



# Theatre in India

## Current Situation & Way Ahead

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Project Course during the  
fourth semester

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## Executive Summary

This project is aimed to study the current situation and provide a strategy forward for the Indian Theatre Industry. Theatre has been prevalent since the times of the Ramayana, Mahabharata and has gradually evolved but does that ensure its sustainable growth in the future? Before we start talking about the way forward, let us ponder upon a few questions!

Firstly, is there even something known as the “Indian Theatre Industry?” Is Indian Theatre large or popular enough to be established as a separate industry in itself? Many professionals do not think so and firmly believe that it will take at least a few more years for theatre to be called an industry and get its own identity.

Secondly, is there immense competition among the dominant entertainment forms? With the rise of other forms of entertainment such as Movies, TV Shows, Sports, Stand-up comedy, Online streaming and festivals, the audience has too many options to choose from in their limited entertainment time. Although each entertainment form has a somewhat distinct and unique set of audience, there is intense competition (even if indirect) among these forms. They have to fight each other to capture the needs of their targeted audience.

Thirdly, what is the audience’s perception of theatre and other entertainment forms? A demand-side analysis (quantitative as well as qualitative) was conducted. It was observed that theatre comes in the bottom three forms of entertainment desired by today’s audience. The primary reason for this was that the audience thought that it was currently not exposed to plays. Since a majority of the audience had either a dramatics society or a dramatics teacher in their school and had the opportunity to be a part of plays in their childhood days, lack of exposure being the primary reason for theatre being ranked low was rather surprising. Plays were ranked higher relative to other forms of entertainment when it came down to participation, social impact, aesthetics and entertainment but the rankings suffered majorly as many respondents did not have the desired knowledge or awareness about theatre.

On the basis of our research and insights, some of the recommendations discussed include:

- Empowering theatre professionals to ‘handle and grow business’
- Using a hybrid revenue generating strategy
- The role of the Government and its bodies
- The role of the private sector
- Using social media as the preferred medium of communication

## Transmittal Letter

31st August 2017

Prof. Anish Sugathan  
Faculty, Business Policy Area  
IIM-Ahmedabad  
Vastrapur – 380015

Prof. Rakesh Basant  
Faculty, Economics Area  
IIM-Ahmedabad  
Vastrapur – 380015

Dear Sir,

We submit herewith the report on our project titled – “*Theatre in India – Current situation and Way Ahead*”. It was an immense learning for both of us, and we believe that this report can be used to further spread the love for theatre that we share.

In case you have any suggestions, we would be glad to meet you anytime. We would also like to thank you for your support and cooperation throughout the project.

Sincerely,

Ankit Yadav & Vidit Sidana

## Acknowledgement

We must admit that our perception about the ‘Indian Theatre Industry’ has changed in the course of the last few months. We would like to thank a few people for their guidance and help, as without them, this project would not have been possible.

We want to begin by expressing our deepest gratitude to Prof Rakesh Basant for providing us with the relevant guidance at the onset of the project and connecting us with important links in the industry and Prof. Anish Sugathan for his willingness to accept and refine our ideas and suggestions over the last few months. There had been no project on the Entertainment Industry and thus, getting approval for this project was in itself an achievement for us, and we would like to thank both our professors for approving our project and being accommodative throughout.

Our project would be incomplete without the help of professionals from the industry who tolerated our cold calls and childish like curiosity throughout the last four months. Ms Manvita Baradi (Theatre and Media Centre, Ahmedabad) for providing us with a fantastic start to our project by briefing us on the foundation of ‘Indian’ theatre. Mr Ashvin Kumar (Oscar-Nominee Director) for getting us in contact with some professional theatre directors. Mr Shivam Pal (actor, Jeff Goldberg Studio) for getting us in touch with the upcoming theatre artists. Prof Apurv Nagpal for his suggestions and help. Ms Sravasti and Ms Vartika (NSD Alumna) for giving us the key inputs right when we needed them. We would also like to thank Mr Jaimini Pathak (Working Title Productions) and Mr Sunil Shanbag. Although our interactions with them were brief, they were insightful. We also received small critical inputs from artists and managers working at Prithvi Theatre and Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA, Mumbai).

Lastly, we would like to express our gratitude towards the following three theatre managers who collaborated with us on the project:

- Mr Ajitesh of ‘Aranya Theatre Group’
- Mr Ashish of ‘Aasakta Productions’
- Ms Huda Bhaldar of ‘Working Title Productions’

Thank you for everything, from filling out questionnaires to giving us telephonic interviews. Without the understanding of a theatre group’s internal processes, we would not have been able to gain practical and realistic insights about Theatre in India. Thank you so much!

## History and Overview

In today's times, each form of entertainment is working towards establishing its own distinct identity. Although every entertainment form can be said to have a different set of audience, competition still exists between them. Entertainment forms such as TV, Movies, Online Streaming, Stand-up comedy, Sports etc. have to deliver entertainment to today's impatient, ever-expecting audience and fight against the demand for 'escapist entertainment.' Theatre can be said to have a very niche audience. The first Bollywood movie was released in 1913 (Dadasaheb Phalke's "Raja Harishchandra" was the first silent Indian feature film), but the Bollywood Industry became one of the most popular industries of this nation within a few decades. However, the same results have not been possible for the 'theatre industry.' In fact, many professional artists and groups do not even consider theatre an industry. According to them, 'there is no such term as the theatre industry.' This is quite shocking as theatre is a performing art form that has existed since the Ramayana and Mahabharata days.

Looking at theatre's history, Indian Theatre was often considered synonymous with Sanskrit Theatre. As per 'Modern India Theatre', Indian Theatre can be divided into *three phases*:

1. Pre-Colonial India's Orientalist Phase
2. Colonial India's High Nationalist Phase
3. India's Postcolonial Phase

Earlier, Indian dramas were so literary that they appeared to be unfit for the stage but were what was called authentic theatre. Kalidasa and his successors did not write their plays for the readers. They wrote them keeping an audience in mind as they intended their plays to be dramatized and staged. All scenic entertainments, including life tableaux and puppet-shows belong to the Indian Theatre. Although India is a multi-lingual and diverse cultural nation, many scholars and writers considered Sanskrit Theatre to be Indian Theatre par excellence and the prevalent non-Sanskrit Theatre to be unsophisticated, unworldly, indifferent to literary qualities, and a mere abstraction offering very little originality. Horace Hayman Wilson's 'Select Specimens of the Theatre of the Hindus' published in 1827 was the first modern history of Indian drama. In this three-volume publication, Wilson portrayed Indian Theatre as exotic, changeless and timeless by making an ancient and defunct Sanskrit Theatre stand for all Indian Theatre. It exercised enormous effect on the future scholars of Indian Theatre and prolonged their narrow perspective.

However, Indian Theatre is not just about Sanskrit Theatre. The Indus Valley Civilization, the four Vedas and the Chandragupta Maurya period were about Sanskrit being the literary language used by the court. But, Sanskrit Theatre ended by about 1000 CE when the Muslims replaced Sanskrit with Persian. However, the numerous vernacular languages and artistic genres flourished. The British replaced Persian with English in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, and this is when modern theatre was born in India. It was only in 1924 when the renowned scholar,

Arthur Berriedale Keith did not consider Indian Theatre identical to Sanskrit Theatre. He gave the impression of even-handedness in his approach to the traditional theatres. Regardless of its language, 'modern theatre projected both modernity and Indianness in its style and subject matter. It had an identity that was modern but with roots in the ancient past and mirrored a Pan-Indian nation state.'

