationship was found ($r = 0.28$, $p > 0.05$).

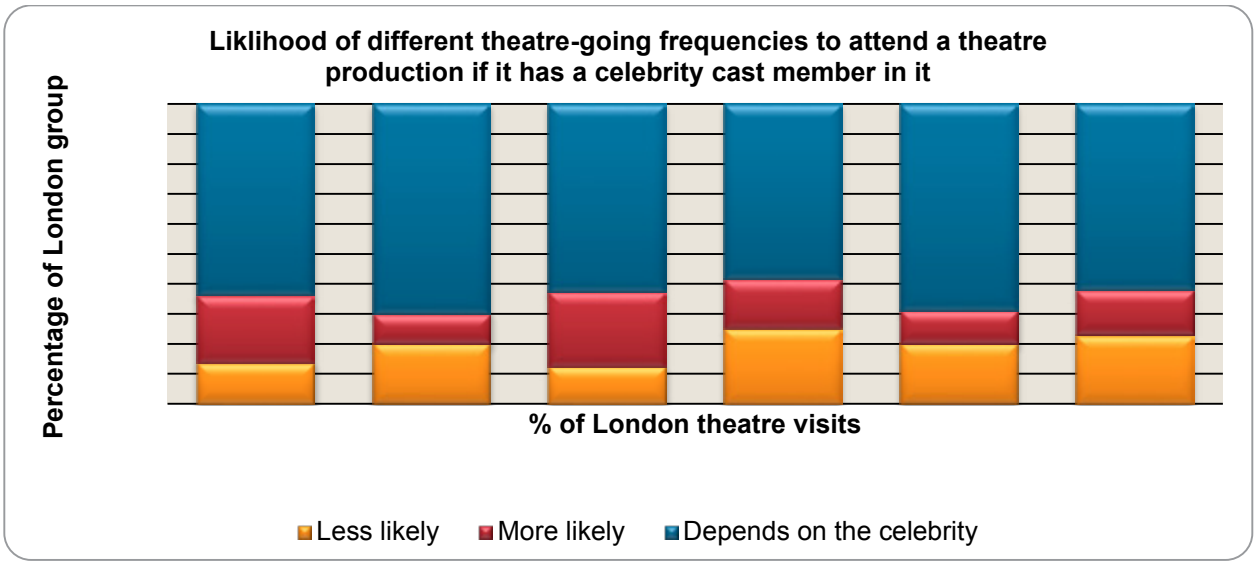


FIGURE 18. PERCENTAGE OF LONDON THEATRE VISITS VS. LIKELIHOOD TO ATTEND A THEATRE PRODUCTION USING A CELEBRITY PERFORMER.

Spearman's rho was used to determine whether or not there was a relationship between the percentage of London theatre visits made by audiences and their likelihood to attend a production using a celebrity performer. No statistically significant relationship was found ($r = -0.46$, $p > 0.05$).

DISCUSSION

The results of the survey and interviews clearly demonstrate that theatre-goers are more likely to be attracted to the theatre by celebrities with theatrical expertise and not by "someone known simply through film, television or the all-pervasive gossip columns." (Billington, 2007) as the literature suggests. A clear distinction between fame and celebrity was drawn by both audiences and theatre professionals within the research, with celebrity being seen as something that is created by media exposure and being in the public eye.
Celebrities with a background in theatre and film were seen to almost exclusively draw audiences to the theatre, as opposed to reality TV shows, search for a star shows and famous couples were very much rejected as being suitable for theatre.

For building brand equity, most audience members felt that a celebrity would increase their awareness of theatre (albeit that this was dependent on who the specific celebrity was) but not their opinion. In order to establish a truly strong theatre brand, both good awareness and opinion need to be established in the minds of audiences. The resulting driving factor of opinion was the expertise of the specific celebrity, ultimately that which deemed them to be a talented actor.

Although the demographic of age was seen to play an important role in whether or not celebrity casting would be effective, neither theatre-going frequency nor percentage of London theatre visits did. This means that, firstly, the research findings can be applied to a wider populous and, secondly, that where previous research implies that celebrity casting encourages those who attend the theatre less frequently, this was not found to be the case.

This section will now discuss the findings in more detail, referring back to the literature and in light of the four research hypotheses.

The survey results clearly indicate that audience members considered there to be a difference between someone who is a celebrity and someone who is famous (86%). This was also supported by the qualitative findings. By far the most prominent definition of celebrity was "Someone with a lot of media exposure / coverage". This supports

the existing literature that the modern day interpretation of celebrity has become that of a media-created public status, and not the original definition of 'a famous person' as discussed in the introduction.

