We Decide What Art Means: Revitalizing Audiences' Authority

by

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Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the

Graduate Liberal Studies Program

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

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Abstract

Facing stagnant average audience attendance and inequality in governmental support, how can British Columbian arts organizations survive and thrive? Research has shown that audiences have become increasingly disconnected from their meaning-making processes during arts and culture experiences (Brown, 2013; Scollen, 2008; Sedgman, 2017). The literature has also demonstrated that meaning-making experiences could increase the audience's desire to attend and advocate for others to attend arts and culture events (Brown, 2013; Gwillim et al., 2019; Prendergast, 2004). My research focused on my participants' experiences at a suite of outreach activities (talkbacks, lectures, digital content, workshops, etc.) which I call information sessions. I was interested in their descriptions of the relationship between attending an information session and their decisions to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events. I was also interested in their suggestions for improving information sessions and their perceptions of the barriers to attendance faced by their communities. Using a social constructivist framework, I conducted a thematic analysis drawing on guided journal entries and semi-structured interviews. My findings showed that meaning-making value was a motivational factor in my participants' decisions to attend arts and culture events, share their experiences with others, and encourage others to attend. In addition, participants articulated how improvements to the physical, financial, and content availability of information sessions and arts and culture events could overcome attendance barriers. These findings are useful because revitalizing audiences' authority as meaning makers can recentre their importance in the development of arts programming that provides value and overcomes barriers to attendance. This potential for revitalization could position information sessions as a crucial contributor to the long-term success of the British Columbian arts and culture sector.

Keywords: arts and culture; information sessions; audience; spectatorship; meaning-making; availability; accessibility; reception

I dedicate this thesis to my three wonderous daughters, Anakalia, Eliana, and Saskia, who have cheered me on and accepted my "school time" with grace and love. I am so proud to show you why doing something you love is worth the effort! I also dedicate it to my husband, Marc, who has been a constant source of support and encouragement during the challenges of graduate school and life.

I love you all more than you could ever know.

Acknowledgements

First, I wish to acknowledge and pay respect to the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), səl̓ilw̓ətaʔɬ (Tsleil-Waututh), q̓íc̓əy̓ (Katzie), kʷikʷəƛ̓əm (Kwikwetlem), qiqéyt (Qayqayt), q'ʷa:n̓ƛ'ən̓ (Kwantlen), Semiahmoo and *sc̓əwaθən məsteyəxʷ* (Tsawwassen) peoples, on whose occupied and traditional lands I carried out my research.

As a grateful settler on these ancestral territories, I take on my responsibility to reconciliation by learning the truth and stories of these lands and the peoples' relationships and responsibilities to these lands.

Throughout the writing of this thesis, I have received a great deal of support and assistance.

I would like to thank Dr. Gary McCarron and Dr. Sasha Colby. Your insightful feedback pushed me to sharpen my thinking and refocus on why I began this project in the first place.

I would also like to thank Dr. Rebecca D. Cox, who was always available to answer my questions with candor and care.

Finally, I would like to thank my compatriots in the Thesis Writing Group. This group was a lifeline to normalcy during one of the strangest times to write a thesis I could have ever imagined.

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Introduction

1.1. Contextual Rationale

Statistics Canada (2012) reported that average performing arts attendance experienced a significant decline in all categories between 2006 and 2012. Although there has been some improvement since 2012, average national audience attendance has not reached 2006 levels (Statistics Canada, 2018). British Columbia has been particularly hard hit, seeing a 19% decrease in average audience attendance between 2010 and 2012 Statistics Canada (n.d.). Further exacerbating the challenge for British Columbian arts organizations is a weakness in governmental funding. In a report prepared for the Alliance for Arts + Culture (2015), it was reported that British Columbian arts organizations received less government funding than peer organizations in other provinces. Facing stagnant average audience attendance and inequality in governmental support, how can British Columbian arts organizations survive and thrive? It appears that performing arts audiences may have an answer to that question. In the 2013 The Value of Presenting (Petri, 2013), three out of four Canadians reported attending a live professional performing arts event in 2011. In fact, attending "live, professional performing arts performances in general is at least moderately important to most Canadians (73 per cent)" (Petri, 2013, p. 13) and even the "half of Canadians who attended a performing arts presentation just once or not at all in the past 12 months say that attending professional performing arts in general is at least moderately important to them" (Petri, 2013, p. 14). It appears that arts organizations do not have to convince most Canadians that attending arts and culture events are important; they just need to convince them to attend more often. They need to ask audience members what will persuade them to come back and convince them to invite their friends to come with them.

1.2. Personal Rationale

Imagine that you are watching a performance, or wandering an art gallery, or listening to a piece of music. The performance concludes, the gallery closes, or the

music ends, and someone leans over and asks what you think it means. Are you ready to answer? I wouldn't be. I have been angry in galleries, staring at cultural artifacts imprisoned in glass, wondering what the people who created them would say about their display. I have been embarrassed in a music hall, listening to an Avant-Garde jazz pianist coaxing out their complicated melody while I closed my eyes and tried to listen for anything but noise. I have been bewildered while a Chorus of Witches in shiny spandex sang Italian prophesies to Macbeth. I have felt things and thought things during a wide variety of arts and culture events, yet I am rarely ready to answer what the art means. For most of my life, I have believed that art had a specific meaning that could be perceived. I have also thought that I almost always needed someone else to tell me what that meaning was; so that I could confirm or adjust my ideas about that meaning.

I was a non-expert, locked out of most art genres by language, practices, and histories I had not been taught. So, I listened. In *Poetics* (350 C.E.), Aristotle told me that the meaning of art could be found in its ability to imitate the activities of a hero such that the emotions evoked help relieve similar emotions in the spectator. I tried to pair up the emotion I saw with the emotion I felt, but instead of relief, I felt defeat at the un-pairable feelings I still held. In *What is Art?* (1904), Tolstoy suggested I could find meaning in experiencing the artist's emotion shared through their art. But how was I to know what that was? Mathew Arnold (1913) relieved me of the pressure to find meaning on my own and assured me that it was the role of critics to stand above the physical and emotional entanglement of everyday life and describe art's true meaning. I could now return to the safety of looking to others to confirm or correct what I thought and felt art meant. That safety was unsettled by Susan Sontag (1966), who advised me to reject the premise that art must have meaning at all. Instead, she told me to use my eyes, ears, and heart to experience art. There was a vulnerability and a power in this, but bounding the experience by my own eyes, ears, and heart still left me disconnected. However, the centring of my authority led to my realization that art experiences felt most meaningful when I connected with the artists, artistic staff, and fellow audience members. I realized that it was not a question of what art means but who decides what art means. Ergo, my meaning-making process is rooted in a social constructivist framework.

The term social constructivism is often attributed to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann. They took the position in their book, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966), that "reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge

must analyse the process in which this occurs" (p.13). My deepest disconnections with arts experiences stemmed from the lack of an interactive social co-construction of meaning. If social constructivists focus on understanding the multiplicity of subjective meanings people develop from their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Taylor et al., 2015), it is essential to remember that those experiences do not occur in an emotional or intellectual vacuum. My arts experiences have been shaped by the quiet tears of a seatmate and the audience's collective laughter. A social constructivist's desire to use experiences to uncover patterns of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2016) led me to consider the meaning-making process enacted at the enrichment activities offered at arts events' periphery.

Arts organizations offer a variety of opportunities to engage with artists, artistic staff, and other audience members. I have attended formal, lecture-style seminars prior to performances, where a subject matter expert provided context for the work I was about to see. I have taken theatre tours with stage managers and peeked behind the curtain to see costumers creating, and stagehands work their lever and pulley magic. I have added to collective mixed-media art pieces and raised my hand to ask questions at post-performance talkback sessions. I've mingled with fellow audience members while musicians circulated with their instruments, ready to give impromptu technical lectures and personal histories. As COVID-19 closed arts organization doors, I have watched pre-recorded question and answer chats, movie-trailer style information shorts, and live-streamed artist spotlights. These events have a myriad of names. For the sake of simplicity, I will use the term information sessions[1] to describe their variety. If my experiences at arts events have been shaped by the emotional responses of my fellow spectators, they have been deepened by the emotional and intellectual engagement that came from the information sessions I attended. Perhaps, for British Columbians, information sessions could connect the recognition of the importance of attending arts and culture events to increasing and advocating for attendance.

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[1] See Canada Council of the Arts (2012), especially pages 4 - 6, for an insightful definition of public engagement in the arts.

1.3. Objectives of the Research

The purpose of this study is to investigate the role information sessions play in audience members' decision to attend or advocate for others to attend arts and culture events. I use a social constructivist research method to provide a focused view of how participants who attended information sessions constructed meaning and perceived barriers to attending and advocating for attendance at arts and culture events.

One of the aims of this study is to contribute to the field of audience studies. First, situating the research in the Greater Vancouver area contributes to the Canadian perspective. Additionally, this study provides insight into the importance of arts and culture information sessions, particularly the value. Finally, the study has produced suggestions for improving the experience of information sessions and removing barriers to attendance. The insights gained from this qualitative study may assist key stakeholders in the arts and culture fields in developing strategies to increase audience attendance and attendance advocacy for arts and culture events.

1.4. Research Questions

With the intention to provide greater insight into participant meaning-making in information sessions and perceived barriers for attending and advocating for attendance at arts and culture events, the research questions are:

1. What role does attending an information session play in audience members' decision to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events in Greater Vancouver?
2. What improvements could be made to information sessions?
3. What are the barriers to attendance faced by communities in Greater Vancouver?

This study was conducted using a qualitative research method in order to capture the multifaceted nature of decision-making processes. Using a social constructivist and sense-making methodology allowed me to honour my participants' complex personal histories and rich inner worlds as we co-constructed their meaning-making values and perceptions of barriers their communities face.

1.5. Outline Structure

I present this thesis in five sections. Section one, the introduction, has introduced and outlined the focus of the thesis. Section two examines the relevant literature. This section includes literature related to audience motivation for attending arts and culture events, audience meaning-making at arts and culture events, audience promotion of arts and culture events, and the function of and reception to arts and culture information sessions. Section three outlines the methodology and research methods adopted in this research. Section four presents the findings and discussion of the study, focused on the themes of value and availability and the subthemes of intellectual and emotional value, and financial, physical, and content availability. Finally, section five presents my interpretations, possible applications, recommendations from the research findings, and a brief conclusion.

Chapter 2.

Literature Review

With average audience attendance flagging, identifying factors that might convince potential audience members to attend and encourage others to attend arts events becomes important. A literature search conducted at the beginning of the research process identified what researchers had discovered about these factors and what remained unknown. It was difficult to locate research that focused on the psychology and phenomenology of the decision-making process of potential arts audiences. Much audience research focuses on audience purchasing and attendance trends or on identifying the demographics of attendees. The Centre for Spectatorship and Audience Research (n.d.) states that "despite a recent resurgence, the study of spectatorship and reception in theatre and performance studies lags behind disciplines such as film, museum studies, and computer science" (Mission and Values section, para. 2). It became clear that the process of choosing to attend and advocate for attendance at performing arts events has not yet been clarified, especially in a Canadian context. Of the articles reviewed in the literature review, only two studies located their research in Canada. Neither of the Canadian-based articles examined the decision-making process that audience members engaged in while choosing to attend arts and culture events.

The literature presented in the following section represents the accumulated collection gathered in the initial and ongoing literature search. Doing so allowed me to continually refine my search to engage with the relevant research as themes emerged. In preparing myself to answer the research questions, I examined literature focusing on audience motivation for attending arts and culture events, audience meaning-making at arts and culture events, audience promotion of arts events and the format of and reception to arts and culture information sessions.

2.1. Audience Motivations for Attending Arts and Culture Events

The research investigating attendance at arts and culture events often focuses on demographics. Many researchers have concluded that populations that are older, wealthier, and have higher educational attainment attend traditional arts and culture events at high rates (Pompe et al., 2020). As such, it would seem a sound decision for arts and culture staff to make programming decisions that motivate this demographic category to increase attendance. However, emerging research cautions against relying solely on biographic data to improve audience motivation to participate. First, sorting attendees into identity categories ignores how audience members move into and out of those categories and how identity categories can be othering, which can negatively effect potential audience members' motivation to attend (Ashton & Gowland-Pryde, 2019). Second, while research showed that socioeconomic status and educational attainment levels impacted motivation for attending arts events, they could not be used to predict attendance patterns. For example, while those with high status were more likely to consume a variety of art genres, those with lower status still attended arts and culture events but tended to stay within a single genre (T. W. Chan & Goldthorpe, 2005). In the context of literary and dance events, the social status of attendees was more evenly distributed when examining contemporary dance audiences, and attendance skewed toward higher socioeconomic status for other dance and literary events (Hanquinet et al., 2019). Finally, an additional downfall of programmatic planning that focuses on the segment of the population who already attends arts and culture events is that it ignores the population that doesn't attend. This forces arts organizations to rely on the interests of a population bounded by their "already participating" status (Ashton & Gowland-Pryde, 2019) to make programming decisions. More nuanced qualitative research into audience motivations for attending arts and culture events have emerged as an alternative way to understand audience attendance patterns.

In examining audience motivations for attending arts and culture events, the appeal of offerings, the accessibility of the offering, the affordability of the offering, and audience awareness of the event were the driving motivators for attendance (Brown, 2013; Cohen, 2014; Crawford et al., 2014; Kemp & Poole, 2016; Pompe et al., 2020; Walmsley, 2011). In terms of appeal, audiences were not only motivated to attend events when they found the content personally interesting but identified events as

appealing if the event reinforced their social status, gave them opportunities to learn, or offered relaxation and socialization activities (Andreea, 2012; Brown, 2013; Reinelt, 2014; Scollen, 2008; Walmsley, 2011). Although audiences used several sources to evaluate an event's potential factors of appeal, the recommendation of family and friends was the most compelling (Cohen, 2014). Finally, in terms of the relationship between pre-planning and types of events, it appears that attendees are more likely to be motivated to buy tickets ahead of time if they think the arts or culture event will sell out (Price et al., 2019). Perhaps this is a case where audience members balance the accessibility of arts events (planning early to get tickets) and the desire to reinforce their social status (being the type of person who attends sold-out performances).

In a chapter investigating who goes to concerts and why, Pitts (2014) found that motivations for attending music events existed on a continuum from *"practical (ticket price, access, availability), through questions of musical choice (repertoire, familiarity, preference) and social listening habits (attending alone, joining the Friends scheme), through to a broader philosophical and moral sense of responsibility (loyalty to a venue/event, concern for the future of live arts)"* (2014, p. 32). It seems that increased attendance moved audiences further from the practical toward the more esoteric, which, in turn, reinforced their motivation to attend. In a different study, Pitts (2016) further established the complexity of motivation for new attendees versus regular attendees. She found that tied up in the practical to esoteric continuum are the identities newcomers and regular-attenders have created for themselves and the interactions between those groups. Newcomers can feel like outsiders who want to join the in-group or be unaware of the existence of an in-group at all. Some regular-attenders may ground their identity in modelling appropriate audience behaviours while others feel their connection to the music privileges them to act in less conventional ways (Pitts, 2016).