While the Europeans were learning the rich Indian culture, Indians were curious to know more about the modern European culture. However, accessibility to the Western training methods and the acting styles was missing. Indians just had access to the Western playscripts and the only option left with the Indian actors was to use their learnings of the folk and rural genres. Thus, folk theatre forms contributed to today's acting styles and helped in creating a charm with the urban masses.

The Postcolonial phase offered a plural, democratic and all-inclusive representation of what Indian Theatre stood for. Theatre in India is a blend of Sanskrit, traditional and modern theatre. One cannot equate Indian Theatre with Sanskrit Theatre only as there is an underlying unity and connectedness of Indian Theatre across chronological, regional and linguistic boundaries, while at the same time documenting its remarkable plurality and diversity.

## Theatre as an Entertainment Form

Just as films, theatre enjoys a captive audience as the audience pays to watch the performance of artists. However, the quotient of personal connect is much higher in theatre performances owing to their live nature. However, TV neither has a captive audience, nor a personal connect. TV is viewed in an informal setting at home where the audience is free to change channels or walk in and out of the program at their own will. Although TV is in the audience's homes and is available as per one's convenience, TV has to create and maintain its own set of audience, unlike films and plays where the audience is interested beforehand the performance. The audience has paid to see a film or a play and comes for their performance on their own and enjoys the grand-scale performances. But, TV has to ensure that the audience does not get bored of the same program as the viewership frequency is relatively higher. It is important to sustain interest and intimate contact throughout the entire season of the show. Though TV is viewed on smaller screens, it establishes a closer and a deeper analysis of human characters, behaviour patterns and relationships.

	Theatre	Films	TV
Audience	Captive	Captive	Not Captive
Personal Connect	Established	Missing	Missing
Scale	Large	Large and grand	Small
Physical Limitation	Limitation of unity of time and place	No limitation	No limitation
Medium	Actor's medium	Director's medium	Director's medium
Style of Communication	Straight narrative device by using more words, expressions and small objects	Interpretations differ as focus on close-ups and visual imagery. Show inner emotions with less usage of words	Interpretations do not differ but focus on close-ups and visual imagery. Show inner emotions with less usage of words

Although each medium has its own set of audiences, they have to compete to offer a unique set of experience. With the increase of online streaming (YouTube, Netflix, Hotstar etc.), stand-up comedy, music festivals, concerts and sports leagues, the offerings available to today's audience are increasing. Now, an individual has a diverse set of entertainment forms available at their disposal that are cheap and convenient. Plays have also started streaming on online streaming platforms such as Hotstar, and they may not be able to offer the similar personal experience, but they are indeed overcoming the physical barrier of the unity of time and place. Many theatre groups may be reluctant to take the online route as of now but even their strategies, i.e. to have online tickets, active social media pages, reviews, teasers etc. add reliability to the fact that digital is the way forward. Theatre would also need to adapt itself in the future to become sustainable.

## Demand-side Data Analysis

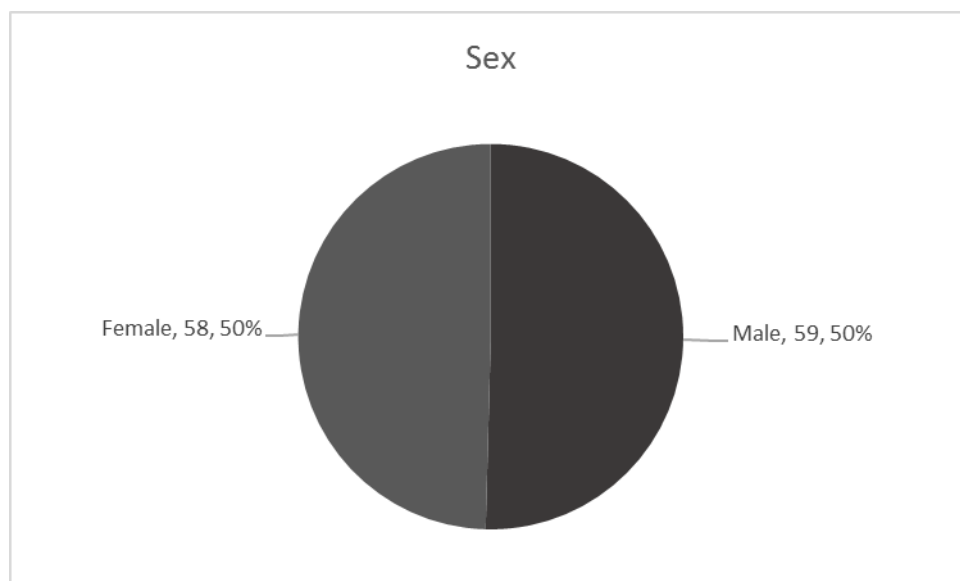
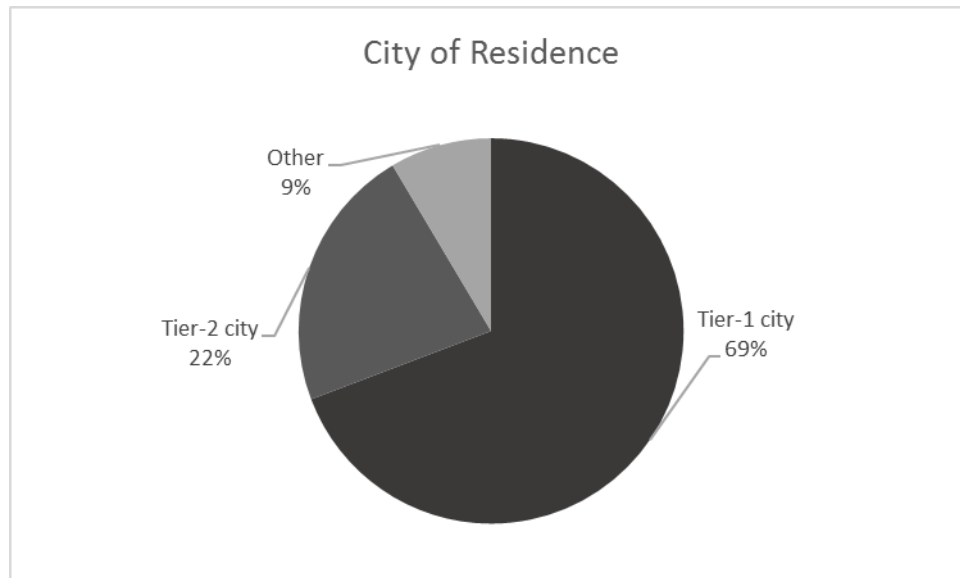
*(Out of the 207 people who began responding to our survey, 90 did not finish it, and we have removed the partially filled answers. Thus, for our quantitative analysis, we were left with 117 responses)*