However, this study contests the existing literature that implies that celebrities, by the modern day interpretation, are not suitable to perform on the stage. It found that, from the audience's point of view, different attributes of specific celebrities can make them either suitable or unsuitbale to perform on the stage. The findings show that although theatre was considered one of the lowest celebrity-producing categories tested, it was also chosen as the second most likely category of a celebrity's background to attract audiences to see a production. This implies that it is not the phenomenon of celebriy itself that is the affecting factor, but the relevance of the celebrity's theatre experience.

When it came to whether or not an audience member would go and see a celebrity performer in the theatre, the importance of theatrical expertise was staggeringly clear from the survey results. This substantiates the audience and theatre professionals' commentary reviewed throughout the literaturewhichhighlighted that theatre-goers believe "It's the talent that matters, not the profile" and that people would "pay a big sum to see Patrick Stewart or Ian McKellen, who will almost certainly be brilliant" (both in response to Billington, 2008). These findings are similar to those marketing studies that have also employed Ohanian's (1990) dimensions of celebrity credibility, where "Only the perceived expertise of the celebrities was a significant factor" (p.51).

A relationship was determined between celebrity casting and audiences' opinion and awareness of the theatre in two separate analyses. This implies that if a celebrity performer would not improve the audience members' opinion or awareness of the theatre, the audience member would also be less likely to attend a production with a celebrity performer, and vice versa. A direct relationship was also seen between whether a celebrity would increase an audience members' awareness of the theatre and whether a celebrity would increase an audience members' opinion of theatre, which indicates that a celebrity performer is likely to either increase both awareness and opinion or neither.

All three of these relationships show that the effect of the celebrity phenomenon on theatre audiences is not a reliable source of brand equity, as the effect can be either positive or negative. That is, it will either increase awareness, opinion and attendance likelihood, or it will not increase awareness, not increase opinion, and decrease attendance likelihood. This supports the literature on celebrity endorsement, which shows that using celebrities for marketing and branding purpose involves a level of risk.

The recall test asking respondents to name the first 5 celebrities who came to mind, and whether they would have a positive or negative effect on their opinion of theatre established a clear link between the two main elements of brand equity; awareness and opinion. The results undoubtedly show that one element can be prominent without the other. Specifically in the case of the four most mentioned celebrities there was a very high level of awareness (established by recall frequency) but also a very negative opinion. This indicates that it is possible to have a negative correlation between awareness and opinion, which would be damaging for the brand overall. This is because a large number of people would know of the celebrity, but also have a negative opinion of them. Thus the celebrity would bring negative associations to the brand, and at a very high rate of awareness, doubling the damaging effect they could potentially have.

In order to manage this risk level, a celebrity's theatrical expertise has been found to be the main indicator of whether they would have an overall positive or negative effect. Previous research into theatre and celebrity endorsement discusses how a celebrity's public perception can enhance or damage a production in which they perform (Quinn, 1990; Stephenson, 2007; Pincus, 2001). This research supports these theories, finding that celebrities referred to as 'talented', 'fantastic' or 'amazing' were found to attract audiences to the theatre, while those referred to as 'idiot', 'washed up' or 'can't stand them' were found to detract audiences from the theatre. The most compelling results were seen in the final question of the survey, demonstrating that when celebrities were categorised into 'theatrical expertise' and 'no theatrical expertise' there was a 77% and 79% response rate of attract and detract respectively.

The analysis shows that theatre-going frequency bears no relationship to whether or not a celebrity performer will increase the likelihood of audiences' attendance. This finding contradicts the general view within the literature that the casting of celebrities, often with no former theatrical expertise, encourages people to go to the theatre

who otherwise would not (Lathen 2011). However, Lawson's (2009) belief that celebrity casting would draw in younger audiences is supported by this research, which found there to be a clear relationship between age and the potential effect of celebrity casting. With this in mind, marketers will be able to use the age range statistics presented herewith alongside their productions' target market age group to build a better picture of how effective a celebrity cast may be.

The findings of this research are considered applicable to the general population of the study; i.e. London theatre audiences. The power calculation used in the methodology established that 100 was a sufficient sample size to pick a truly random group from the population. The limitation that true randomness is unlikely because of friend and work associations that could have been linked to the sample group through the researcher has been considered. However, the use of online/offline distribution triangulation and the fact that the resulting sample size was more than double the power analysis sample number indicates that even if there was some sort of skew in the way that the sample was selected from the population, the power of the data should still be generalizable to the wider population.

CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was designed to determine the effect of celebrity casting on the brand equity of theatre. The research has argued the differences between fame and celebrity in order to establish what underlying associations may impact upon an audience's general view of the phenomenon of celebrity. It has established the connection between celebrities and brand equity through their influence on audience opinion and awareness of the theatre. The study has explained the central importance of theatrical expertise in creating brand equity in theatre through celebrity casting, and has given an account of
the reasons behind these findings. Returning to the hypotheses posed in the conceptual development of this study, it is now possible to state that:

1 – There is a difference between Celebrity and Fame

2 – Expertise is the most important dimension of credibility for a theatre performer

3 – Celebrities with theatrical expertise will have a positive effect on brand equity

4 – Celebrities without theatrical expertise will have a negative effect on brand equity

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that audience members believe that there is a difference between fame and celebrity. Although there is an inescapable cross-over in the way these are used within the media and marketing, it is clear that they send different messages and hold different associations in audiences' minds. It is apparent that, for theatre audiences, 'celebrity' has something of a negative association, that it is a media-generated status and is not automatically connected to fame or talent. This was clear from the mere 4% of respondents who believed that celebrity casting would improve their opinion of theatre as well as the numerous qualitative responses that echoed the theme of "I can't stand celebrities".

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that it is a celebrity's theatrical expertise that will determine whether they have a positive or negative effect on audience members' opinion and their likelihood to attend a theatre performance with a celebrity performer in it. It was also shown that theatre and film celebrities were vastly more likely to attract people to the theatre than celebrities from search for a star shows, the sports industry or who are well known for things such as being a celebrity couple (for example, Victoria and David Beckham) or simply being in the media lime-light a great deal (for example, Katie Price).

These two main findings are of such interest because they contest a vast amount of the existing literature which believes people have an "obsession with celebrity" (Sir Jonathan Miller, 2008) and want to see celebrities from non-theatrical backgrounds, such as reality TV personalities. It is also interesting that the results of this investigation concur with the marketing and branding literature on celebrity endorsement for advertising, whereby expertise and celebrity-product fit have generally been found to be integral to successfully

creating and managing brand equity. Although theatre is not a form of advertising, it is intriguing that producers and theatre marketers have taken such an opposite approach to the celebrity endorsement literature. This study considers theatrical expertise to be the theatre equivalent of the celebrity-product fit theory used in the fields of advertising and branding, and an implication of this is that theatre producers and markets should consider it as a suitable brand equity model for theatre.

These findings enhance our understanding of how celebrity casting can impact upon theatre-going audiences and affect the brand equity of theatre. The current findings add to audience research in the way that it improves our understanding of London theatre audiences and their motivation to attend performances. The research also adds to a growing body of literature on celebrity endorsement, but has gone some way towards creating an understanding of the phenomenon of celebrity endorsement, referred to as celebrity casting, specific to the theatre industry, which, to date, has been little investigated.

Limitations of the current study and recommendations for future research

A number of caveats need to be noted regarding the present study. The current investigation was limited by the categorical nature of its data, as it restricted the statistical analysis to non-parametric testing. Although this was able to determine significant relationships between variables, a wider parametric study and analysis would be beneficial.

The current study has examined only London theatre audiences, and although suggestions have been made as to how it could apply to the theatre in general, it would be useful to repeat the study in other regions to gain a wider understanding of the subject and to ascertain whether a similar view is in fact taken by regional theatre audiences. A future study investigating the difference between regions would be particularly interesting.

An aspect that was not addressed in this study was the demographic of sex. Whether opinions would differ depending on whether respondents were male of female were not considered within the research, but may be useful in future research to determine another level of understanding of the subject. It is suggested that the association of this factor is investigated in future studies.

Implications/recommendations for future practice

An implication of these findings is that both the industry background of a celebrity and the perceived expertise of the celebrity should be taken into account when deciding firstly whether or not to use celebrity casting at all within a theatre production, and secondly which celebrity in particular to cast if this decision is taken.

The information in the findings and analysis of this study can be used to develop targeted marketing strategies for different theatre-going age ranges when considering celebrity casting.

Taken together, these findings do not support strong recommendations to employ a celebrity casting marketing and brand equity strategy unless the target age range is likely to respond well to the use of a celebrity performer, the celebrity performer has a background in theatre and the celebrity is considered to have theatrical expertise.

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