Another factor that plays an essential role in increasing audience motivation to attend arts and culture events is the engagement of the community in arts-related decision-making (Martorana et al., 2017). Increasing the supply of arts and culture events in lower socioeconomic areas was not enough to increase resident motivation to attend. Lack of access to information about the events, including costs (even if free), a lack of education about arts and culture in general, and a disconnection with the activities, processes, and etiquette of arts and culture events reduced motivation to attend (Martorana et al., 2017). Community engagement may help mitigate the

increasing lack of interest in traditional cultural offerings (Pompe et al., 2020) by leveraging community consultation to create opportunities for programmers to offer events of interest to the community. A secondary benefit to community consultation is that it provides opportunities to increase the confidence of potential attendees while also offering opportunities for education, including the introduction of artistic or cultural co-creation activities, such as involving audience members in creative and physical activities before or during events (Brown, 2013; Conner, 2013).

2.1.1. Barriers and Interruptions to Audience Motivation

Financial barriers should not be disregarded when considering audience motivation. They not only reduce motivation to attend (Brown, 2013; Kemp & Poole, 2016; O'Hagan, 2017) but feed a cycle of non-attendance for the less privileged as their children are less likely to be enrolled in arts education which lessens their likelihood of attending arts events as adults (T. W. Chan & Goldthorpe, 2005; O'Hagan, 2017; Pompe et al., 2020). Arts education is important as exposure to arts, and art education as a child or youth led to higher attendance as an adult (Borgonovi, 2004; Brown, 2013; Crawford et al., 2014; Mathewson Mitchell, 2017; O'Hagan, 2017). In addition to increasing the likelihood of attending arts events as adults, research has found that arts education for younger children was also effective at transmitting an understanding and enthusiasm for the arts to older siblings and other family members (Martin et al., 2012; Martorana et al., 2017). Brown (2013) also found that interacting with artists in the educational process as an adult "can be transformative with respect to an aesthetic awakening" (p.13) and suggested that integrating the arts more deeply into college academic experiences also supports audience development. This supports the idea that the positive impact of learning opportunities on future arts attendance does not need to be restricted to the elementary and secondary years (Brown, 2013; Prendergast, 2004).

Brown (2013), Scollen (2008) and Sedgeman (2017) found that some audience members felt blocked from engaging with arts and culture experiences even though they tried very hard to engage. Scollen's (2008) participants felt locked out of activities they perceived as elitist. Their self-perception as non-experts undermined their confidence in their physical, emotional, and intellectual responses to the work. This lack of confidence could explain why Pitts (2016) found that audience motivation was sometimes restricted to a particular art form or attached to a specific venue. These findings suggest that as

audiences build confidence in certain art genres, their responses gain credibility and may increase their confidence in attending within that genre. The negative effect of non-expert may also be supported by Bitgood's (2009) findings that fatigue, a decrease in attention, and a cognitive overload in museum settings decreased audience enjoyment and learning and thus decreased their motivation to attend. Although Bitgood's review of the research illustrated a need for better descriptions of the phenomenon of museum fatigue, it was clear that audiences were working to the point of fatigue to make physical, emotional, and intellectual connections to the installations during their visits. Bitgood's (2013) later research suggested supporting audience engagement and motivation was directly connected to perceptions of value.

Research has also found a positive relationship between perceived value and motivation to attend. To gain a deeper understanding of perceived value, evaluation tools have been developed to ascertain that value. One such evaluation tool was "Culture counts", which was developed to measure the intrinsic value of arts and culture activities. This evaluation tool focused on the value audiences assigned arts experiences. Although it attempted to gain insight into the audience's value of arts events, it still relied on quantifying audience responses rather than providing a qualitative analysis of meaning-making processes (Gilmore et al., 2017). As meaning-making has been shown to be a significant contributor to audience assessment of value, researchers have become more interested in exploring the meaning-making processes of audiences at arts and culture events.

2.2. Audience Meaning-Making at Arts and Culture Events

Radbourne et al. (2009) identified three points of audience meaning-making, "knowledge/information transfer or learning, authenticity and performer interaction, and collective engagement" (p.27). Güler's (2019) research into audience reception and attitudes toward ceramic art supports this conclusion. She found that most attendees were from non-arts backgrounds and identified as art lovers or art hobbyists. Attendees suggested that increased genre knowledge and a deeper connection to the artists would increase the appeal of an arts and culture event for the greater population. This suggestion was supported by Walmsley (2016), who found that digital platforms allowed non-attenders to connect with unfamiliar artforms and underlined that social interactions helped keep even non-attenders engaged with the arts content. Mathewson Mitchell

(2017) agreed, finding in her work with youth that participation in activities that brought artists, artistic staff, and youth together led to deeper knowledge and comfort with arts and arts spaces. The youth were particularly satisfied with the self-directed and interest-led nature of their learning, suggesting that personal meaning-making opportunities deepens audience connection. Foreman-Wernet & Dervin (2017) demonstrated that a Sense-Making Methodology could uncover multiple points of meaning, showing that audience members derived meaning based on personal experiences and that meaning was influenced by what they knew.

Anderson (2015) and Bennet (2012) examined how digital spaces increased meaning-making opportunities for audiences. Anderson (2015) examined an art project that offered three separate meaning-making spheres and illustrated the layers of meaning-making engagement that occurred online, in-person, and with audiences familiar and unfamiliar with the context of the work. Bennet's (2012) work illuminated how digital technologies allowed in-person audiences to include online attendees in the meaning-making processes at live musical events. They gave examples of how deep engagement with the artistic work happened at all levels. However, more artist supplied information was required the further the audience was from personal connections to the regional-based work.

Park-Fuller (2003) and Jacobson (2018) believed that interactive theatre offered more points of meaning-making for the audience. Jacobson's (2018) work illustrated that post-performance talkback sessions provided multiple points of uncertainty for audience members, which created fertile ground for personal connection and open dialogue. Sedgman (2019) pointed out that a crucial point of meaning-making is the intersection of the individual and the larger context, where a single audience member's response is positioned within the larger audience response and the social context that exists. Sedgman (2019) took a meta-position by including the researcher's meaning-making process, pointing out that researchers are also "groping toward" (p.479) meaning. Cohen's exploration of live music memories and place illustrated how spectators' personal, inner life experiences of music interconnect with place memory, relationships, and community. Blair (2016) found that when audiences connect to an artistic character and see that character's empowerment, a connection is established between artist and audience, and the effect of that connection lasts beyond the conclusion of the performance. These researchers have shown how arts meaning-making can connect

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audiences with their fellow attendees and connect them to the artist and the greater social context within which the performance took place.

The benefits of interactive meaning-making need not be confined to the interaction between people and can include the interaction of the physical and intellectual realms. Conner (2013) was convinced that asking audiences to connect to their personal experiences would deepen their connection to the material being presented. She rejected modern conventions for audience behaviour favouring rich audience experience, allowing space for spontaneous meaning-making in the moment, even if that meaning-making was disruptive. This whole-body meaning-making process was supported by Reason and Reynolds' (2010) research, who observed their participants' most powerful meaning-making experiences were within their bodies, when they described their engagement as grounded in empathy, sympathy, and connection through kinesthetic measures. Younan and Eid (2016) explored how technologies, like 3-D printed materials, may allow attendees to interact with museum artifacts or digital art pieces physically. Validating the meaning-making that occurs for the audience in the physical realm may lend confidence to participants' interactions with the arts and culture events, underscoring their role in the greater arts and culture context.

Prendergast (2004) focused on how to make the audience feel like they matter – based on the idea that audience members are aware that they are part of a whole but that if they leave, the performance will go on without them. The curriculum framework she developed to aid audiences in their meaning-making refocused attendees on their personal connections with the material and asked them to be more active in their role as spectators. Allen and Laine (2018) illustrated how deeply audiences matter by examining how artists' engagement with their audiences placed them within that community of learning. They concluded that perceiving an arts experience as a continuation of individual meaning-making journeys created richness and connection for audience and artist alike. This blurring of the line between spectator and artist may legitimize the meaning-making experiences of non-experts. As pointed out by Paulus et al., (2010) "When no one person is the expert, all participants can share equally in the process" (p.861). This legitimization is of particular importance in the context of Foreman-Wernet & Dervin's (2017) research, which found that those who felt they did not belong in arts and culture spaces felt surveilled and did not connect as deeply with the work. Lack of

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arts and culture knowledge and the self-perception as a non-expert status contributed to that lack of belonging.

2.3. Audience Promotion of Arts and Culture Events

In a report aiming to uncover how to engage the next generation of arts attendees, Brown (2013) found that most college students look to their friends or people they like to expand their cultural tastes. This echoes Andreea's (2012) finding that audience members valued the input of their friends and family when making ticketed purchasing decisions. The next step is understanding what factors motivate audience members to promote arts and culture events.

Research has found that audiences who saw value in their attendance were more likely to exhibit loyal behaviour (Kemp & Poole, 2016). This loyalty is associated with advocacy for others attending arts and culture events. Chan and Au (2017) dug deeper into the categories of value and found that authentic, interesting, emotionally engaging, coherent, and sensorially stimulating events increased audience members' likelihood to recommend others attend theatrical events.

Audience members were motivated to promote arts events when their perception of the event was positive (Andreea, 2012; de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Dowell et al., 2019; Scollen, 2008). Boerner & Jobst (2013) found visitors' emotional, cognitive, and "conative (i.e., thought-provoking impulses, animation for communication)" (p.391) responses were second only to their perceived quality (set, acting, staging) of the event in eliciting a positive evaluation of the event. This motivation to advocate for others to attend arts events can have powerful results, as Scollen (2008) reported concerning Australia's Talking Theatre project, which supported arts organizations in relationship-building with non-attenders in their communities. Non-attenders were transformed into attenders through the learning and relationships facilitated by the project. In the time the research took place, the Talking Theatre project had

> generated a 110% increase in ticket purchases by all participants. Twenty-nine per cent of all participants returned, on average more than once, which is 177% up on their previous attendance. Factoring in the guests that they brought with them, results in a ticket multiplier of 397% per participant. (p.51)

Participants in this project reported that the guests they brought with them were now attending new performances on their own (Scollen, 2008).

Previous research showed that favourable emotional responses was positively linked to the desire to share information about a product (J. Berger & Milkman, 2012; Heath et al., 2001; Kang et al., 2020). Research has also found that word of mouth significantly impacted ticket sales and run lengths of theatrical movies (Moul, 2007). Dowell et al. (2019) found that desire to promote events via word of mouth was related to the value co-creation attendees engaged in at the event. Lowest levels of value co-creation were found among the population that was categorized as "must have been dragged along". It is possible that some of the reticence to share among this group might have stemmed from the low levels of audience engagement as participants who were "dragged along" were likely not given a choice to attend an event they found of interest.

As previously mentioned, research has offered insight into how social media platforms have allowed attending fans to support non-attending fans, keep fan communities close and build relationships with non-attenders (Pitts, 2016; Walmsley, 2016). This is important as there is support for the idea that electronic word of mouth does have a positive impact on consumer behaviour by offering deeper learning opportunities about the products (King et al., 2014; Muñiz Jr. & Schau, 2005), a reduction in the risk of a poor investment of resources (Kim et al., 2001; King et al., 2014), and more trust and loyalty toward the product (King et al., 2014; Weitzl, 2017). Based on the research presented, it seems that arts organizations should consider engagement practices that increase value and provide positive emotional responses in order to encourage audiences to share their experiences with others.

2.4. Format and Function of Information Sessions

Audiences are eager to actively participate in information and talkback sessions. (Goodwin, 2004; Heim, 2012; Karen Burland editor & Stephanie Pitts editor, 2014). These activities allow arts programmers to hear what audiences think about the events and provide another point of meaning-making, which we have already seen contributes to positive opinions of value, which contributes to audience motivation to attend and advocate for others to attend arts events. One option to increase engagement encourages artistic staff to reimagine the temporal constraints of information sessions,

giving audience and potential audience members opportunities to participate and practice an artistic genre in the weeks or months leading up to an event. "A growing body of data illustrates the interconnectedness of participatory arts practice and attendance at live events. General population studies of arts participation consistently find that active participants are more likely to be audience members in the conventional sense" (Brown & Novak-Leonard, 2011, p. 11). Artists can flip the traditional ask and answer format of a talkback session and present the audience with questions the artists have generated, providing an opportunity to refine their performance while establishing a unique relationship with the audience (Cohen, 2014). Work by Scollen (2008) suggested that artistic staff can be left out of the equation altogether as peer-led post-performance conversations resulted in seventy-six percent of participants reporting increased understanding of events after these peer-to-peer group discussions.

Gallagher and Wessels (2013) showed an interesting contrast between surface and deep learning in their presentation of the results of an arts-based research project centring on youth homelessness. Audience members were encouraged to spontaneously call out words to describe homeless youth at information sessions before and after the performances. While there was a pattern of negative views before the performance turned to positive after, the surface learning enacted by shouting words without context proved to reinforce negative and stereotypical views of youth experiencing homelessness. In contrast, the deep and candid conversations during post-performance talkbacks resulted in "an arresting moment of spectator-to spectator pedagogy in which shelter youth audience members spoke frankly to the actors and others in the audience in a manner that charged the space with a daring poignancy" (Gallagher & Wessels, 2013, p. 35). Here we see how information session format and content has the potential to engage audiences in learning and critical thinking beyond what was presented in the art or culture event.

Research has shown that there remains a reticence to disrupt the modern conventions of audience behaviour with peri-performance interaction (Crawford et al., 2014). Yet Gwillim et al. (2019) showed how successful that can be, with their museum walking tour prompting one spectator to say,

> The images created for us on the tour were beautiful, moving, and funny
> by turns, and they were integrated by a soundtrack that wove together bits
> of the soundscape we were actually moving through—ending with an

inspired passage that wove everything together. This is something I will remember for a very long time to come (p.144).

There is evidence that audiences are seeking information about arts and culture events even when formal programming is not available. Crawford et al. (2014) described how participants used YouTube to familiarize themselves with the classical works they were going to see, creating an ad hoc pre-performance information session. Their research also described the success of a social-media engaged app that allowed audience members to learn about the arts event and engage with each other (Crawford et al., 2014). Conner (2013) was hopeful that digital platforms could usher in a new era of information sessions, allowing arts organizations to leverage the general population's willingness to pay for easier access to information they are now seeking on their own. "If arts organizations become information sorters for their audiences, everyone gains. And if arts organizations can combine that power to compile useful paratexts that support understanding and provoke thinking with structures that facilitate productive talk, the gain is exponentialized" (Conner, 2013, p.170-171).

In contrast to the opportunities for engagement that thoughtfully designed information sessions can create for audiences, (Fisher, 2014) suggested that the standard format of post-show discussions was unsatisfactory for artists, facilitators and audience members alike. So, what does this mean for arts organizations? Given what research has uncovered about the connections between barriers to attendance, meaning-making value, and audience motivations to attend and encourage others to attend, it seems logical to examine what role information sessions might play in supporting audience retainment and growth.

Chapter 3.

Methodology and Research Methods

The purpose of my research study was to describe the role information sessions played in the decision that arts audience members make to attend and advocate for attendance at arts and cultural events. I anticipated that a complex description rooted in personal and social context would emerge from the data to inform our understanding of how and why information sessions impact audience attendance and advocacy for attendance. Studying the decision-making process of audience members is not an easy endeavour to quantify; therefore, the research methodology I selected to achieve this purpose best was a qualitative approach.

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

The ontological position of my research is that decision-making factors are constructed in different ways. Each construction effects perceptions of information sessions and their impact on arts audience members' choices to attend and advocate for attendance at arts and cultural events. Personal histories, real-time impressions, and the personal contexts of each individual are gathered and aligned with social norms, ideas, and behaviours to influence decision-making. This position, which views reality as conditional, local, specific and constructed and co-constructed (Hugly & Sayward, 1987; Lincoln et al., 2018) aligns with the relativist rejection of the notion of absolute truth.