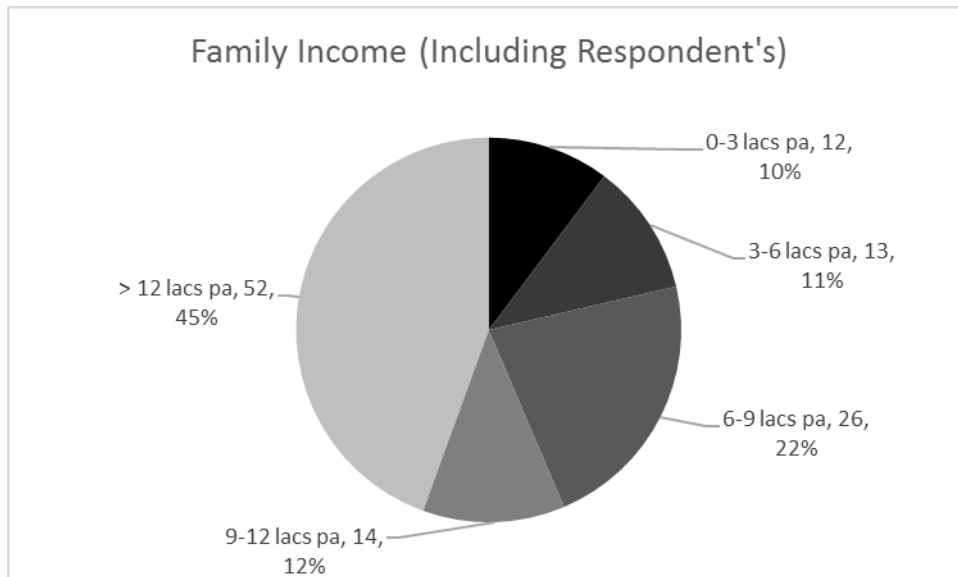
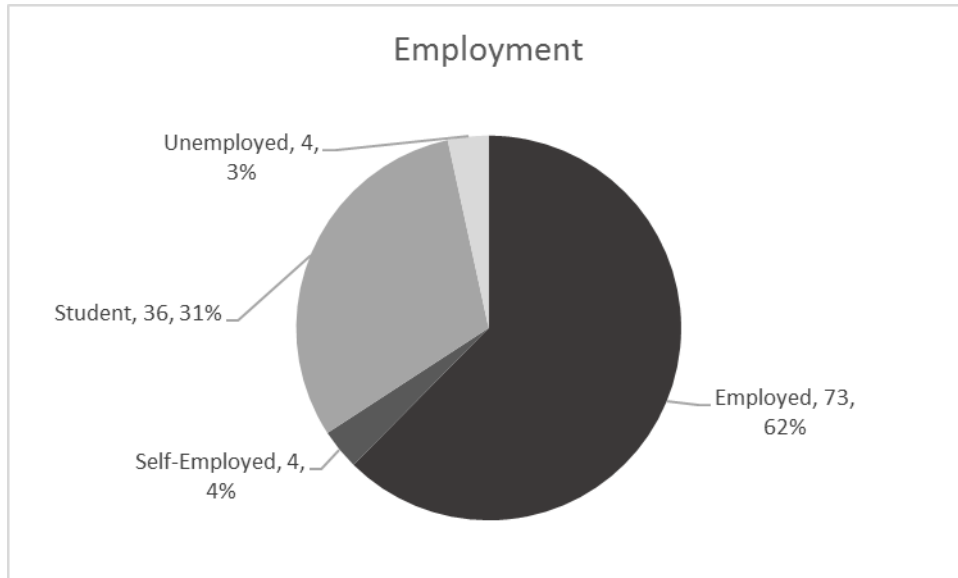
Based on the insights generated from our discussions with professional artists, theatre groups, focus group discussions conducted on campus, we did a preliminary survey to gauge the perception about theatre in India. After pre-testing the questionnaire with a few friends, we



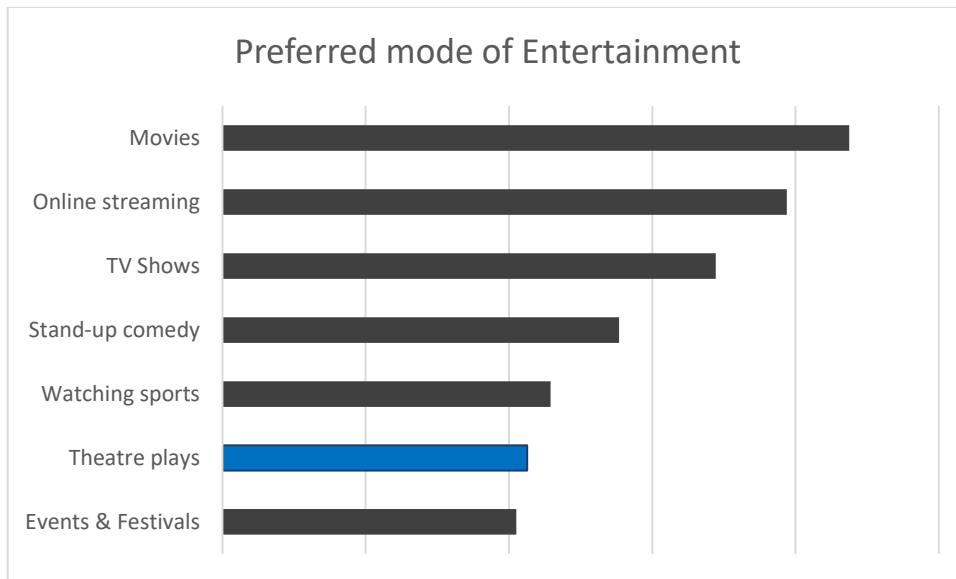
removed some undesirable questions. The pre-test also helped us in making sure that the data collected would be sufficient for our analysis. Hence, we made some changes and floated the final questionnaire. **(Attached in Exhibit)**

A summary of our final set is as follows:

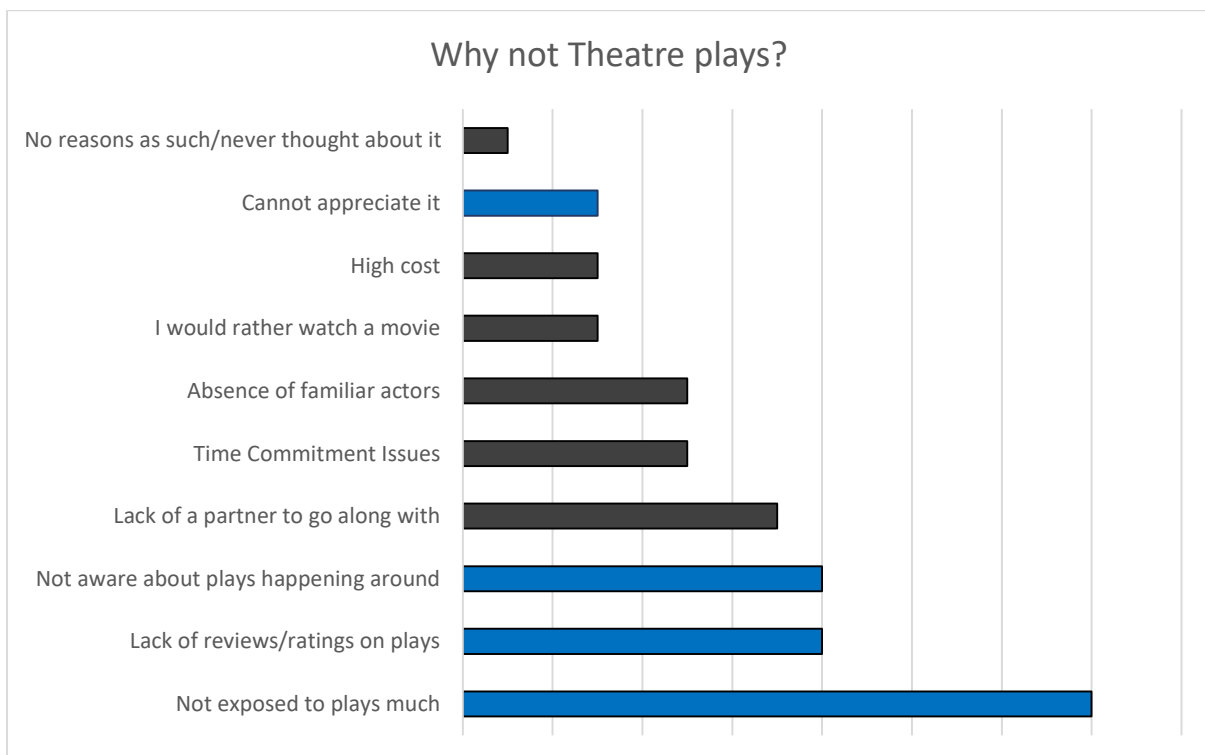




To get an idea of people's preferences, we asked them to rate their preferred mode of entertainment. Out of the seven mediums provided, Theatre was ranked at 'five' or 'six' by most of the respondents (with 'one' being the most preferred form of entertainment).

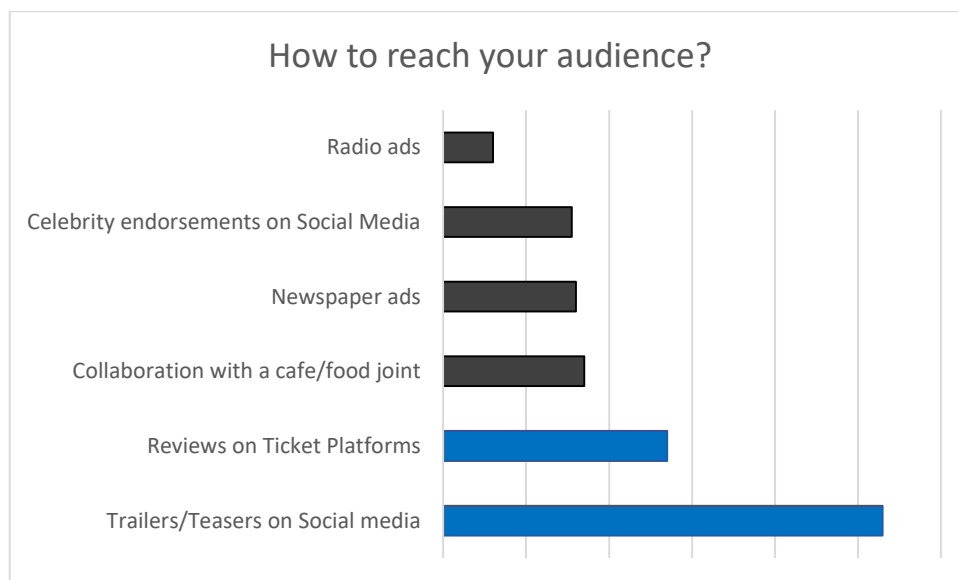


Now, the respondents that had rated theatre plays among their least preferred source of entertainment were asked a follow-up question. We asked them the reason for not preferring plays.

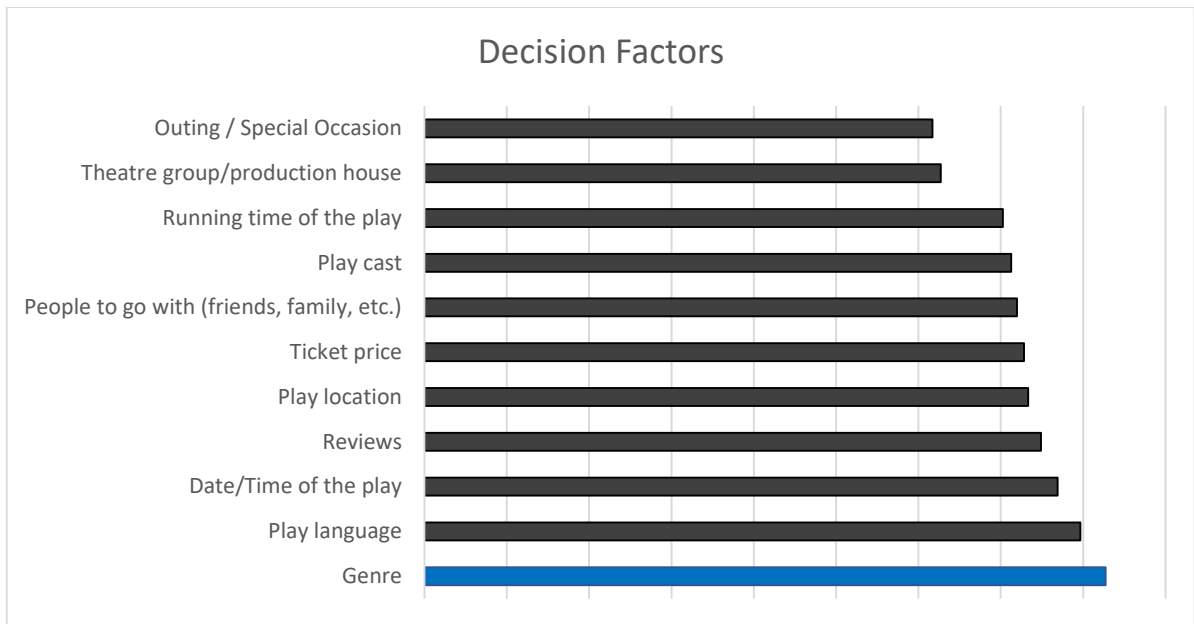


The three primary reasons for not watching plays can be resolved by the government, ticketing companies, and theatre groups.

- 1) Not everyone is exposed to quality theatre in their school days: Even if skits and one act plays are staged in most of the schools, they are only for special occasions such as Independence Day, Founder’s Day etc. If theatre (study and performance) can be integrated into the school curriculum, more and more people will appreciate the art form. The liveness and physical immediacy is very addictive, and it also helps in overall development of children and increases their social well-being.
- 2) Lack of reviews/ratings of plays: This is a big problem that most of the respondents pointed out. In the absence of these ratings, people rely on the presence of a celebrity face and the popularity of the production house as helpful proxies to pre-judge the quality.
- 3) Advertisements: Although BookMyShow lists the prominent events in the city on its app, not every event is covered. People usually are not aware of the plays happening near them. Based on the data we collected, we recommend that theatre groups increase their online activity to reach out to more people. Below are the ways people prefer to be notified about theatre performances in their area.