My epistemological position is that researchers and their participants co-create the meaning attributed to information sessions' impact on the choices that arts audience members make to attend and advocate for attendance at arts and cultural events (Ültanır, 2012). My constructivist epistemological position allowed for a qualitative enquiry underpinned by the supposition that all people, including researchers, construct the realities surrounding them (Charmaz, 2017; Olssen, 1995; von Glasersfeld, 1995).

3.1.2. Qualitative Research Approach

I chose a qualitative research approach for this study because qualitative methods are especially useful in understanding the meaning that people give to events that they experience. It also allowed me to induce patterns and understanding from the data (Taylor et al., 2015). It offered the opportunity to present a holistic view of my participants, uncovering the complex processes they engage in as they make their choices about and advocacy for attendance. A basic qualitative approach is most strongly supported as a research method choice by its lack of additional dimensions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 24). The choice of a basic qualitative research method allowed me to draw on the strengths of other methods while maintaining a flexibility that allowed me to remain responsive to the insights of the data. An important factor in uncovering those insights was remaining rooted in a social constructivist framework.

3.1.3. Social Constructivist Framework

In this thesis, I utilized a social constructivist framework rooted in the view that reality is socially constructed. As previously mentioned, the term social constructivism is often attributed to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, who took the position in their book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1966) that "reality is socially constructed and that the sociology of knowledge must analyse the process in which this occurs" (p.13). They acknowledged being influenced by Mead, Marx, Durkheim, van der Leeuw, Eliade and Bultmann. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) describe social constructivism as an interpretive framework wherein researchers construct knowledge based on their and their participants' interpretations of events. As a social constructivist researcher, I focused on understanding the multiplicity of subjective meanings people develop from their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Taylor et al., 2015). Social constructivists use participant experiences to uncover patterns of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A social constructivist framework supported my data collection choice to conduct interviews with participants and analyze textual data created by participants in reflective journals. These data collection methods allowed me to co-construct information session experiences with participants and explore how those experiences influenced their intentions to attend or advocate for others to attend arts and culture events.

I formatted the reflective journals using Dervin's Sense-Making Methodology (SSM), "a theoretic that captures the dynamics of meaning-making in the material context of the everyday world" (Foreman-Wernet & Dervin, 2011). SSM conceptualizes the sense-making (and un-making) process as a bridge between an individual's situation and context and their experiences. The SSM process is designed to allow for themes to emerge from the richness of individual experiences, moving away from homogenizing participants based on their demographic categories. In this process, knowledge transforms from a noun to a verb (Dervin, 1998).

3.2. Research Method Design

This is a thematic analysis study drawing on guided journal entries and semi-structured interviews based on a social constructivist framework. The approach and methods I employed in this study were guided by the following research questions:

1. What role does participating in an information session play in audience members' decision to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events in Greater Vancouver?
2. What improvements could be made to information sessions?
3. What are the barriers to attendance faced by communities in Greater Vancouver?

Procedures for selecting study participants and collecting and analyzing data are described in this section. It should be noted that Simon Fraser University Ethics approval was received for this project in February 2020. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic. On March 16, 2020, the province of British Columbia announced strict physical distancing measures across the province, which included the closure of public performance spaces. The following day the British Columbia Provincial Health Office declared a public health emergency that included the closure of all primary and secondary schools, with additional business closures announced within the next week. These public health measures impacted my original intention to examine the participants' experiences of live information sessions and arts and culture events and delayed the start of the study by several months. Once local arts organizations began offering online information sessions and arts events, I was able to resume the research project. As many local arts organizations were not able to offer digital content, participants' options were more limited than originally intended.

3.2.1. Participants

I selected individuals over the age of 18 who lived in the greater Vancouver area for this study to ensure maximum variation sampling. As the goal of the study was to uncover the impact of information sessions on attendees' decisions to attend and advocate for others to attend arts and culture events, participants originally needed to be proximate to a greater Vancouver arts venue from which I could arrange tickets. Although COVID-19 necessitated a shift to an online format, I chose to remain focused on the Greater Vancouver area for two reasons, first to ensure the research contributed to a greater understanding of the Canadian context, and second, to make a small contribution to supporting local artists and arts organizations as they struggled through health and safety restrictions that forced the cancellation of all live performances.

I used a combination of convenience, typical, and snowball sampling to purposely select six research participants (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Although I intended to use my personal and professional connections for face-to-face recruitment as well as provide a digital flyer for those connections to pass on to potential participants, the implementation of a partial lockdown because of COVID-19 made in-person recruitment impossible. The digital flyer (Appendix A) was posted to the Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies website in the Seeking Research Participants section in May 2020 and it was distributed to the SFU Graduate Liberal Studies program student mail list in June 2020. SFU's research ethics office does not allow researchers to have access to mail lists, so I do not know how many people received an invitation to participate through the GLS email process. Twenty-six people responded to the call for participants. Although the original exclusion criteria included people under the age of 18 and anyone living outside of the Greater Vancouver area, I chose not to exclude respondents based on geography if they usually lived in the Greater Vancouver area and had moved because of COVID-19.

3.2.2. Procedure

I screened the interested respondents in chronological order for a mix of attendance histories. Once potential participants had been identified, I emailed them with performance and information session options and an informed consent form (Appendix B). The form included a description of the research study, research procedures,

research questions, risks and benefits of participation in the study, and details about the protection of confidentiality. The first six respondents whom I invited to participate returned their signed consent form and became participants in the study. While the original intention of the project was to have participants attend an in-person arts event with an information session, the restriction of such events because of COVID-19 made that impossible and I pivoted to online options being offered by local arts groups with appropriate information sessions. Participants chose from offerings from the Vancouver Opera and Pacific Opera Victoria, The Vancouver Art Gallery, and The Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. Once participants had identified which performance and information sessions they intended to attend, a guided journal template (Appendix C) was emailed to them, and a 30-minute interview time was booked that was convenient to them. Each of the participants received a $50 gift card in appreciation for their time.

3.2.3. Data Collection Methods

There were two phases of acquiring data for this study, phase one was guided journal entries and phase two was telephone interviews. Both phases took place between June 1st and September 15th, 2020.

3.2.3.1. Guided Reflective Journal Entries

The first data collection phase occurred within 24 hours of the six participants attending the research prompted performance and information session. Prior to the scheduled performance, I provided the participants with a set of reflective headings based on the Dervin Sense-Making Methodology (2017); participants were asked to submit their reflections to me electronically within 24 hours of the event. I asked participants to reflect upon their information session experience within the following open-ended headings based on Dervin's (2017) eight sense-making questions: (1) ideas, conclusions, prompts; (2) emotions, feelings; (3) questions, confusions; (4) past experiences; (5) help, facilitate; (6) hinder, constrain; (7) sense of self; (8) power, constraining structures. The guided reflective journal had a twofold purpose. The first was to support triangulation with an additional data collection method, thus supporting the internal validity of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and the second was to encourage participants to begin engaging with their experience through their own lenses, centring their voice as the most important one in the upcoming

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one-on-one interview. Five of the six participants completed the journal entries within the requested time, while one was unable to complete that portion of the study.

3.2.3.2. Interviews

The second phase of data collection occurred when I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured, open-ended interviews with each of the six participants within 36 hours of the performance they attended.

All interviews for this study were conducted by telephone. Telephone interviews were a convenient and efficient way to conduct interviews, making it possible for participants to complete the interview while their performance and information session experiences were recent. Further, because of ongoing social distancing guidelines related to the control of COVID-19, telephone interviews were a practical and safe way for me to connect with participants using familiar technology.

At the beginning of the interview, I reminded participants of their previously submitted consent form and of their right to withdraw from the project at any time. Once consent was reaffirmed, I asked participants if they wanted a copy of the interview transcript. With participants' approval, interviews were digitally recorded. Handwritten notes were taken during the interview which allowed me to track key points to return to later in the conversation and for use during transcription and data analysis. Interview length varied from 14 minutes to one hour.

I utilized a semi-structured interview approach to uncover the multiplicity of experiences represented by the participant group. Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of having some framework for the interviewer to remain on track while giving the freedom to probe participants about relevant thoughts and observations.

The interviews included the following open-ended questions:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself and the frequency of your attendance at arts and culture events?
2. How would you describe the experience of attending the information session?
3. How did attending the information session impact your desire to share your experience at this performance with other people?
4. What impact did attending the information session have on your likelihood to attend another arts event of the same type?

5. What impact did attending the information session have on your likelihood to attend another arts event of a different type?

6. What impact did attending the information session have on your likelihood to encourage people you know to attend arts events?

7. What recommendations would you make to improve information sessions?

8. Finally, when you think about your community, what things do you think prevent them from attending arts events regularly?

3.2.4. Ethics

The SFU Ethics policy sets out the process for obtaining approval for conducting ethical research involving human participants. Part one sets out the principles of the policy, which centres on risk. The level of scrutiny on the research is proportionate to the level of risk the research presents. The risk analysis takes into consideration potential for risk, how to moderate risk, and how to reverse any impact the risk might have on research participants. The policy also considers the risk to the researchers, the process for obtaining informed consent, and the privacy and confidentiality obligations of the researchers, which is reiterated in the policies around data collection. The policy describes its scope, responsibilities, administration, and process. The policy includes a section specific to qualitative research, which includes a hyperlink to chapter 10 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2, which sets out the nature of qualitative research and its particular ethical requirements.

I applied to the SFU Research Ethics board for ethics approval in November of 2019 and received approval in February of 2020.

Using the guiding principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and trust (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), I considered and actively managed ethical issues throughout the research process. All participants were asked to sign a consent form with project details. Consent was reaffirmed prior to beginning one-on-one interviews. The primary ethical issue that arose during the research was the type of gift card offered to participants in appreciation of their participation. In anticipation of beginning the research, I purchased gift cards from a Vancouver restaurant to offer to participants. Once the contagious nature of the COVID-19 virus became clearer, I was concerned that participants might not feel comfortable dining at a restaurant, even when following public health guidelines. I asked each participant if they would be more

comfortable receiving a gift certificate from another source. One indicated that they would, so I sent them a gift certificate for their preferred choice.

3.2.5. Data Analysis

The interviews were digitally recorded. I transcribed the interviews using Express Scribe transcription software. I conducted data analysis on an ongoing basis throughout the research project.

All of the reflective journal materials and transcribed interviews were entered into password-protected computer files and backed up on SFU vault, a secure platform. The qualitative analysis software NVivo was used to manage the data and aid in its analysis.

I conducted a thematic analysis using the six phases of thematic analysis suggested by Nowell et al. (2017). In phase one, I familiarized myself with the data, and in keeping with qualitative data analysis best practices (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015), I memo'd and made notations. In phase two, the initial codes were generated; I began coding by question and then started an iterative coding process rooted in the data. Phases one and two were conducted throughout the data collection period. In phase three, I began searching for themes. Two themes and five subthemes emerged. I reviewed themes in phase four and defined and named themes in phase five. As I analyzed throughout data collection, phases one through five were moved into and out of as each new theme crystalized. These themes provided insight into the motivation for attending and advocating for attendance at arts events. Phase six was the production of this thesis.

It is important to note that, because of a miscommunication, the guided reflective journals of the participants focused mainly on their experience of the arts and culture event and not on the information session they attended. Although this data fell outside of the scope of my original research questions, I felt it gave me a unique opportunity to compare themes that emerged from participants' information session experiences and their experience of an arts and culture event.

I engaged in reflective analysis of my practice throughout the research. The process of revisiting my role as "Researcher" allowed me to check for bias, and

maintaining a reflective practice allowed me to approach my research with open curiosity and fresh perspective.

3.2.6. Validity and Reliability

Multiple methods of data analysis combined with the use of multiple data collection methods from multiple sources allowed me to achieve triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) of my data.

3.2.7. Limitations

This research project had limitations. First, because of limited resources, the number of participants in the study (6) was small. A larger participant group may have produced additional themes. However, my choice to include a mix of regular, moderate, and infrequent attenders presents a unique snapshot of the population. Second, because of COVID-19 restrictions throughout the research process, participants were not able to attend arts events and information sessions in person. In-person interactions may have allowed participants to get information that resonated more with their own experiences and may have led to richer meaning-making opportunities. Finally, the COVID-19 restrictions severely limited the options for arts events with information sessions. A larger variety of arts events may have given participants an opportunity to choose events that personally resonated and provided more opportunities for meaning-making.

3.2.8. Reflexive Statement

I have been involved in arts and culture programming since I was six years old. I danced competitively for over a decade, became involved in theatre when I was in elementary school, and have done volunteer and paid acting work into adulthood. I have written and performed my own work. I have volunteered at a wide variety of cultural events and even taught traditional folk dancing for several years. Yet, I still struggle to identify where I fit in the arts and culture realm. Am I an artist? A performer? A hobbyist? Does my pragmatic choice to pursue more financially reliable avenues of employment preclude me from claiming any title at all? My *engagement* with arts and culture events

often finds me struggling with genre-specific vocabulary, intimidating artistic practices, and my own feelings of inadequacy.

Yet my *experience* of arts and culture events is pure pleasure and joy. Those feelings are always amplified when I am offered opportunities to connect with the artists, artistic staff and other audience members in meaningful ways. I leave those events buzzing with excitement to share my experience. I am motivated to continue attending familiar and new genres of arts and culture events because of that joy and excitement. I believe those feelings are inextricably linked to my personal relationship with arts and culture programming. I lack an understanding of what it is like to experience information sessions without this background. Throughout my research I needed to remain aware of my own bias and be attentive to how my participants experienced information sessions and how those experiences informed their decisions to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events.

Chapter 4.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings from the guided reflective journal entries and semi-structured interviews with participants about their information session experiences. The reflective journal entries and the interviews aimed to describe the role that information sessions played in the participants' decision to attend and advocate for others to attend arts and culture events. I was also interested in participants' recommendations for improving information sessions and their perception of barriers faced by their communities in attending arts and culture events. This section begins by getting to know the six research participants. Following this, two key themes and seven sub-themes are defined, and a brief overview of findings is presented. Then the interview questions are given with participants' responses, my interpretations, and their relationship to the extant research. The findings from the participants' reflective journal entries follow. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how the themes and sub-themes contribute to the study of spectatorship in Canada.

The research for this thesis began with my curiosity about the impact of information sessions on engagement with and enjoyment of arts events. My particular interest was an investigation of the real-world experiences of a variety of attendees in the Canadian context, which appeared to be underrepresented in the existing literature. Research on arts and culture information sessions has mainly focused on two things: the audience's ability to critique an arts or culture event immediately upon experiencing it, or how receptive or skilled they have been in responding to a predetermined enrichment opportunity. One of my curiosities arising from this type of research stems from the researcher's limited ability to probe within the confines of the articulated scenario. I wanted to remove the pressure presented by the role of Critic and the constraints presented by the role of Student. Asking participants to describe the information sessions, their impact on their plans to attend and advocate for others to attend arts and culture events, and their suggestions to improve information sessions and arts events' availability provided substantially more depth within which I could explore.