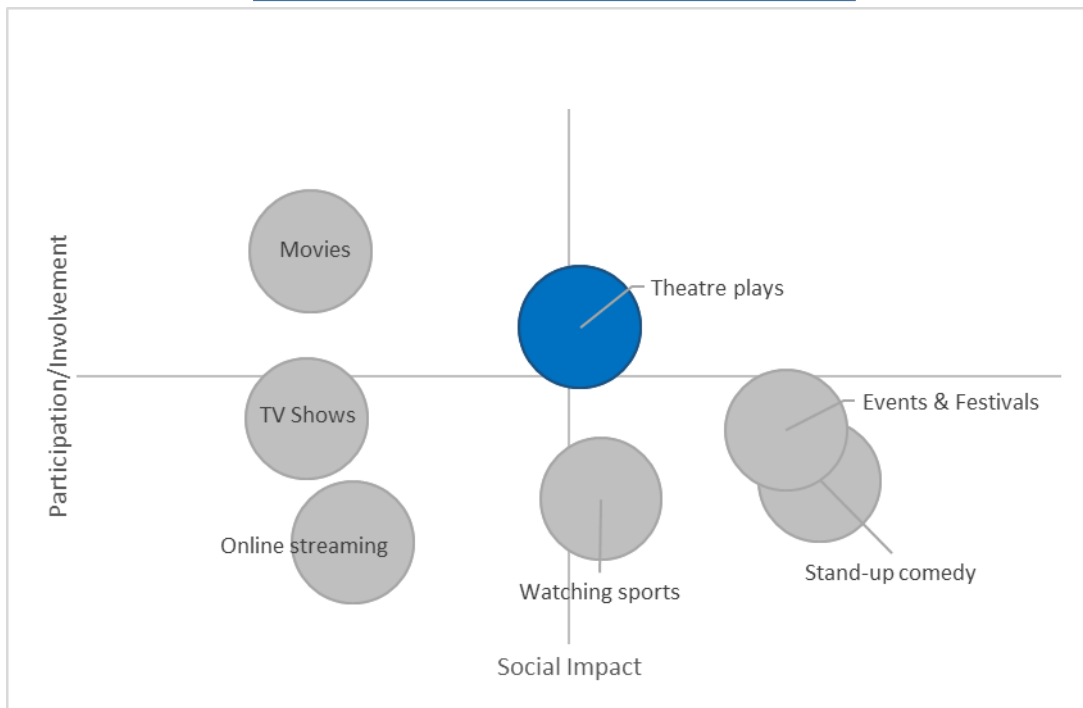


In addition to that, the level of importance audience gives to various decision factors before watching a play are:

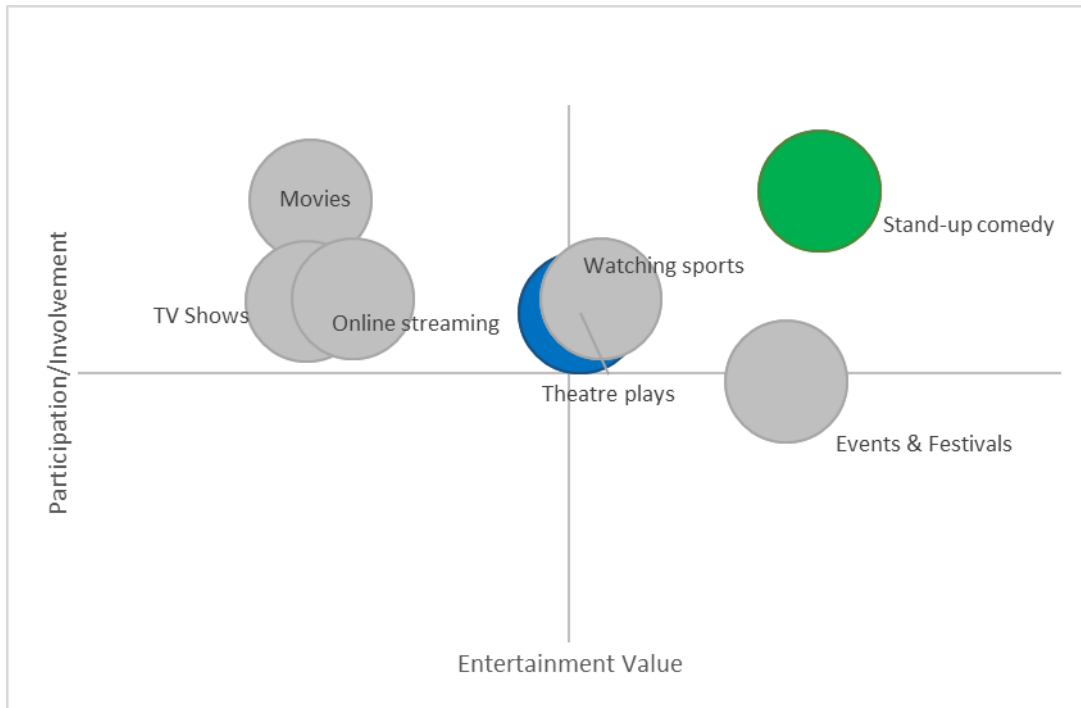


We also tried to build *Perceptual Maps* based on the responses received. Below are four perception maps that give us a good comparative picture between different forms of entertainment.

### INVOLVEMENT & SOCIAL IMPACT



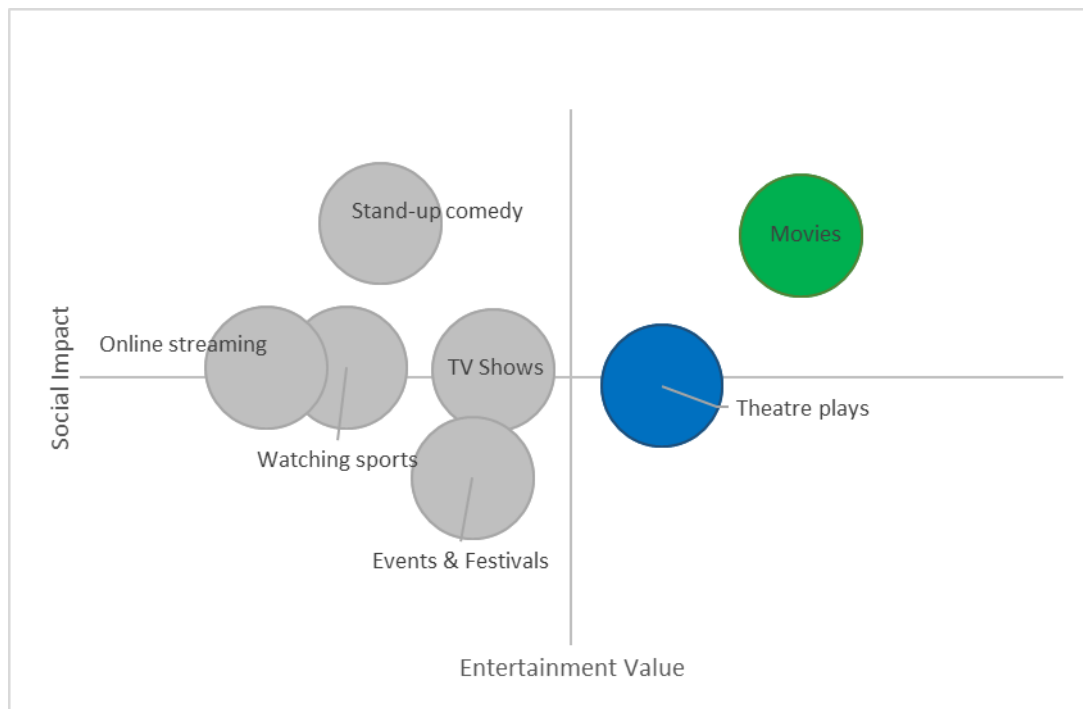
## INVOLVEMENT & ENTERTAINMENT VALUE



## AWARENESS & ENTERTAINMENT VALUE



## SOCIAL IMPACT & ENTERTAINMENT VALUE



Based on the above perceptual maps, it can be observed that theatre ranks relatively high when it comes to social impact, entertainment value and involvement. But, when it comes to awareness, theatre's perceptions drop tremendously. People are not aware of the theatre plays happening around. Only those who look for it consciously or the ones who have been told about the play by their friends and family come to watch the play.