4.1. Getting to Know the Participants

Attends arts and culture events:

| Not often | ~Six times a year | Monthly | Twice a week |

| Participant 1 | Participant 4 | Participant 2 | Participant 3 | Participant 6 | Participant 5 |

International student, likes art galleries, no dance

Working student, likes theatre, seeks less expensive options

Chinese-Canadian, professional, prefers theatre

Recent immigrant, tries new things, wishes to attend more

Retired Arts professional, attends/supports a variety of arts

Arts professional, enjoys many genres, worries about arts' future
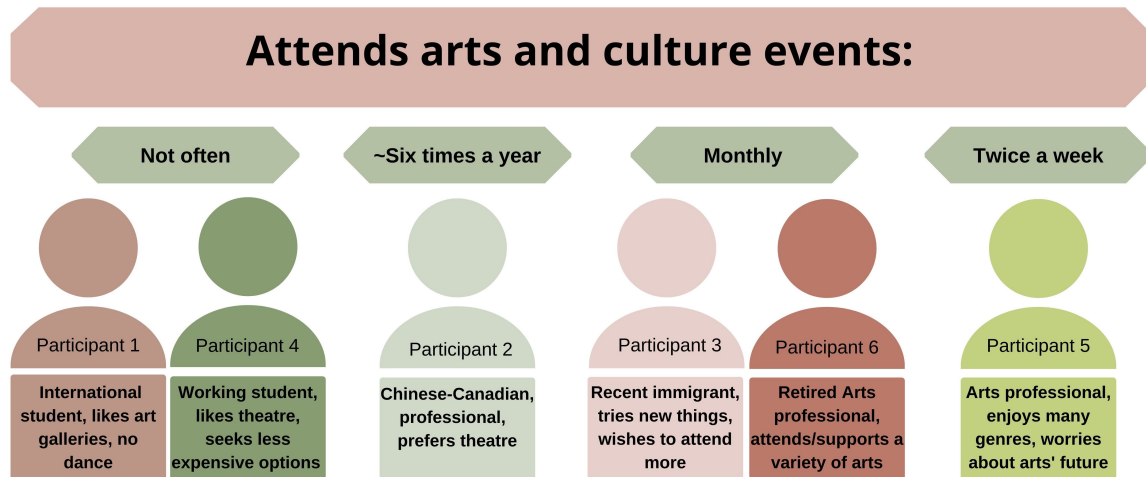
Figure 4.1 Participants' personal details and frequency of attendance.

To get to know the people who volunteered to participate in my study, I asked them to share a little about themselves and how often they attended arts and culture events. Collecting demographic information about the participants to assess their place in traditional audience segmentation did not align with the purpose of this study. On the other hand, these six participants generously co-created knowledge with me and I believe it is important to connect with the participants through the ways they chose to describe themselves. As I did not ask participants about their gender identity, I will use "they" pronouns when discussing the knowledge that they shared with me. Participant 1 was an international student studying at a Greater Vancouver post-secondary institution. They had relocated to the Okanagan while their coursework was offered remotely because of the pandemic. They described their attendance at arts and culture events as very rare, and preferred visiting art galleries to other arts and culture genres. They did not like dance as an arts genre. Participant 2 was trained in engineering and was currently working as a construction project coordinator. They were new to Vancouver and a member of the Chinese-Canadian community. They wondered why Vancouver's art scene seemed so much smaller than cities of a similar size. They attended a variety of arts genres but preferred theatre and estimated that they attended approximately six events a year. Participant 3 was a recent immigrant to Canada. They attended arts and culture events frequently before coming to Canada, as offerings were often inexpensive or free. They were interested in trying new things in their new city and, even though

events were more expensive here, they attended one event per month. Participant 4 was an enthusiastic participant in a variety of research projects. They were working from home during the pandemic and balancing that with their academic work as a student. They missed having opportunities to participate in research studies where they learned new things. They really liked attending arts and culture events and participated in drama in high school. They were not able to attend arts events very often because of the expense and expressed regret over this fact. Participant 5 was an Arts professional and had been a part of the arts scene for most of their adult life. Pre-COVID-19, they attended an arts and culture event at least twice a week. They were doing their best to find events to attend safely during COVID-19, and they had planned to attend a play reading in a parking lot in the city the week we spoke. Participant 6 was a retired Arts professional. They had been supporting various Vancouver arts organizations through ticket subscriptions and memberships for many years. Their current favourites were the Arts Club Theatre Company and the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra. They attended an arts and culture event once a month. These six participants had a variety of life experiences, connections to the arts and culture scene, and attendance patterns. The knowledge they shared helped me uncover themes that contributed to my understanding of the ways in which information sessions impact motivation to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events, ways to improve information sessions, and barriers faced by their communities in attending arts and culture events.

4.2. Themes and Sub-Themes

The two primary themes that emerged from my thematic analysis include meaning-making value and availability. Meaning-making value includes the subthemes of emotional value and intellectual value. Availability includes the subthemes of physical availability, financial availability, and content availability. These themes represent the points of provocation and stumbling blocks for attendance and advocacy for attendance that the participants described in their interviews and journal entries. While these themes are presented as discrete and individually defined, it is essential to note that they are interconnected elements in the participants' experiences of the information sessions.
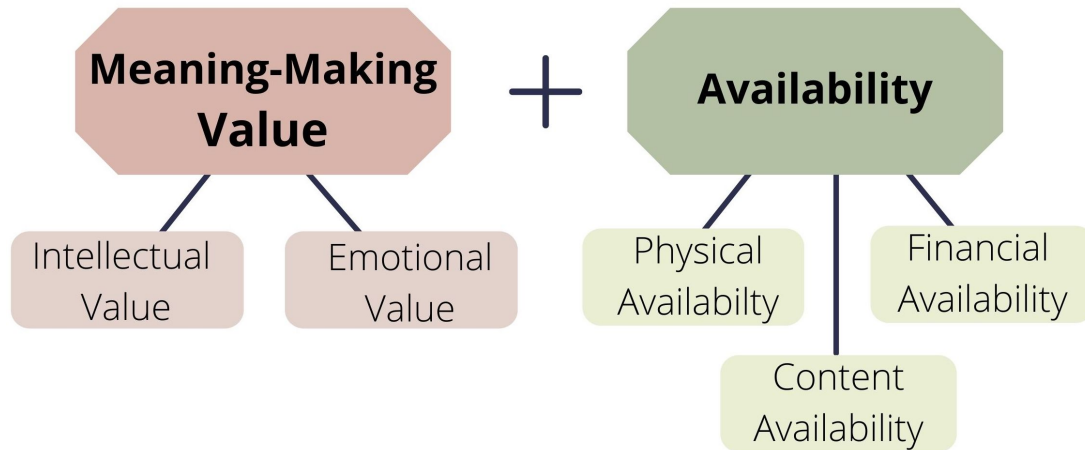
Figure 4.2 Themes and sub-themes.

4.2.1. Finding Value through Meaning-Making

Meaning-making value is not being defined within a return-on-investment framework; I did not ask the participants if their experiences were worth their time, effort, or money. Instead, I conceptualize meaning-making value in a holistic sense, encompassing the participants' emotional and intellectual meaning-making processes. Any descriptions of their experiences that revealed an information session's capacity to provoke participants to make connections, ask questions, or self-reflect were coded as meaning-making value. Based on my findings, I suggest an association between meaning-making value and motivation to attend and advocate for attendance at arts events.

Previous research (Güler, 2019; Jacobson, 2018; Mathewson Mitchell, 2017; Park-Fuller, 2003) showed that meaning-making opportunities build audience connections to arts and culture events. These connections positively effected audience perception of value, which increased their motivation to attend (Andreea, 2012; Brown, 2013; Reinelt, 2014; Scollen, 2008; Walmsley, 2011). My data shows that information session meaning-making value was the most likely theme to contribute to the participants' reporting an increased likelihood to attend another arts event themselves. Four of the six participants described meaning-making value as contributing to their intention to attend another arts event of the same or a new type. Participants were also just as likely to cite meaning-making value as availability as motivating them to share their experience with others and to encourage others to attend arts and culture events.

Meaning-making value was the only theme that emerged from participants' descriptions of the information sessions. Meaning-making value was also the most common theme in the participants' reflective journal entries. Every participant found multiple points of meaning-making while reflecting on the arts event they attended. As meaning-making value is a complex theme, I found it helpful to break it into two subthemes, Intellectual Value and Emotional Value.

4.2.1.1. Intellectual Value

Intellectual value includes participants' experiences of engaging with the information sessions on an intellectual level. Instances when participants described processing new information, were provoked to seek more information, or engaged in critical thinking were coded as intellectual value. I was surprised at how committed participants were to uncovering meaning-making moments of intellectual value. It was the most commonly occurring meaning-making sub-theme when participants described the information session, its impact on their desire to share their experience with others, their likelihood to attend events of a different type, and their likelihood of encouraging others to attend arts and culture events. Intellectual value is tied with emotional value in its influence on participants considering their likelihood to attend an arts and culture event of the same kind. Four of the five participants who completed journal entries described points of intellectual value in the meaning-making stemming from their experience attending the arts event to which the information session was connected.

4.2.1.2. Emotional Value

Emotional value encompasses participant experiences of having an emotional reaction. These emotional reactions may have been positive or negative. It includes moments when the participants felt connected to the artists or material, derived pleasure from the experience, or were stirred to action. Emotional value was the only other subtheme that appeared in the participants' description of the information session. It was just as influential as intellectual value on participants considering their likelihood to attend an event of the same type. All five participants who completed journal entries wrote about the ways in which the arts event provoked responses that resulted in emotional value.

4.2.2. Availability

The theme of availability captures the participants' perception of the information session or arts and culture event as being ready to use and easily accessible. Although the term accessibility may seem a better fit, I deliberately chose not to use it as it has become increasingly linked to providing access for people with disabilities and the process of universal design. Both are important considerations for the study of spectatorship, and they are outside the scope of this project. Examples of participants' feedback that were coded with availability included elements of the information session or arts and culture event that were easy to share, not burdensome to find, not cost-prohibitive, or did not require extensive preparation. Participants focused almost entirely on availability in their recommendations to improve information sessions and the barriers to attending arts and culture events faced by their communities. As mentioned in the literature review, motivation to attend arts and culture events was negatively impacted by lack of affordability (Brown, 2013; Kemp & Poole, 2016; O'Hagan, 2017) and lack of arts education (Borgonovi, 2004; Brown, 2013; Crawford et al., 2014; Mathewson Mitchell, 2017; O'Hagan, 2017). This suggests that availability plays a role in convincing audiences to attend and encourage others to attend arts events.

My findings demonstrate that availability impacted half of the participants' desire to share their experience at an arts and culture event and encourage others to attend. Availability dominated the participants' recommendations for improving information sessions, with all six participants making recommendations within this theme and only two adding meaning-making value improvements. All of the perceived barriers to attending arts and culture events faced by participants' communities fell within the realm of availability. The theme of availability is multifaceted, and I divided it into the subthemes of content availability, physical availability, and financial availability.

4.2.2.1. Content Availability

Content availability captures ways in which the information sessions or arts and culture events can offer the participants information or an approachable experience. Content availability figured as a thematic element within barriers for community participation in arts and culture events, with three participants identifying it as a barrier. Three of the six participants also made recommendations to improve information sessions related to content availability. A single participant described a content

availability concern in the reflective journal entry. As the theme emerged from perceived deficiencies, it was often presented as elements that the participants did not want. For example, participants did not want content that was too formal, that was aimed at genre experts, or that was restricted by language.

4.2.2.2. Physical Availability

Physical availability included activities that were constrained by the physical world, including time and location. Information sessions and arts and culture events that could be attended from multiple locations, had advertisements that were easy to find, or that were easily shareable with friends had high physical availability. It is important to note that ease of availability in the technological world was also considered physical availability, as there is still a physical interface to that realm. Three of the six participants were eager to share their experience at the information session with others and encourage others to attend an arts event because of its physical availability. Two of the participants reported that the physical availability of the information session contributed to their desire to attend another arts and culture event of the same kind or a different kind. Five of the six participants had recommendations for improving information sessions related to physical availability, and all six cited physical availability as a barrier for their communities attending arts and culture events. Two participants were provoked to write about physical availability in their reflective journal entries.

4.2.2.3. Financial Availability

Financial availability includes the financial cost of the arts and culture event and any added financial value. One participant found that the information session impacted their desire to attend an arts and culture event of the same type because of financial availability. Otherwise, it did not present as a thematic element in the description of the information session, its impact on participants' desire to attend an event of a different type, or its impact on participants' desire to share their experience or encourage others to attend. In contrast, financial availability was mentioned by all six participants as a barrier for their communities in attending arts and culture events. A single participant made an observation about financial availability in their reflective journal.

4.3. Participant Descriptions of the Information Sessions
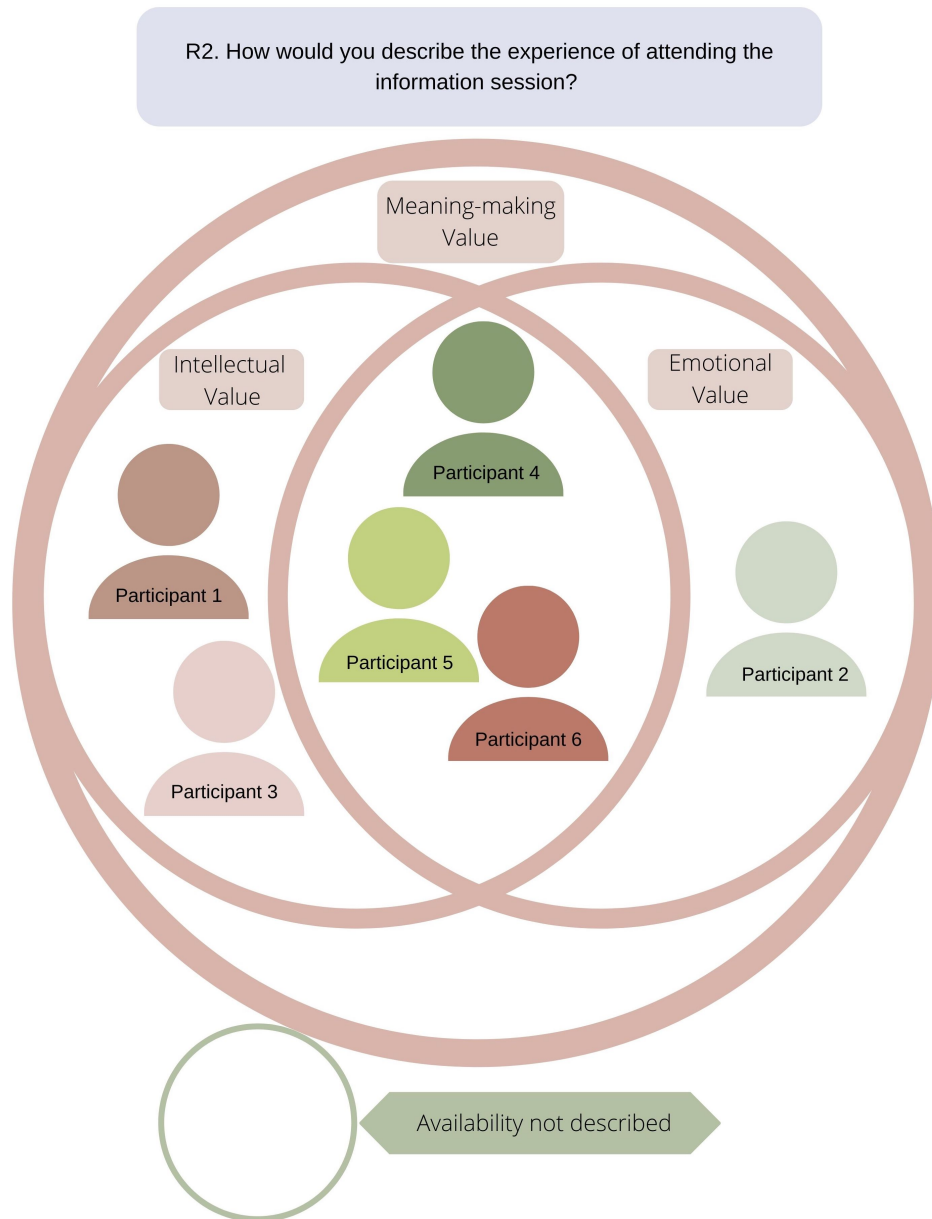

Figure 4.3 Participants' description of the information sessions.