## Financials

Most of the theatre groups are owned by individuals, and the administration of expenses is not a formal exercise. The proprietor gives out money to his/her production manager, who ensures that the money is spent prudently. Also, in most of the cases, the theatre group owner is either the director or the producer of the play. Sometimes, the owner has to play the role of a director, producer, scriptwriter and actor. The level of involvement and commitment from these individuals to their job is very high, and finance is not something that they track formally. This in no way implies that they do not keep an account of their funds. It is just not done in a formal corporate accounting manner. Hence, it was not possible to produce a perfect distribution of expenses in this project. Myriad ways in which theatre groups conduct their business also makes it tough for us to present one picture. However, we have analysed a broad distribution of expenses, of a popular theatre group based in Mumbai.

We have taken the following *assumptions* while arriving at the cost:

1. The play script is ready: The amount of research that goes into building a script is immense, and there is very high variance. The expenses depend on the content to be written as well as on the individual conducting the research. However, for simplicity, we have assumed that apart from spending time, no expenditure is incurred on writing a script as the cost incurred on writing a script is a highly subjective cost.
2. The rehearsals take a month (30 days) to finish and require booking a space for 4 hours every day for at least ten days. Practices on the remaining days are assumed to be conducted at someone's house/ office/ open spaces etc.
3. The advertisements for the play run for three continuous days before the performance.
4. Advertisements on ticket booking platforms such as BookMyShow are handled by the venue owner. For example, Prithvi Theatre already has a collaboration with the ticket platforms as a result of which theatre groups don't have to pay to get their events listed on the BookMyShow platform. For others, there is a convenience fee charged by the ticketing portals on each ticket they sell.
5. The performance is to be staged at Prithvi Theatre. At Prithvi, the space rent varies from INR 4,500 (if the play is staged on a Tuesday) to INR 22,500 (if the play is staged on the weekend). The rent also varies according to the price at which the theatre group wants to sell its tickets except on Tuesdays when the ticket prices are fixed at INR 175 (therefore the rent is also the lowest then). We would want to highlight that bookings for performing space at Prithvi are only accepted during the months of June and December, and not everyone gets the required auditorium space to perform. Another assumption is that the lighting costs are included in the rental cost. However, the costs of booking auditoriums/ performing halls are variable (depending on city, location, date, time etc.) and usually higher than the costs charged at Prithvi Theatre.
6. We have assumed that a theatre group has booked the venue for three consecutive shows for two consecutive weekend days.
7. Set items (props, costumes etc.) required are mostly borrowed, and it is not a large-scale grand play performance.



Description	Cost
Rehearsal space (INR 400-500 per hour)	INR 16,000 to 20,000
Marketing expenses (Putting out ads in newspapers, social media, etc.)	INR 18,000
Performing space rent (including lights)	INR 27,000 to 135,000
Miscellaneous expenses (Refreshments, etc.)	INR 20,000
Set props, costumes	INR 15,000
<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>INR 96,000 to 208,000</b>

If you pay close attention to the above analysis, there is no mention of the salaries for the cast and technical crew of the play. This is exactly how most of the groups operate. Any profits generated out of the ticket sales are either distributed among the team members or ploughed back in the group for future productions.

Thus, the final ‘salary’ that the members end up getting is not very lucrative. Assuming an audience seating of 200 and a ticket selling price of INR 500, the total revenue generated out of a houseful show daily at Prithvi Theatre for three shows and two consecutive days would be INR 6 lakhs. After subtracting the associated costs (let’s say INR 1 lakh for two days), if we divide the revenue earned among the 20 production members involved, then each member would receive INR 25,000 approximately for a month’s hard work. Not to forget, this is a highly optimistic prediction with extremely simple assumptions!

These figures in the table may not be very large but they are not entirely reflective of the grim financial conditions in which theatre groups operate. Many theatre groups have not still not achieved their break-even status and are struggling financially.

## Government bodies supporting the ‘Theatre Industry’

Ministry of Culture is endowed with the task of preservation, conservation and promotion of cultural heritage and art forms. Supporting activities in more than 24 languages is in itself not an easy task, above which, the ministry also engages in regional, national and international cultural exchanges. Some of the government bodies which directly or indirectly deal with theatre related activities are:

### *1. Sangeet Naatak Academy*

It is the apex body of performing arts – music, dance and drama in the country. Setup in 1952; the Academy was formed with the objective to preserve and sustain the Indian cultural heritage by offering support to the performing art groups. It coordinates and collaborates with different states as well as foreign governments to achieve the objective. It also establishes institutions and sets up projects to further the cause.

## ***2. National School of Drama (NSD)***

It was set up as a constituent unit of Sangeet Naatak Academy in 1959 and later became an independent entity. With its three-year programme, the school seeks to impart diverse knowledge about drama. The school is well respected in the industry with ranks of its alumni achieving stellar success and recognition in their fields. However, it has a limited student strength.

These two institutions are primarily responsible for nurturing and preserving the rich cultural heritage while other national level, state level and privately funded bodies are supporting the industry through the following ways:

**1. Publishing:** Cultural heritage cannot sustain on content that was created years ago. Original content and content adapted from well-known authors of the world is made available by these publishing units in the organisations to spread different cultures globally.

**2. Festivals:** Festivals organised by these companies offer a good amount of exposure to the upcoming theatre groups and artists. They also provide a rising platform to make the performing art popular among the masses and theatre enthusiasts. The festivals are attended by renowned people in the industry and act as a platform to disseminate the latest developments and ideas in the industry.

**3. Extension programmes:** These programmes not only provide a forum for the interaction between traditional and contemporary artists but also act as a personal development tools for their participants. The workshops under these programmes are conducted by NSD faculty, alumni and well-known names from the industry.

**4. Grants and Scholarships:** Scholarships not only act as a motivating factor for the students but also provide financial support to those actively seeking education in the field. The ministry disburses grants under various schemes to the interested applicants. Although the process of applying for the grants is cumbersome, the funds expended indeed provide the much-needed financial and psychological support to the groups and individuals.

**5. Awards and fellowships:** Awards are presented to practitioners, gurus and scholars in the performing arts industry. The academy provides a total of 33 awards each year, and these are not just limited to the field of drama. These awards help sustain and further increase

standards in the performing arts industry as a whole as well as provide honour and recognition to the artists for their service to their respective fields.

Some of the current popular *schemes and initiatives* are as follows:

- **CTSS (Cultural Talent Search Promotion Scholarship)** is instituted by the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) to provide guidance and support to outstanding, talented young children in the age group of 10-14 years. Along with the scholarship, tuition fees is also reimbursed for the scholarship holders
- **Performing Arts Grants Scheme** is to provide financial assistance to theatre groups and includes the Repertory Grant funds as well
- **Artists Pension Fund and Welfare Scheme** is for those artists who have made significant contributions in their fields. They become eligible to receive a monthly grant from the ministry
- **Scheme of Tagore National Fellowship** aims to strengthen the institutions under the Ministry of Culture by encouraging academicians and researchers to affiliate themselves with these institutions to work on projects of mutual interest
- **Studio Theatre Scheme** provides up to 60% funding of the project cost incurred in building or restoring creative spaces. The grant can go up to INR 50 lakhs in metro areas and INR 25 lakhs in other places. This scheme aims at providing ‘economic independence’ to the theatre artists and groups

## Challenges Faced by the ‘Theatre Industry’

The industry has gained recognition by leaps and bounds in the last few decades due to support from the government bodies and concerned individuals. However, certain issues remain, and if these are not resolved, then it can be a slow poison for the industry.