All six participants' descriptions of the information session focused entirely on meaning-making value. They described the new knowledge the information session helped them create and how they were given a more nuanced understanding of the artists and their processes. The information session also engaged them in thinking

critically about societal issues. Participant 5 recognized the influence of colonization on their information session, pointing out,

> It was an exercise, and it was a colonized performance on behalf of the interviewer. I actually know her, and I know Tasha, quite well. So, yeah, I noticed that there was a reticence on behalf of the interviewer to engage with what was very important to Tasha, which is the ancestral teachings and the spiritual truth of what a cedar is and what a Cedar Woman represents to her. And the interviewer was anxious to get it back to dance.

The variety of their descriptions revealed the active meaning-making they engaged in and the value that produced. In order to get insight into that meaning-making value, it is worth examining how the sub-themes of intellectual value and emotional value appeared within their meaning-making processes.

When asked to describe the information session they attended, intellectual value centred the experience of all six participants. They observed that the information session offered them opportunities to create new knowledge, helped wrap up any questions they might have had while they were watching the event, grounded them in the cultural contexts of the pieces, or gave them a better understanding of the technical aspects of the performances. Participant 3 was particularly adept at describing how that intellectual engagement translated to value, saying:

> I think the information session was very good because they played the context. And a lot of times, this has happened with me, I end up watching a live dramatic sort of play without knowing what it is about. And then I sort of regret; Oh my God, I'm wasting my time - this is not something I was into, or this is unexpected. So, I really like the information session because I knew what it was. I knew what the play was about.

We see here how the information session's intellectual value provided participants with the information they needed to connect with the arts event they were about to attend, potentially priming the audience member for a more enjoyable and meaningful experience at the arts event. This finding may have a twofold impact. First, it may provide a secondary opportunity to make meaning, which research has shown to increase value and thus motivation to attend (Andreea, 2012; Brown, 2013; Reinelt, 2014; Scollen, 2008; Walmsley, 2011). Second, it could be leveraged to help expand the types of arts and culture genres potential audience members are interested in by giving

them access to the type of intellectual value-building that reassures them that they are not "wasting" their time.

Emotional value was the other subtheme that appeared in the participants' descriptions of the information session. Four of the participants felt a connection to the artists, evoking emotional value. Participants felt that connection when they understood more about the artists and their creative processes by watching them discuss the work that goes into preparing events or observing the evidence of their closeness as a team. One participant was moved by the insight the artist gave into their cultural and spiritual beliefs. The same participant felt connected to emotions she was having in her own artistic practice, pointing out that the awkwardness during the information session interview

> is everything that we're dealing with right now in the theatre in terms of, sort of a sense of neutrality, like a customary neutrality that exists in our art form where everything must be made palatable to a consuming audience. So, it can't be too far-fetched or too ethnic. It's pretty embarrassing.

Participant 5

Research has shown that audience members who connect personally with arts and culture experiences have deeper connections to the arts event (Conner, 2013; Prendergast, 2004) and that emotional responses can have a positive effect on the perceived value and motivation to attend (Boerner & Jobst, 2013) and the desire to share information (J. Berger & Milkman, 2012; Heath et al., 2001; Kang et al., 2020). My findings indicate that it may be possible for an information session to create emotional value by building a connection between spectator and artist or evoking emotional responses to greater societal issues revealed through the presentations.

Participants' description of their information sessions indicated that they perceived meaning-making value, including intellectual and emotional value, in their information session experiences. Next, I examine their responses to whether their information session experience increased their desire to attend arts and culture events.

4.4. Impact on Desire to Attend Another Event of the Same and Different Type

4.4.1. Desire to Attend Event of the Same Type
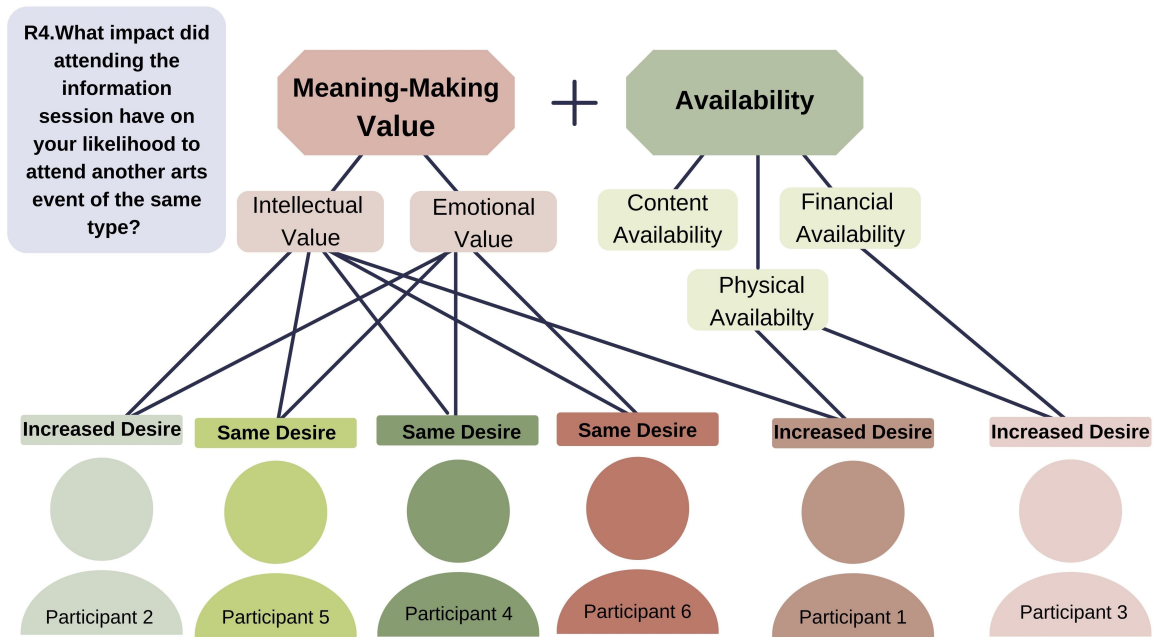
Figure 4.4 Information session's impact on desire to attend event of same type.

My findings suggest that there is a relationship between intellectual value and desire to attend arts and culture events of the same type. Five of the six participants identified intellectual value as impacting their decision to attend an event of the same kind. Two of the five participants said the information session increased their likelihood to attend. Participant 1 seemed surprised at their own response, stating

    wow, I find that, actually, I find it will

even after mentioning more than once that they did not enjoy this particular event, nor were they generally a fan of the genre. Both of these participants credited the information sessions with deepening their understanding of the material being presented and the artistic processes behind the events, which made them excited to attend more events of the same type. Three other participants were already committed to the genre of arts they attended and thus did not feel that the information session impacted that pre-existing desire. However, all three felt that attending an information session provided

intellectual value and appreciated how it helped them increase their understanding of aspects of the genre with which they were less familiar.

The emotional value of participants' meaning-making emerged as the second most influential subtheme in their decision to attend an arts and culture event of the same type. Of the four who described emotional value, one said that the information session's format increased their likelihood of attending an event of the same type. They described their excitement at being able to watch the artist working on a piece while chatting informally and explained how this increased their curiosity and desire to see more of the artist's work in person. This enthusiasm for increased attendance through emotional meaning-making in an unconventional format is supported by the work of Brown (2013), Gwillim et al. (2019) and Prendergast (2004). Three participants felt the information session did not increase their likelihood of attending another event as they were already committed to attending. As Participant 4 said

I've always loved Opera.
Participant 4

The emotional value of the genre they attended was already established for them.

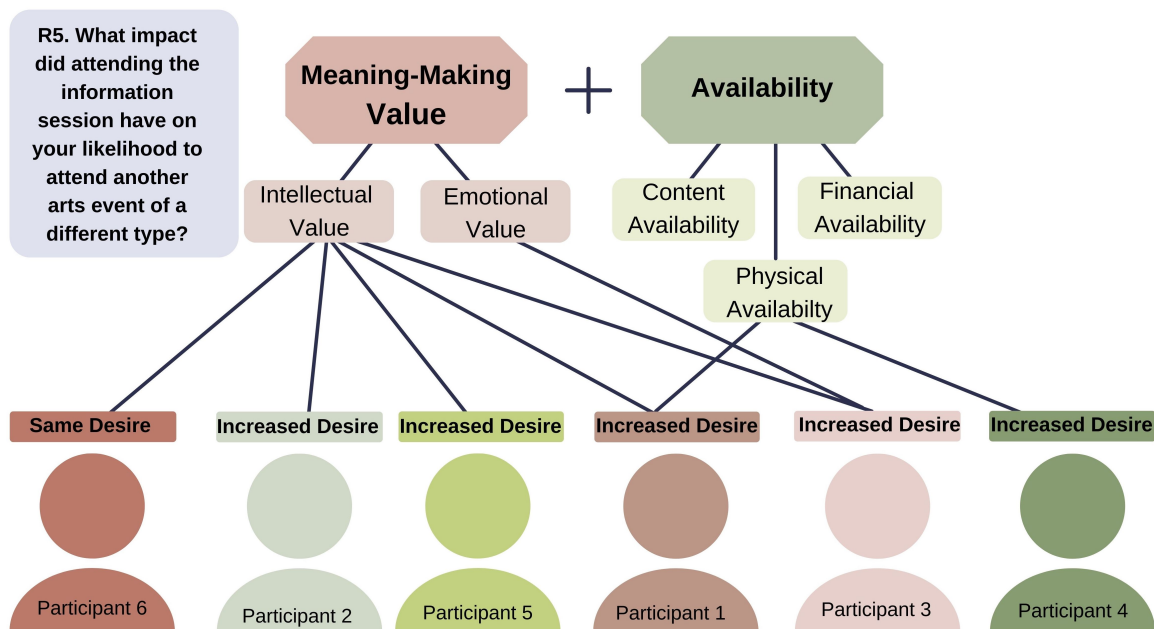## 4.4.2. Desire to Attend Event of a Different Type

Figure 4.5 Information session's impact on desire to attend event of different type.

Intellectual value also seemed to influence participants' likelihood of attending an arts and culture event of a different type. Four participants connected their interest in the new knowledge that they had created to an intention to attend an arts and culture event of a different type. Participant 6's pre-existing commitment to attending a variety of arts genres meant the information session did not influence them. However, it might be the case that an information session could persuade them to increase their attendance at genres they have not traditionally enjoyed. When asked if they had ever had the experience of an information session being a catalyst to try something new, they explained

I can't think of an example where it did tip me. I'm not afraid of new experiences, especially in the arts. I mean, I have seen some ballets. Ballets don't tend to have information sessions. At least that I know of - sometimes they need them! So, I'm not sure what new form of art that I haven't experienced that I should go for and find information sessions to sell me. I can use dance as a good example. If I can find that information, in an information session, helping me to better appreciate, you know, Swan Lake … yeah, I can imagine something doing that.

In the end, five of the six participants identified the intellectual value of an information session as a possible inducement to either attend a genre of arts they had never attended before or potentially increase their attendance in a less favoured genre. Here we see an alignment with research that showed that commitment to attend events is positively correlated to the event's appeal to the audience member (Brown, 2013; Crawford et al., 2014; Kemp & Poole, 2016; Pompe et al., 2020; Walmsley, 2011).

Emotional value played a more minor role for participants in their decision to attend an arts and culture event of a different type. Only one participant described how their emotional reaction to the information session, grounded in excitement, made them want to find all of the other arts events in the city with information sessions. These findings support the association between audience motivation to attend arts events and the appeal of the content of those arts events (Brown, 2013; Crawford et al., 2014; Kemp & Poole, 2016; Pitts, 2014; Pompe et al., 2020; Walmsley, 2016), particularly when those events make the audience feel good. The aspect of the information session that so excited the participant and compelled them to seek out new arts genres was their emotional connection with the artist, which supports Brown's (2013) suggestion that a transformative aesthetic awakening can result from meaning-making interactions with artists.

Although five of the six participants connected their intention to attend an arts event of a different type to meaning-making value, two participants also focused on the information session's availability, specifically its physical availability. Participant 4 was enthusiastic about physical availability as a facilitator for them to explore different arts genres, explaining

> It can catch my attention like, it's on my radar. It's not hidden somewhere, and I've never heard of it before. And then, and then I get a chance to at least take a look at it and maybe it does look like something I can go to.
>
> Participant 4

This aligns with previous research that found that audience awareness of an arts and culture event is a driving motivator for attendance (Brown, 2013; Crawford et al., 2014; Kemp & Poole, 2016; Pitts, 2014; Pompe et al., 2020; Walmsley, 2011). Participant 4 represents an interesting insight into the positive connection between audience perception of value and loyal behaviour (Kemp & Poole, 2016). Intellectual and emotional value supported their loyalty to the genre of arts event they attended for this research, so the information session did not impact their intention to continue attending. Yet increased availability may be required to serve as a bridge between the types of events they ordinarily attend and moving to a new genre of arts event. The other participant was particularly happy with the online format. They explained how the information session made them aware that they could attend performances of less familiar genres from the comfort of their own home, giving them the freedom to start and stop their experience to attend to their physical needs without being restricted by the conventions of a traditional event. The positive impact of unconventional formats on content availability was supported in the research of Gwillim et. al.'s (2019) interactive museum walking tour. Brown (2013), Martorana et al. (2017), Scollen (2008), and Sedgman (2017) agreed that enjoyment and engagement in the arts were often reduced in atmospheres that undermined the audience's comfort and confidence.

These findings indicate information sessions provide meaning-making value to audiences. Intellectual value played a larger role than any other subtheme in the generation of meaning-making value, with emotional value playing an important secondary role. It is possible that this meaning-making value supports audiences' decisions to attend another arts and culture event of the same or different type. It may also be possible that availability serves as a bridge to ease audiences' journey in expanding the genres of arts and culture events they attend. Next, I turn my attention to

the role information sessions play in audience members decisions to share their experience with others and encourage others to attend arts and culture events.