**1. Inadequate infrastructure:** Not every theatre group has its space for rehearsal/ performance, and that is the biggest challenge. No audience is interested in a play that is not polished or practised yet. Providing the artists with space has been encouraged by the government in the Studio Theatre Scheme. Smaller creative spaces are the need of the hour to provide economic independence to the professional groups. Although rehearsal space can somehow be managed by groups by rehearsing at their houses/open spaces, performing in an auditorium requires high overhead costs. Barring a few professional theatre spaces in the country such as Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai and Rangashankara, Bangalore – the cost of renting

a well-maintained and equipped auditorium is very high and affects the group's bottom line significantly. This is one of the primary reasons for theatre groups to not achieve break-even.

State and Central governments have their halls and centres that can be rented out, but these are not adequately maintained and lack the technical infrastructure to stage a play to its full potential. These performance spaces are not created keeping theatre performances in mind but in fact, are just meant for annual functions. Booking these spaces is also not easy for small groups. Technically equipped and well-maintained performing areas are conducive to pique interest in arts and theatre in today's young generation.

**2 Raising funds and sponsorships:** The lack of financial resources affects the industry negatively in two ways. Firstly, without adequate funding, you cannot create a large scale play, and secondly, if somehow you do manage to create a wonderful play, you still need funds to advertise and promote your play, as without marketing, a play does not reach the desired audience. Lack of a patron does affect the industry severely. Having a celebrity or a well-known face in the group helps raise sponsorship funds and get some audience to the auditorium, but the process is highly demanding and challenging. In theatre, the artists only overlook the scripting, production and marketing activities. They do not have the leisure to hire publicity organisations.

Government support through funds and schemes is useful, but the process of obtaining these funds under these schemes is very cumbersome and tedious. There is no guarantee that a professional group will get the desired funds all the time. Sometimes, the funds are rejected purely on the grounds that "the organization does not possess a predominantly cultural profile". Also, the process of applying for the grants requires a recommendation letter from the State or national academies or foundations (such as Kala Academies, Kalakshetra Foundation, NSDs, ZCCs, etc.). Although this acts as a good filter as only the deserving ones get the grants and funds, it might also be promoting only those professional groups or organisations that are well-connected.

**3. Challenges from Other forms of entertainment:** Theatre plays have occupied an extremely niche space in the entertainment industry as they primarily cater to a limited set of audience. Other forms of entertainment such as TV, Movies and Online content streaming have fared relatively better in gaining popularity and accessibility. Today's audience prefers to entertain itself with cost-effective options that are available at their convenience in their free-time. Most of the good plays staged act as a mirror to the happenings in today's society and force the audience to contemplate their actions. People are not looking for 'serious forms of entertainment that force them to think and reflect on their actions.' Audience preferring other modes of entertainment is not the only challenge. Most of the professional artists prefer working in a movie than working in a play since movies are more

rewarding, both financially and popularity-wise.

**4. Regulations:** The Dramatic Performances Act or the DPA is an outdated act that was brought into legislation in 1876. However, it still exists and is being implemented in various Indian states through amended versions. Some states such as Gujarat require the manuscript of the play to be scrutinised and cleared before the play can be staged. The law was enacted by the British with the aim of ‘censoring’ and stopping rebellious theatre activities during our struggle for Independence. However, this law ‘still’ hinders the creativity and keeps unnecessary hurdles in the path of upcoming theatre productions. Also, there are a few conceptual flaws in the law:

a. Ensuring the enforcement is a burden for the government: The regulator can only ask the objectionable content to be removed from the script but what gets staged is at the director’s and actor’s discretion. The regulatory bodies cannot be present at every performing space to verify if their directions were indeed followed. Keeping a track of every performance is a tedious activity for the government. Also, are the police officers equipped to appreciate the contents of the script is another question.

b. Scrutinising just the script is not sufficient: There are various methods of communication that can be used in a play. Scrutinising just the written content is not enough. There will be on-stage improvisations plus communication through facial expressions, and these cannot be scrutinised as per the current regulations.

c. Violates the fundamental right of ‘freedom of speech: There have been numerous instances in the last few years where freedom of expression and right to free speech have been highly debated. Free speech is promoted and everyone’s right until it affects national security but the definition of these terms is highly subjective in today’s context.

d. Promotes parallel economy: Intermediaries exist in the system who promise to get the script approved within one day. There are inefficiencies in the system because of which such agents gain at the expense of theatre groups and creativity.

Some of the things that can stall a theatre performance are:

- Profanity or impropriety of language
- Vulgarity or indecency of dress, dance, movement or gesture
- Denigration of a caste, community or gender
- Offensive representation of political figures
- Naming living politicians
- Words or phrases likely to excite feelings of sedition or political discontent
- Any content that may stoke communal violence

Other regulations such as possessing a performing license (it is needed for each play) and obtaining permission to sell tickets are also required as they help in ensuring public safety in the performing spaces.

However, we are not of the view that all regulations should be removed. Instead, the need of the hour is that only the necessary rules and regulations be implemented properly. Archaic laws need to be replaced with new laws that are applicable in today's world. It is time we start practising the "minimum government and maximum governance" policy for theatre-related activities as well!

## Recommendations

After having discussions with various professional artists and theatre groups, we were able to understand the 'industrial perspective' and the operational behaviour of theatre groups. While some theatre groups had green bottom-lines, there were some who were yet to break even while for some, profit was not the sole purpose of pursuing theatre! It is hard to believe that there are organisations that do not operate just for the sake of earning profits. All that we learn at business schools is that one should focus on improving a company's profitability, but for some theatre groups, the primary purpose may be to express their opinions. Thus, we have come up with the following recommendations:

**1. Empower the theatre professionals to handle business:** The people we spoke with were not managing and organising their activities formally, be it handling the group's finances or the operations. Resources are planned, but everything is done informally. There is a dearth of business professionals and courses where the focus is on managing and running a theatre company. Quoting a veteran theatre artist, who owns two theatre companies – "Bottom line is the last thing we look at while creating a play. A chartered accountant or a business management individual will fail to understand why we do that." Most of the people in the industry concurred on this point. Thus, it is important to have individuals who have the required knowledge in the field of theatre as well as business management.

People who rise through the ranks in a theatre company start from the bottom. They, in most cases, have swept the performance space floor before and after the play. With all their energies focussed towards their creative side, the development of business acumen takes a hit. Training institutes must impart business training to theatre group managers and owners. These training institutes should especially focus on two critical challenges –Financial Management (managing books and raising funds) and Customer Relationship Management (how to build and sustain a loyal base).

**2. Follow hybrid revenue-generating strategies:** Currently, the majority of the income is

earned via the revenue collected from sold tickets. However, it is important for each theatre group to adopt a hybrid strategy to be profitable. The groups may not be operating for the sole purpose of earning profits, but it is important to improve the standards of living of the group members. Revenue can be earned via sponsorships, government grants, collaborating with festivals and events, organising workshops and partnering with schools to conduct theatre-related activities as a part of student's personal development. A group must not solely rely on the tickets sold and needs to adapt with the changing times.