4.5. Desire to Share Experience with Others and Encourage Others to Attend Arts and Culture Events

4.5.1. Desire to Share Experience with Others
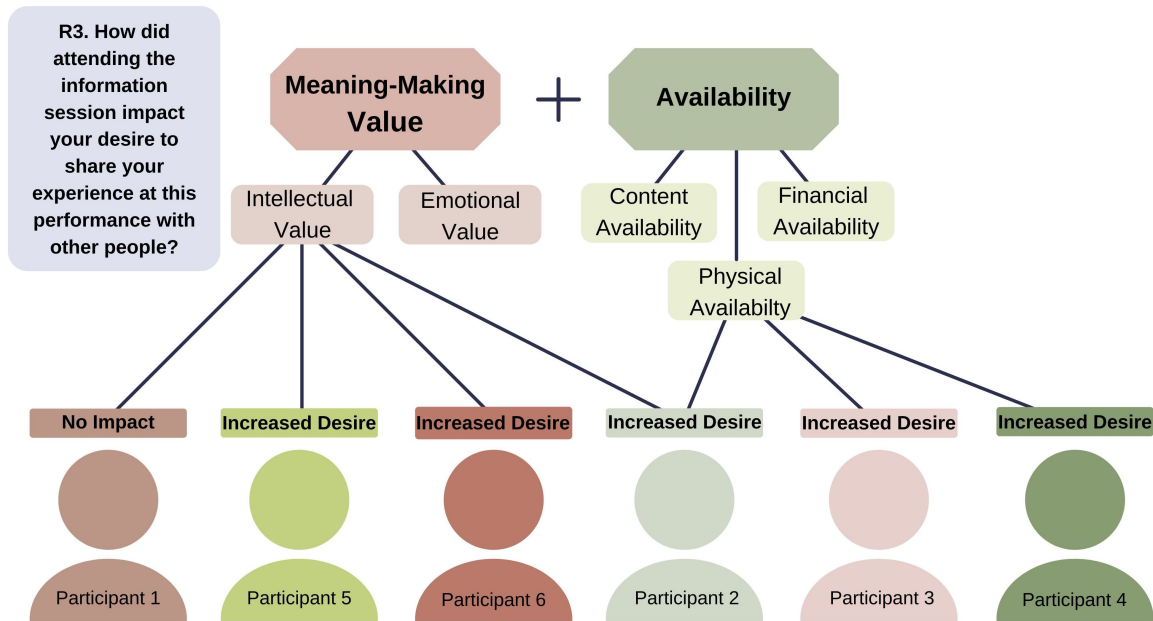
Figure 4.6 Information session's impact on desire to share experience with others.

Participants explained that the information session's ability to deepen their knowledge about the arts and culture event they were going to attend played a role in their decision to share their experience with others. Four of the six participants associated intellectual value with their desire to share. Three of those four indicated they intended to share their experience at the information session with others because of an increase in confidence related to the material in the information session. Participant 2, a six-times a year arts attender, noted that in her normal arts and culture experience

> Maybe I want to share but I wouldn't feel, you know, as competent in knowing if I'm correct in his intention, where you're coming from, versus now I know, I heard firsthand. I think I'll be more confident; more inclined to share that with someone.

This increase in confidence to share was not limited to less regular attenders, as Participant 5, who attended arts and culture events on a weekly basis, pointed out that, when considering her likelihood to share her experience at the information session with others, the information session

had a really big impact. I mean, contemporary dance is abstract, and Indigenous contemporary, within the canon of contemporary dance at large - it's abstract. So it's subject to vast interpretation. It could be about anything. It's really gestural. So when Tasha grounded it, the translation of Cedar Woman, I mean, it made it really clear.

A lack of intellectual value was identified by Participant 1 as decreasing their desire to share their experience at the information session with others. They described the information session as too simple and wondered if a lack of funding had effected the quality of the information session. This aligns with previous research that found that audience members were motivated to promote arts events when their perception of the event was positive, and that positive perception was influenced by the intellectual value of the events (Andreea, 2012; de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Dowell et al., 2019; Scollen, 2008).

The physical availability of the information session also played a role in three of the participants' desire to share their experience with others. Participant 2 explained how the information session was

like a trailer, like how for every movie, you have a trailer coming out and then you watch it and then people get interested. So similarly if it was like, a three minute…if it was an animated information session like for the Flight of the Hummingbird. And I found it very interesting, I could just forward that to people. And if they liked it, if they see it, invest two, three minutes of their time and they find it interesting, they will get interested in watching the opera. So simply the fact that it's short and it's shareable and it's very interesting, makes it easier to share it with people and garner their interest.

The physical ease of clicking a button and sharing an information session with others also resonated with Participant 4. When asked to describe why their desire to share their experience with others increased because of the physical format of the information session they attended, they said

> I guess how easy it was to share it on YouTube, we can just copy and paste the link to someone watching. Right now, I can just do that too. So in terms of accessibility, I guess it was easy to share it with other people. So that they could get a quick sense of what it was about.
>
> — Participant 4

Here we see how availability, in this case, physical availability, may act as a link between potential audiences and the meaning-making value offered by an information session.

4.5.2. Desire to Encourage Others to Attend
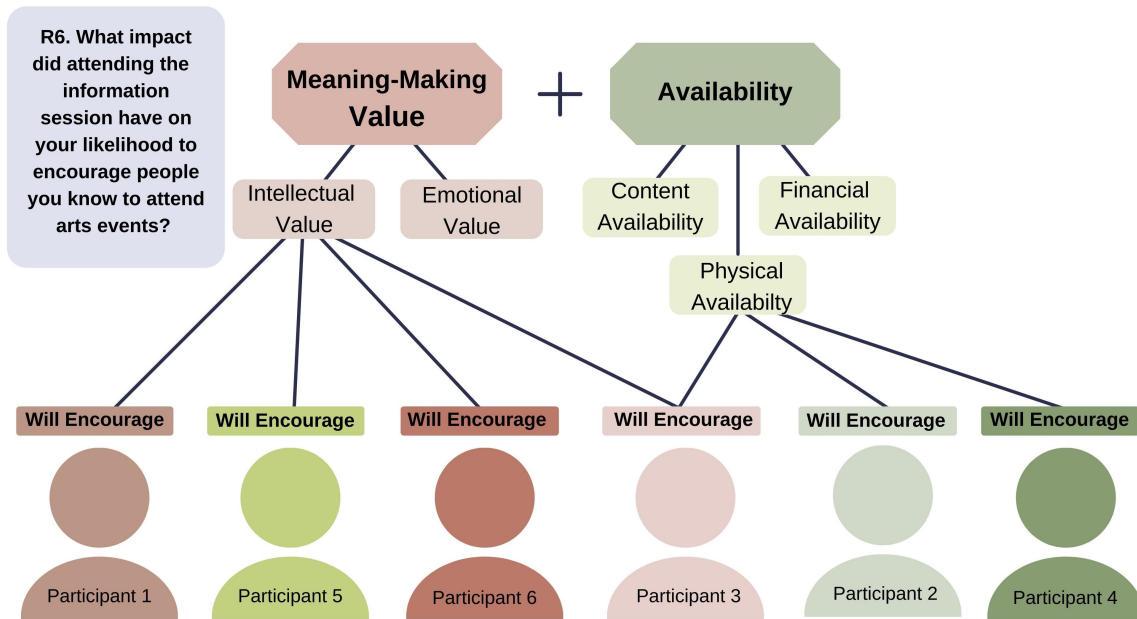
Figure 4.7 Information session's impact on desire to encourage others to attend.

All six participants said that the information session played a role in increasing their likelihood to encourage other people to attend an arts and culture event. Four of the six participants attributed this increase to the new knowledge they created at the information session. Participant 1, who, as mentioned above, connected intellectual value to their increased likelihood to attend a previously unappealing arts genre, suggested that they would encourage others to attend because

> attending the information session can make people better understand the background of the opera or any other forms of art performance. So it can help them to, sometimes most of the time, I think can help them to get interest into the opera itself.
>
> — Participant 1

They appeared to be taking their experience of intellectual value and predicting that others will have the same experience. Two other participants had similar thoughts, contending that their own intellectual engagement with the information session made them more confident that their friends and family would feel the same way. Participant 5 felt their increased knowledge would give them the right words to confidently encourage others to attend, pointing out

> you know, it's a lot easier to be able to relay information based on what the artist perceived as the content.

It appears that the decision to encourage others to attend an arts and culture event reveals the role that self-perception as a non-expert plays in encouraging others to attend arts and culture events. The literature review showed that some audience members may feel blocked from engaging with arts and culture experiences because of their self-perception as non-experts (Brown & Novak-Leonard, 2011; Scollen, 2008; Sedgman, 2017). These findings appear to extend that research, as the participants seem to have identified how information sessions help override their feelings of being a non-expert by allowing them to construct the knowledge they need to feel confident encouraging others to attend arts and culture events.

Three participants said that they were more likely to encourage others to attend an arts and culture event because of the availability of the information session. Several aspects of physical availability were described. Participant 2 felt able to encourage others to attend safely during COVID-19 because of the virtual nature of the information sessions and arts and culture offerings. Participant 3 focused on the short duration of the information session and its easy shareability. Having a virtual option to share meant they could potentially expand their attendance circle, noting

> before having seen the information session, I might have just gone with my spouse or something because I know that is what I am into. But after the information session, I will probably ask some of my friends or my colleagues as well, I will tell them about it and share it with them.

Participant 4 saw easy shareability as a way to reinforce their own word of mouth recommendation, explaining

> The synopsis does help, like we mentioned earlier, in terms of being able to easily just send that information and share it. And on top of my word of mouth, the actual, like a little bit of what they'll anticipate to see in the future. And then because of that, yes, I would definitely recommend that.
>
> — Participant 4

These findings indicate that the intellectual value provided to audiences through information sessions gives them the confidence to encourage other people to attend arts and culture events. It is also possible that the availability of the information session aids audiences in encouraging others to attend by offering unique platforms, an opportunity to expand their attendance partners, and as a connection between lack of awareness and meaning-making for potential audience members.

4.6. Recommendations to Improve Information Sessions and Barriers to Attendance for Communities in Greater Vancouver

4.6.1. Recommendations to Improve Information Sessions
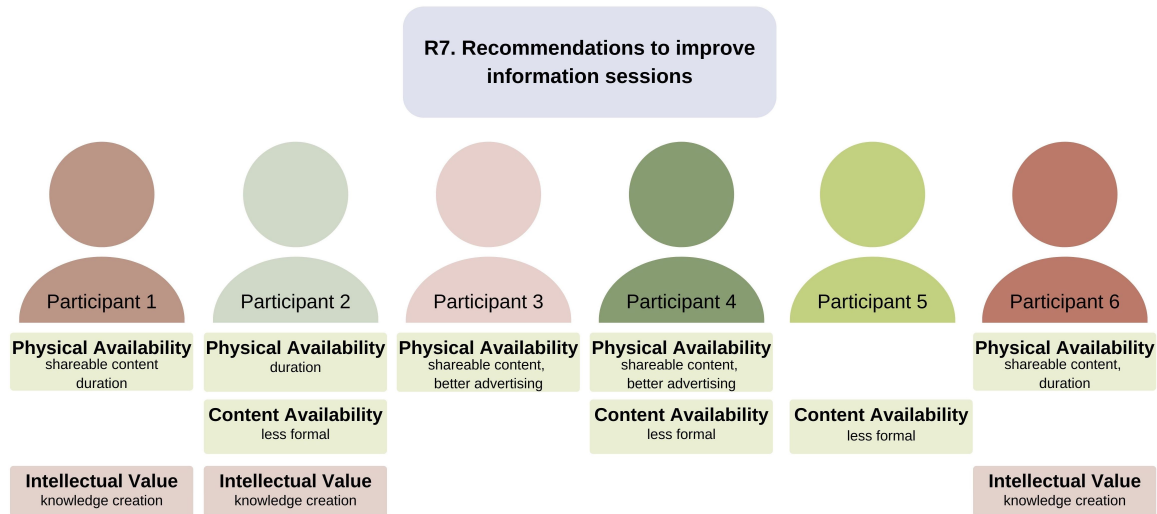
Figure 4.8 Recommendations to improve information sessions.

My findings have shown that information sessions may play a role in encouraging audiences to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events. Given this potential, I was interested in eliciting my participants' suggestions for improving information sessions. Availability drove the recommendations made by participants; all six participants made availability recommendations.

Five of the six participants made recommendations about improving the physical availability of the information sessions. These recommendations focused on the shareability of the information sessions, their length, and the physical location of their advertising. With four participants recommending easily shareable content, it was the most commonly occurring sub-theme for improving information sessions. Participant 1 suggested that arts organizations

> should do something like what is done by film or movies. So you can create like a post, with all or most of the key information on it

that is then easily shareable. Participant 3 agreed, suggesting the internet or social media as the best platforms for information sharing. Although Participant 4 had a preference for live information sessions, they acknowledged that pre-recorded videos were more accessible for most people. Participant 6 had a well-thought-out recommendation for a symphony orchestra to offer a blended model including a digitally available performance followed by an information session as a prelude to a live performance. They suggested YouTube or Facebook as the most appropriate platforms for the first two parts of the series. We see how participants included the shareability of digital content in the physical sphere – they wanted a simple click and connect shareability. The second recommendation made by participants to improve the physical availability of information sessions was related to the length of the offerings. Three participants made this type of recommendation. Participants used the terms quick and short to describe ideal information sessions. For two of the participants, length was interrelated to shareability. Creating digital content that required a two-to-three-minute time investment for the viewer was described as ideal for these participants. Both of them conceptualized this shorter content as one piece of a larger information session bundle. One liked the format of the information session they attended, which included three short presentations that could be viewed all, or in part, before the arts and culture event. The other participant suggested a shorter, shareable piece be available on top of a more traditional information session, recommending 30 minutes as the ideal length for the longer session. Participant 2 also took a position on the length of conventional information sessions, concerned with its role in audiences' likelihood of attending. They worried that

some of the pre info sessions, are quite long actually, for a two-hour performance. Some of the pre information talks will be like an hour long, they might be a bit too long a commitment for some people.

They felt that moving from a formal to an informal format would relieve some of the time constraints for the audience, as latecomers who might be uncomfortable interrupting a lecture-style information session might feel more comfortable joining a mingling crowd. They also suggested offering refreshments, to alleviate the pressure attendees might feel in balancing their responsibilities, the need to eat, the travel time, the length of the event and the addition of attending the information session. They suggested that an event where audience members could

talk to others and listen to this facilitator talk about things may be more timely, easy, and far more fun to attend.

Finally, two participants suggested that information sessions needed to be better advertised in places people could see them. Participant 3 pointed out that it was possible that:

a whole lot of people do not know about the pre information sessions, especially when it comes to plays or drama or any live acts because not a lot of these do have a free information session. And I think awareness of it, like people should know about these free information sessions as well, and the easy availability. I mean, they should be advertised on the internet and social media, so that people can take a look.

Participant 4 concurred and pointed out that there is a need for

a page on Facebook, an event page or something that people can see, these are the events coming up, in areas that have different avenues of penetrating. I think a lot of times people don't even know this event is even happening. So they're not even aware that it's even available to do. They might have a weekend free and they're looking for things to do, but they just don't see this as something they can do. Because it just doesn't show up. It's not that people don't want to go, perhaps.

Digital platforms and advertisements placed in public places were both suggested to increase the physical availability of the information sessions.

Participants' recommendations for improving the physical availability of the information sessions focused on having digital content that was easily shareable with potential audiences, which aligns with previous research that explored the success of utilizing digital content for audience building and engagement (Anderson, 2015; Bennett,

2012; Walmsley, 2016; Younan & Eid, 2016). Their additional recommendations around intentionally programming information sessions at a length that did not burden audience members' schedules and improving advertisements' physical location in both the digital and real world provide simple improvement solutions. Next, we see how participants considered how format changes could improve the content availability of information sessions.

As previously mentioned, content availability describes the ease of access to experiences and information (videos, lectures, images and other knowledge-sharing tools) at information sessions and arts and culture events. Three of the participants suggested that adjusting the format of the information sessions would be an improvement to its content availability. Formality was linked to an unappealing format, and, as Participant 2 pointed out, if audiences walk into a room that is set up for a

lecture kind of event, [it] may be too serious.

They felt that seriousness might discourage audience members from participating or attending at all. Participant 4 agreed, saying they wished to remove the physical distance between artists or artistic staff and audiences, moving away from the lectern lecture and creating an environment that allows attendees to relax into the content. Participant 5 also recommended that arts organizations move away from formal, lecture-style information sessions toward a talkback format, noting that

the times that we are in are much more active, politically active. Activism is normal. It's going live. So people have a lot to say about everything. It's not just silent theaters, having a drink at intermission and then going home.

They went on to suggest that content availability may increase as formality decreases which may be because audiences would not be blocked by formality, non-expert status, or genre specific language. Previous research described how audiences were actively creating their own engagement opportunities (Bennett, 2012; Conner, 2013; Crawford et al., 2014). My findings suggest that increasing the availability of information sessions may create space for audiences to confidently contribute to the discussion about the meaning of art and ground their views in the interplay between personal meaning-making value and larger societal contexts.

Meaning-making value did not figure as prominently in recommendations to improve information sessions. In contrast to recommendations related to availability coming from all six participants, only three had meaning-making value recommendations. They posited that opportunities to connect with personal interests and a general deepening of the audiences' understanding of the context of an event would increase interest in attendance. Participant 1 said:

I would be more interested in; can you show how they make background like that? In this case maybe the trees, maybe the water, the fire. So, if they can tell the general public regarding how they produce these, as preparation, it can help people to understand everything and to get people interested into the opera.

Participant 6 suggested that hands-on meaning-making opportunities would be of value, pointing out that as a long-time and committed attendee, they were drawn to experiences that offered unexpected and deeper opportunities for meaning-making. They were enthusiastic about a local arts company's engagement initiative, explaining

they are now offering a 10-week course in acting, this is an actual course, with unlimited enrollment. And people. You know, we all form up in small groups, I still have no intention of being an actor. I said to them, I have no intention of being an actor, I'm just doing this because I like to learn about stuff. And she said, oh, this is perfect for you.

Although information sessions may play a role in increasing audiences' desire to attend and encourage others to attend arts and cultural events, it was clear that participants still felt there was room for improvement. While recommendations for improvement are important, it is also essential to understand what participants thought may be the barriers facing their communities in attending arts and culture events.

4.6.2. Barriers to Attendance for Communities in Greater Vancouver

R8. Barriers to attendance faced by community

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
Financial Availability Cost	**Financial Availability** Cost	**Financial Availability** Cost	**Financial Availability** Cost	**Financial Availability** Cost	**Financial Availability** Cost
Physical Availability time	**Physical Availability** COVID, advertising visibility	**Physical Availability** COVID, time, advertising visibility	**Physical Availability** COVID, time	**Physical Availability** COVID	**Physical Availability** COVID
Content Availability lack of familiarity	**Content Availability** lack of familiarity			**Content Availability** lack of familiarity	

Figure 4.9 Barriers to attendance faced by participants' communities.

Just as participants focused on availability in their recommendations for improving information sessions, so too was availability the most common theme in the participants' descriptions of the barriers to attendance faced by their communities. The number one availability concern was cost, followed by COVID-19, time, lack of awareness, the formality of events, and language. Each of these perceived barriers offered insights into the ways in which the participants' communities could be excluded from attending arts and culture events.

All six participants cited the financial availability concern of cost as a barrier for their community in attending arts and culture events. Two of the six said it was the number one barrier. Participant 4 said:

> the biggest barrier, I think, is just economics. Really. It's not interest. It's mostly economics.

Participant 5 agreed,

> top of the list is money- money.

This barrier aligns with previous research that links financial availability to motivation to attend (Brown, 2013; Kemp & Poole, 2016; O'Hagan, 2017).

Physical availability concerns made up the second-largest sub-thematic grouping. Top of this list was COVID-19, with five participants stating that this was a serious barrier. Participant 4 pointed out the difficulty their community might have in navigating the fluctuating rules and asked

Can we actually go to it at that point? In the midst of step two? Can we actually go to it?

Participant 5 summed up the obvious barrier presented by COVID-19, bluntly summing up,

There is nothing to attend.

And Participant 6 identified the potential ramifications of attending an arts and culture event if event spaces were open when they said

maybe someone gets COVID or whatever. ... I really don't know. That would be even more scary.

As COVID-19 was an emergent concern at the time I conducted my research, there was nothing in the literature to describe or predict the short-term or long-term impacts of a global pandemic on arts and culture events in a contemporary context. I will note that all of my participants spoke about their intention to participate in arts and culture events in the future. Time was the second most common physical availability barrier described, with three participants wondering if their community had the time to attend or even the time to look into attending. Participant 4 was sure that

once they get home, they don't have energy to even go to these things or even look them up or even see that they're available, right?

Two participants saw the lack of visibility of arts and culture events in public spaces or online as a barrier to attending for their communities. Participant 3 found information difficult to find and observed

I'm not seeing a whole lot of stuff online. But even when I check out things to do in Vancouver, there is a whole lot of outdoor stuff. And outdoor events. But things like, you know, plays and dramatics and all that, I don't see them on the first page, at least, they escaped my eye. So, if they're advertised better, I think it would do wonders.

The participants also perceived low content availability as a barrier to attending for their communities. Here we see a nuance of content availability described for the first

time, the diminished availability of content that requires audiences to have specialized preparation or genre expertise to participate. Three participants felt a lack of familiarity or education left community members disinterested in or disconnected to arts and culture events. Participant 1's number one barrier was that

> most people are not very interested in the traditional style of art galleries, or art performance because of the mainstream movies.

Participant 2 echoed this position,

> They may not appreciate this type of thing. So, I think it's partially, you know having the introduction, the education.

Participant 3 recognized the diversity of their community and thought that lack of local cultural education was a barrier

> Because, like, like I said, the Flight of Hummingbird was about some Indigenous parable that has been there for a long time. But I was not aware of the story before. So, I think the cultural context of art events might differ as well and might be very aligned to the local population that have been around for a while.

Participant 5 was also concerned with the disconnection to arts and culture events felt by their community. They suggested that their community had more pressing concerns, like

> What is the exact connection to precise and measurable social change? Like, I mean, we're in a climate crisis. We're in a paradigmatic shift, we're in the midst of a paradigm shift so it's like, what does this mean? Where are they taking us? Will this mean that there will be less people murdered? Does this mean they will be solving the case of the missing and murdered Indigenous woman? Will this mean that the people who are in tent city come to some kind of understanding with the city? No.

Although lack of education may be seen as a meaning-making barrier, I contend that it is appropriately categorized as a content availability concern. My findings have shown that participants who attended an information session for a genre they were unfamiliar with were able to actively engage in meaning-making of intellectual value. It seems that the content availability of information sessions may be increased with thoughtful planning and presentation of material. This is an important barrier to consider as research has shown that arts education can increase the likelihood of arts attendance (Borgonovi, 2004; Brown, 2013; Crawford et al., 2014; Mathewson Mitchell, 2017; O'Hagan, 2017).

4.7. Reflective Journals Themes

Only five of the participants submitted reflective journals. Although the journal instructions asked the participants to focus on the information sessions when responding to the prompts, they concentrated on their experience of the arts event instead. I chose to code the journals and include them here as the themes mirrored those from the interviews and offer comparison and contrast points. Their journals were unedited, and all of the quirks and foibles of their writing voices remain in the quotes. Their responses indicated that they actively engaged in meaning-making following the arts and culture event they attended. My analysis of their responses revealed that they derived more emotional value than intellectual value from their meaning-making. Participants also raised concerns related to all three subthemes of availability.

All five participants explored points of emotional value in their journals. They identified how the arts event connected them to their emotions and how, for some, those emotions created an impulse toward action. All five described their emotional connection to the event. For example, Participant 2 was

> nostalgic for that time where in school I acted in plays. As explained in the emotions and feelings section I was able to relate the play to a lot of my personal past experiences...Bunny for example – as someone caught up in her daily chores without much time or headspace for anything else it is the case with me as well as a lot of members of my family and community. We are all so caught up in our own survival we forget about the collective world we share and focus on the individual. We live in denial about the problems out there by making our own little worlds as busy and comfortable as possible.

In contrast to nostalgia and denial, Participant 5 described feelings of despair at the start of their event,

> Twisty, knots, very uncomfortable agony and cracking of bones into a length of branch that sways with the wind, creates the wind, Protects the wind, the water, the earth, The Trees over see us. They are fighting for the survival of us all.

Later they described a more personal conflict and recalled an emotional encounter with the interviewer from the information session,

> I remember the interviewer from dance events, maybe a dinner party. I think I had a fight with her.

In contrast, it was almost possible to feel the delight of Participant 6 as they noticed

> the piano player's page-turner make a mistake and advance 2 pages
> instead of one...how human, how real, and how much like being there.

Participants described the emotions of nostalgia, denial, despair, conflict, and delight as they reflected on their experience viewing the arts event. These emotions seemed to fuel an impulse toward action in four of the participants. For Participant 5, discomfort was the impetus to pledge that they

> cannot be hindered by white silence and discomfort. It is very
> uncomfortable to become a tree but it is the way out.

Participant 2 also found inspiration to act on their internal struggle, as they shared,

> On a personal level it did raise a conflict in me as in: Will it be enough
> whatever we do? To save the planet and ourselves? Are we too late? But
> I did get inspired by the opera and realize that if all of us contribute
> even in a little way it might be enough to change the world. It has
> inspired me to begin changing my habits from today itself so that we
> can stall the effects of climate change as much as possible and I do not
> want to wait to act.

Participant 3's emotional meaning-making appeared to connect them to society when they confided,

> Even if you are one person if you join forces with others you can still
> make a difference. Even if it seems hopeless as if your actions would
> amount to nothing it's still better to have done something than to not
> have done anything at all.

This emotional connection to societal issues was echoed in the participants' meaning-making of intellectual value. Four of the five participants explored the intellectual value they experienced at the arts and culture event. All four explained how the event allowed them to critically engage with local, national, or global concerns. Three participants viewed an event aimed at children and were still able to construct meaning and apply it to world history and current societal concerns. Participant 2 said that the event

> absolutely helped me relate the opera to our current situation of climate
> change and forest fires. As such this would facilitate me and a lot of

others watching the play to start acting about the climate change situation.

Participant 1 was reminded of

some pathetic moments such as recent wars in Middle East and World Wars. In addition, for people living in indigenous areas, they are suffering from climate change and resource depletion. These tragic events should bring to people's mind all the time for the protection of environment.

Participant 5 attended an Indigenous dance performance and made a critical observation about the relationship between humanity and the earth when they declared that

The earth is alive and it has it's own plans for survival independent of our destruction.

They also struggled with tensions in settler Indigenous relationships and wondered

How can I support my indigenous friends and not buy into their creation story? I don't buy it. The teachings are for all of us.

Participant 6 took this critical engagement with the event into a problem-solving sphere and united the restrictions of arts events during COVID-19 with the challenges of digital delivery of arts and culture events. Then they offered several suggestions for improvements and explained

I would like to see an evolutionary step forward in an internet delivered arts experience. The Internet offers the tremendous opportunity of interactivity not just simple consuming or viewing. To go back to McLuhan…how can the arts world become more interactive in these days of the expectation of interactivity? Maybe I could view these performances with a separate monitor highlighting the actual music like a Norton Notes reduction of the themes? Maybe, I could select which musician I'd like to focus on and see an isolated shot for just the violin, in my case. I can see these types of solutions applied to theatre as well. Difficult time such as these will ultimately lead to creative and evolutionary steps specifically designed to maximize the advantages of on-line delivery of the arts.

It was clear that rich meaning-making occurred at both the events and the information sessions. These findings align with research that describes arts and culture events as a site for meaning-making (Anderson, 2015; Bennett, 2012; Brown, 2013;

Foreman-Wernet & Dervin, 2017; Jacobson, 2018; Mathewson Mitchell, 2017; Park-Fuller, 2003; Radbourne et al., 2010).

When participants reflected on their experience at the event, availability was not as prominently described as meaning-making value. Financial, physical, and content availability were mentioned in the context of concerns. Participant 3 echoed a content availability barrier to community attendance when they pointed out that the event

> couldn't reach a wider audience due to the fact it is currently in one language [English in this case]. It may be a bit more difficult to understand the story if somebody doesn't understand this language.

Physical and financial availability concerns were often intertwined, as evidenced when Participant 6 asked

> Can we return to the Orpheum a sit physically distant from one another and have to pay 4 or 5 times as much per ticket? This really makes the arts experiences even more elitist than it already is.

This relationship was extended beyond COVID-19 when Participant 3 described how people are

> simply bombarded with just staying afloat in society and too busy earning enough money just to keep a roof over their heads and food on the table (simple basic needs) that they don't even have the time and money to watch these stories.

My analysis of the participants' experiences at the arts and culture event revealed similarities to their responses to the information sessions. Their primary focus on the meaning-making value of the information session and the arts and culture event may provide insight into their priorities as spectators. This is important because research has shown that meaning-making can to increase value and thus motivation to attend (Andreea, 2012; Brown, 2013; Reinelt, 2014; Scollen, 2008; Walmsley, 2011). The participants' enthusiastic willingness to engage in meaning-making could point to the ease with which audiences can participate in deciding what art means when they are not blocked by availability factors. Research has shown that audience members who connect personally with arts and culture experiences have deeper connections to the event and that emotional responses can have a positive effect on the perceived value and motivation to attend (Boerner & Jobst, 2013) and the desire to share information

(Berger, J., & Milkman, 2012; Heath et al., 2001; Kang et al., 2020). Seeing meaning-making value described by participants in the information sessions and the arts and culture events shows the potential for enriching audience experiences through an integrated information session and arts event experience.

4.8. Explanation of Main Findings

I have presented my findings and their relationship to the existing literature. In the following section, I will give possible explanations for the four major findings.

4.8.1. Information Sessions and Meaning-Making Value

Information sessions provided meaning-making value for participants. None of the participants mentioned availability as a concern or as a factor worth describing. There are several possible explanations for this finding. First, as all of the information sessions were available online, there were no physical, financial, or content availability concerns for the participants. Second, arts organizations may already be skilled at delivering information sessions that lower availability barriers and provide intellectual and emotional meaning-making value. Finally, it could also be explained by information sessions' ability to revitalize audiences' authority by centring their meaning-making processes. I find this explanation compelling as my experience with the participants showed me how willing and well-equipped they were to tackle intellectual and emotional engagement with very little prompting from me and no specific direction from the information session programmers.

4.8.2. Information Sessions and Audience Attendance

Information sessions that participants perceived to have high meaning-making value and availability appeared to increase participants' desire to attend another arts and culture event of the same and a different type. This extends insight into the information sessions' potential as a tool for audiences to begin the meaning-making process, potentially supporting more attendance. Information sessions appear to help audiences make meaning which translated to value, which translated to their desire to attend more often. They are also more likely to attend different kinds of events, which is important because based on previous research (Pitts, 2014) we know that even regular attenders

can be reluctant to attend new types of events. As described above, intellectual value drove participants' decisions to attend an arts and cultural event of the same type and a different type.

Interestingly, most of the participants also pointed to the emotional value provided by the information session as increasing or supporting their likelihood of attending an arts and cultural event of the same type. In contrast, only one participant mentioned emotional value as a factor that increased their desire to attend an event of a different type. This difference could be attributed to the participants' readiness to engage in intellectual meaning-making at arts and cultural events while being unable to predict the emotional value of an arts event of a different type.