**3. Setting up a lobbying body for the 'theatre industry':** From our primary research and knowledge gathered about theatre in India in the last four months, we did not come across a lobbying association (such as CII, FICCI, etc.) that can raise the concerns of theatre artists and groups to the government. The key theatre personalities should collectively take a step towards this direction.

**4. Increasing involvement from the private sector:** There is growing support for theatre from family business houses such as Tata Trusts (Set up National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) and Aditya Birla Group (Aadyam) to name a few. To involve other business houses, it is necessary that the government encourages such actions and provides tax incentives to the private sector. Once the companies have invested money into the projects, they can reap the benefits from it in the form of endorsements etc. The companies can gain goodwill by preserving India's rich cultural heritage. Some FMCG companies can also use such events to conduct marketing tests for their products.

**5. Reach out to a broader audience:** Increasingly the theatre spaces are being looked at as elitist and more sophisticated. The theatre groups should consciously try to appeal to as large an audience as possible. Even in the urban areas, a large chunk of the population has not watched a single professional play yet. If this market can be tapped and if these segments can be brought to their first show, the audience will increase. Additionally, theatre groups should consciously reach out to schools and colleges. If the children and college students get exposed to theatre at a young age, they will appreciate the art more. Theatre unlocks creativity in children and encourages them to think critically. Generating interest among the children would encourage the elders and parents also to support theatre in India.

**6. Advertisements:** In our survey, we found that people preferred social media as the medium to know about a play in their city. The approach to ads is lacklustre. Digital cameras have become so widespread, and their quality has consistently improved in recent times. If theatre groups don't use this opportunity to reach out to their target audience through short trailers or teasers, they are letting go off a big chunk of revenue. It is time to embrace the social media change.

**7. Role of the government:** Before we set out to do this project, we had a misconception that the government is apathetic to the cause. However, we found out that the government engages in the development and preservation of cultural heritage on multiple fronts. Though we appreciate the role government has played in the progress of the industry, we want to point out some of the gaps that we identified during our conversations with people from the theatre industry:

- a. Amend The Dramatic Performances Act (DPA) to make it more conducive to foster theatre in India. For example, the Maharashtra government amended the provisions of the Maharashtra State Performance Scrutiny board. Earlier, theatre groups had to submit two copies of their script to the board for approval which is no longer required now. However, an NOC is still to be taken from the local police station. Instead, a form of 'self-censorship' can be established where the groups would be liable for their actions but do not need the approval before every performance (based on the idea of self-censorship in India for placing advertisements).
- b. Open more schools/institutes of drama such as NSD in other states of the country. There are still a lot of theatre enthusiasts who are not able to get a formal education in performing arts from a quality institute. This step can improve the quality of the talent in our industry.
- c. Apart from the recommendation on tax incentives mentioned above, we also recommend that the government increases the fund allocations towards the industry. The allocated funds are towards preserving Indian culture as a whole, but the government should have individual budgets for each performing arts field. For this, an efficient bureaucracy and government system is needed.
- d. More rehearsal spaces in the city areas as well as more technically equipped auditorium spaces in the country should be promoted under the Studio Theatre Scheme.



## Exhibit

### *Questionnaire*

1. Please rank the following modes of entertainment based on your personal preferences  
(Drag the Most preferred to top and Least preferred to the bottom)
  - a. Movies
  - b. TV Shows
  - c. Stand-up comedy
  - d. Theatre plays
  - e. Watching sports
  - f. Events & Festivals
  - g. Online Streaming (Netflix, Hotstar, YouTube etc.)
  
2. Why would you not watch plays? {Select as many}
  - a. Time commitment issues
  - b. Cannot appreciate it
  - c. Not exposed to plays much
  - d. Lack of a partner to go with
  - e. Not aware about plays happening
  - f. High cost
  - g. I would rather watch a movie
  - h. Lack of reviews/ ratings on plays
  - i. Absence of familiar actors
  - j. No reasons as such/ never thought
  
3. How often do you go out for movies?
  - a. Once a week
  - b. Once in 2-3 weeks
  - c. Once a month
  - d. Once in 2-3 months
  - e. Other
  
4. Have you watched a live professional play yet?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. No, but I have watched plays staged by college students
  
5. How many plays have you watched till date?
  - a. 0
  - b. 1-5
  - c. 5-10

- d. >10
6. When was the last time you watched a play?
- a. Within last one month
  - b. Within last 6 months
  - c. Within last one year
  - d. It has been more than one year
  - e. Never
7. How many professional theatre groups are you aware of?
- a. 0
  - b. 1-3
  - c. 3-6
  - d. 6+
8. Select the level of importance you attribute to below factors before deciding to watch a play (Least important to Very Important) {Select as many}
- a. Play cast
  - b. Genre
  - c. Play location
  - d. Play language
  - e. Ticket price
  - f. Outing/ special occasion
  - g. Date & time of play
  - h. Reviews
  - i. Running time of play
  - j. Theatre group/ production house
  - k. People to go with
9. What do you like about theatre plays? Rank each of the below factors from Low to High
- a. Live performance
  - b. Opportunity to interact with cast
  - c. Involvement/ absorption in the act
  - d. Power to influence/ impact opinions
10. Would you go watch a play just because a celebrity/famous actor is a part of the play?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Maybe

11. Was there a dramatics society/club/teacher in your school?
- Yes
  - No
  - Not sure
12. How do you usually get to know about a play's details (venue, date, cast, etc.)? {Select as many}
- TV/ In-movie advertisements
  - Social media
  - Friends/ family
  - Ticket platforms
  - Newspapers
  - Billboards
  - Radio
  - Theatre group membership/ subscriptions
  - Have no idea until I visit the venue
  - Haven't looked for it consciously
13. What are the ways that can be used to arouse your interest to watch a play? (Select maximum 3 options)
- Trailers/teasers on social media
  - Reviews on ticket platforms
  - Newspaper ads
  - Radio ads
  - Celebrity endorsements on social media
  - Collaboration with a café/ food joint
  - Other
14. What is your city of residence/ work?
- Tier-1 city
  - Tier-2 city
  - Other
15. What is your age?
- <18 years
  - 18-24 years
  - 24-30 years
  - >30 years
16. Sex?

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Other

17. Employment status?

- a. Student
- b. Unemployed
- c. Employed
- d. Self-employed

18. What is your approximate annual income?

- a. <3 lacs per annum
- b. 3-6 lacs per annum
- c. 6-9 lacs per annum
- d. 9-12 lacs per annum
- e. >12 lacs per annum

19. How much is your approximate annual income? (including your income)

- a. <3 lacs per annum
- b. 3-6 lacs per annum
- c. 6-9 lacs per annum
- d. 9-12 lacs per annum
- e. >12 lacs per annum

20. Name (optional)

21. Please rate the below experiences/ activities (Very Low to Very High)

- a. Movies
- b. TV Shows
- c. Stand-up comedy
- d. Theatre plays
- e. Watching sports
- f. Events & festivals
- g. Online streaming

*on the basis of:*

- participation/ involvement from audience
- social impact
- aesthetics
- entertainment value
- awareness

## References

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The Book 'Modern India Theatre' edited by Nandi Bhatia

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- Performing arts grants scheme:

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