4.8.3. Information Sessions and Encouraging Others to Attend Arts and Culture Events

Participants were eager to share their experiences and encourage others to attend arts and culture events when information sessions were physically available and provided intellectual meaning-making value. The connection between physical availability and participants' willingness to reach out to others may be explained by the autonomy that digital content offers arts audiences. Participants seemed enthusiastic about the availability of content that provided a quick snapshot of the upcoming event, which offered them the opportunity to determine their interest and pass that content on to others. This increased confidence could also be explained by the intellectual value the information sessions created for participants. The information sessions may have given audience members the opportunity to overcome their self-perceptions of being a non-expert. Attending an information session allowed them to co-create an experience with artist's and artistic staff's input, giving them the language and authority to encourage others to attend an arts and culture event. This is important as research has shown that friends and family recommendations are valued when making decisions to attend arts events (Andreea, 2012; Brown, 2013; Cohen, 2014).

4.8.4. Information Sessions and Availability

Although the theme of availability did not figure as prominently as meaning-making value in audiences' choices to attend and encourage others to attend arts and

culture events, availability concerns were central to the participants' recommendations to improve information sessions and their perceptions of the barriers faced by their communities to attending arts and culture events. This could be explained by the ease with which participants engaged in intellectual and emotional meaning-making at the information sessions and during the arts and culture events. I was surprised and excited by the rich and varied meaning-making the participants were able to engage in considering the constraints placed on their experience by COVID-19. Specifically, participants were only able to attend pre-recorded information sessions and arts and culture events with an interactivity level approaching zero. However, the information sessions did satisfy the availability criteria identified by participants as improving information sessions and reducing barriers to community attendance at arts and culture events. It seems participants were very adept at assessing what is required for improvement and barrier reduction, as evidenced by the positive influence the information sessions appeared to have on participants' likelihoods to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events.

Chapter 5.

Conclusion

5.1. Recapitulation of Research Purpose and Findings

I have used a social constructivist approach to explore the role that participating in information sessions plays in increasing audience members' likelihood of attending and promoting arts and culture events to others. I suggest that information sessions can provide an opportunity to revitalize audiences' authority in meaning-making at arts and culture events. Meaning-making value, including emotional and intellectual meaning-making opportunities, appeared to translate to an increased desire for audience members to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events. Participants' recommendations for information session improvement focused on increased physical and content availability, while financial availability was the number one perceived barrier.

My findings show that meaning-making value may be a motivational factor in participants' decisions to attend arts and culture events, share their experiences with others, and encourage others to attend. Participants showed a commitment to meaning-making, even without the benefit of live events or any interactivity during the information sessions. While meaning-making value played a role in decisions to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events, availability issues shaped the recommendations to improve information sessions and participants' perceptions of the barriers to attendance faced by their communities.

Increasing physical availability, including easily shareable information sessions and mixed delivery of arts and culture events, was the most common recommendation for improving information sessions. Cost (financial availability) was the only barrier to attendance identified by all participants. The reduction of physical availability caused by COVID-19 and a disconnection to the content (content availability) rounded out the top three barriers.

These themes were repeated in the participants' reflective journal entries. Participants were provoked to make connections to their own emotional and intellectual worlds and critically engage with the arts and culture event. They expanded their

perspectives beyond the personal to the global, asking questions and making predictions about the climate crisis, racism, and the future of arts and culture event delivery. They worked hard to co-create meaning-making value, even when their partner in co-creation – the arts and culture event - was pre-recorded and offered no interaction. Although the financial, physical, and content availability of the arts and culture events were not primary themes in the reflective journals, participants still found themselves wondering about the role that availability plays in attracting the diverse community that makes up the Greater Vancouver Regional District and the impact that new technologies have on arts and culture experiences. As Participant 5 astutely pointed out,

> The smell of cedar? No smell on YouTube.
>
> Participant 5

5.2. Limitations of Research

There were several limitations to the research. First, this study was limited by the lack of prior research on the relationship between information sessions and arts audiences' decisions to attend arts and culture events. Although it was clear meaning-making at arts and culture events translated to value and led to increased motivation to attend, there was a gap in the literature examining if information sessions could provide similarly influential meaning-making value. My findings offer preliminary substantiation to the possibility that information sessions could provide an added entry to meaning-making for audiences. A second limitation stemmed from the recruitment restrictions imposed by COVID-19. I was very interested in including non-attenders in my participant group, but I was unable to identify any from the respondents who replied to the call for participants. As students and alumni of the Graduate Liberal Studies Program made up the bulk of those respondents, I can only assume that as a community, they attend arts and culture events at a slightly higher rate than the provincial average. A third limitation was related to the measures used to collect my data. The structure of my interview questions could have been improved to provide opportunities for richer details. I also regret not asking the participants about the importance and role of arts and culture events in their lives. I come from an education system with a western bias and am in the early stages of deconstructing that bias. When I began my analysis, I realized that it was inappropriate to impose my western-centric cultural framework on the diverse population

of my participants. Despite this limitation and with the help of my participants, I have gained insight into who decides what art means.

5.3. Problems Arising During the Research

Several problems arose during data collection. The most serious of these was the global pandemic, as COVID-19 effected almost all aspects of my work. There were extremely limited online arts and culture events, few were offered with an information session, and I could not find a single live digital event that also had an information session during my data collection period. As a result, there is no data related to active participation in a live information session, giving a partial picture of the impact of the industry-standard version of an information session. This was a disappointment as it eliminated the possibility of giving full consideration to how active participation contributed to participants' decisions to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events.

A second problem was the completion and submission of the guided reflective journals. Only five of the participants submitted a completed guided reflective journal entry. Although I requested that the journals be submitted before the interview, I did not follow up with participants at the interview about their journal submissions. I did contact the one participant who did not submit their journal, and they were unable to locate the document. Given the amount of time between the performance and the date of contact, I decided to forgo asking the participant to complete a new entry as I thought it would be difficult for them to recall their initial impressions without the influence of our interview.

A final problem also concerned the guided reflective journals. The instructions for the guided journal entries asked participants to focus on their experience of the information session in their responses. Unfortunately, my instructions failed in clarity, and none of the participants' journal entries focused on the information session. Instead, participants wrote about their experience of the arts and culture events they viewed. Initially, I was very disappointed as I thought I had to abandon this additional data, which I hoped would contribute to the reliability of my findings. Instead, I chose to code the journal entries, and the same themes and subthemes emerged, allowing me to use the data in the project.

5.4. Contribution to the Field of Spectatorship and Audience Reception Studies

My research findings provide insights into the field of spectatorship and audience reception studies. First, they strengthen the case that qualitative research is a valuable way to conduct research with audiences. My findings illustrate how qualitative research methods may help understand the intellectual and emotional processes that drive audiences' decisions to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events. Through one-on-one interviews and reflective journal entries, I was able to probe the complexities of my participants' experiences to uncover the ways in which information sessions may have disrupted their self-perception as non-experts and recentred their authority as valuable contributors to the meaning of art. Second, my findings advance knowledge of audiences' experiences in the Canadian context, which is helpful given the gap revealed in my literature review. Third, this study lays the groundwork for future research into the relationship between information sessions and audience experiences at arts and culture events, specifically into how information sessions may offer audiences additional opportunities to create meaning-making value. Finally, these findings provide insight into the possible improvement of information sessions and the perceived barriers to attendance faced by communities in Greater Vancouver. Asking audience members for their opinions on improvements and barriers repositions them as essential contributors in the arts and culture landscape, which directly aligns with the goals of spectatorship and audience reception studies.

5.5. Recommendations

5.5.1. For Research

These findings provide the following directions for future research. First, further studies need to be carried out to add to the body of literature in the Canadian context. In addition, work is needed to describe the long-term effects of attending an information session on audiences' likelihood to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events. Third, to develop effective long-term strategies to improve information sessions and reduce obstacles to attendance for communities, richer and more profound insights into why and how the necessary changes should happen could be pursued in collaboration with those communities. For example, as the cost of arts and culture

events was the number one cited barrier to attendance, researchers could ask how and why arts organizations should be supporting potential audiences in overcoming that barrier. This brings me to my final recommendation. Research could explore the tensions between the influence of the Western tradition on contemporary arts and culture offerings and an increasingly diverse national community, from the language barriers pointed out by the participants in this study to the larger question of the role of and meaning of arts in that community.

5.5.2. For Practice

My findings have several practical implications. First, arts organizations should expand their information session offerings. A range of options, including short, digital content, in-depth learning opportunities offered in-person and online, and complementary participatory arts experiences would be ideal. However, it was clear that participants found short, digital content compelling and easy to share, possibly making it the most effective option for reaching established and potential audiences. While participants identified the easy shareability of digital content as valuable, arts organizations should not overlook opportunities to encourage attendees to share their experiences with others at in-person information sessions. As availability concerns dominated participants' recommendations to improve information sessions and their perceived barriers to attendance for their communities, arts organizations should consider ways to mitigate the effect of availability concerns. Reimagining the atmosphere and timing of in-person information sessions could address recommendations for improvement. For example, participants were enthusiastic about less formal information sessions with less clearly defined beginning and end times that provided more opportunities to connect with artists, artistic staff, and fellow audience members. As cost was cited as the number one barrier for community attendance at arts and culture events, arts organizations could consider pairing with governments or corporate sponsors to provide free tickets to one event per season for eligible residents. The literature (Scollen, 2008) has shown that even one free ticket can increase the likelihood of attendees continuing to purchase tickets and encouraging other people to attend. Finally, my findings show that guided self-reflection produced rich engagement with the arts materials for the participants. They could co-create knowledge with the artists and recapture their authority as meaning-makers even when their experience was

contained within a one-way, two-dimensional frame. Arts organizations should consider how they can reinvigorate the role of the audience in the meaning-making process, perhaps by showcasing the audience meaning-making processes through public guided self-reflection projects.

5.6. We Decide What Art Means

This qualitative study of six members of the greater Vancouver community was conducted to explore how audience members described the role that arts and culture information sessions played in their decisions to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events. I was also interested in their recommendations to improve information sessions and their perception of the barriers to attendance faced by their communities. Their narratives provided rich and insightful information into the value they placed on their intellectual and emotional meaning-making processes and the positive impact that value had on their decisions to attend and encourage others to attend arts and culture events. My findings demonstrated how easily participants were able to describe how their experience moved them through multiple layers of identity, uncovering critical thinking that connected them to personal, community, and global concerns. They told me that the primary duty of arts organizations was to present information sessions in a way that was available – not too hard to find and not wrapped up in overly formalized formats or language. Their meaning-making value came from taking that information session experience, combining it with the arts and culture event and deftly connecting it to personal experience and contemporary context.

My participants taught me that they did not require very much to begin the meaning-making process. They did not need to be told what to feel (Aristotle, 350 C.E.; Tolstoy, 1904); they easily told me what they felt. They did not find meaning by stepping away for an objective view (Arnold, 1913); instead, they remained among the fray, clear-eyed while tackling their responsibility in colonialism and to our planet's climate crisis. And they did not limit their experience to their eyes, ears, and heart (Sontag, 1966). They were called to action, for themselves and their global community, and they made commitments to participate. My participants taught me that we decide what art means.

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Appendix A.

Participant Recruitment Flyer

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

Arts Audiences and Information Sessions:
Impact on Audience Attendance and Attendance Advocacy

FREE TICKET

About the research:
The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the impact of arts event information sessions on the choices that audience members make to attend, increase attendance, and advocate for attendance at arts events.

Target Audience:
People of any age who attend arts events a lot, a little, or not at all. (That's you)

As a participant in this study, you will attend an arts event (theatre, dance, music, fine art) of your choice with a scheduled information session, submit a guided journal entry, and take part in a 30-minute interview. Participation is voluntary and you will receive a $50 gift certificate in appreciation.

Accepting participants until:
May 31, 2020

Want to participate or have questions? Contact:

Andrea Leveille

FINE ARTS EVENTS

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

study number 2019s0482, V2 Jan 11, 2020

Appendix B.

Informed Consent Form

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

INFORMED CONSENT

Arts Audiences and Information Sessions:
Impact on Audience Attendance and Attendance Advocacy

Thank you for your interest in my research project**.**

Study Team
Principal Investigator: Andrea Leveille, Graduate Liberal Studies,
                         Tel. ▨▨▨▨▨, Email: ▨▨▨▨▨
Faculty Supervisor: Gary McCarron, Tel.: ▨▨▨▨▨, Email: ▨▨▨▨▨▨

Invitation and Study Purpose
British Columbian arts organizations are facing poor attendance and low governmental financial
support. How can they survive and thrive?

As a British Columbian, you are being invited to participate in a research study about the impact
of arts event information sessions on audience attendance at arts events.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the impact of pre or post-performance
information sessions on the choices that arts audience members make to attend, increase
attendance, and advocate for attendance at arts events.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw your participation in
this project at any time without consequence. Your involvement or non-involvement in this
project is in no way related to, and will not impact, your relationship with the researcher and/or
your status with the institution.

What happens to you in the study?
If you say "Yes", here is how we will do the study:
- You will be invited to attend an arts event (theatre, dance, music, or fine art installation)
  with an information session
- You will be asked to fill out a short, guided journal form about your arts event experience
  (30 minutes).
- You will be asked to participate in a short, one-on-one telephone interview about your
  arts event experience (30 minutes). With your permission, the interview will be digitally
  recorded.

Is there any way being in the study will be bad for you?
There are no known risks to you in participating in this study,

V2 – Jan 11, 2020

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

What are the benefits of participating?
You will receive a ticket to an arts event. You will be contributing to a broader understanding of what factors influence audience attendance and advocacy for attendance at arts events in the Canadian context.

Will you be paid for participating in this project?
You will be given a $50 gift certificate in appreciation for your participation. If you choose to withdraw from the study at any time, you will still receive this gift certificate.

Measures to maintain confidentiality
Your identity and all records will be kept confidential. Please note that email and telephone communications are not a secure means of communication and therefore confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

The project data will be stored on SFU vault, a secure, SFU hosted cloud storage and printed hard-copy data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Andrea Leveille's office. During data analysis, any electronic files will be backed up on a password-protected computer hard drive. The audio recordings will be destroyed and erased from all equipment and computer drives one you have verified the transcription of your interview. Signed consent forms and all other hard copy data will be confidentially destroyed two years after the completion of the project. Digital data that has been stripped of information that could identify participants will be uploaded to SFU's Research Data Repository and will be available for future research indefinably.

What if I decide to withdraw my consent to participate?
You may refuse to participate or withdraw your participation in this project at any time without consequence.

Study Results
The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books.

Contact for more information:
You may discuss any questions you might have about the project with Andrea Leveille, (███ ████ or ███████) or Gary McCarron (████████████████████).

Contact for concerns about the study
If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, you may contact Dr. Jeffrey Toward, Director, Office of Research Ethics at ████████████████

Warm regards,

Andrea Leveille

V2 – Jan 11, 2020

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

Consent Form

I, _____(name), understand and consent to participate in this study being conducted by Andrea Leveille

I also consent to being recorded for transcription (please check the appropriate response)
- ☐ YES (the digital file will be transcribed, a copy sent to you to check for accuracy, and used in the analysis)
- ☐ NO (only notes will be taken and used in analysis)

☐ I consent to this interview transcript only (and not the audio recording) being retained to be used in related research projects exploring audience attendance and advocacy for attendance.

☐ I acknowledge that email and telephone communications are not a secure means of communication and therefore confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

☐ I acknowledge receipt of the gift certificate for my participation in this project (I understand that I may withdraw from this study at any point during this study without any negative effect on my relationship with the researcher and SFU and I will still receive this gift certificate)

☐ I acknowledge that I have read and understood my rights as a participant in this project as explained in the consent form and letter of invitation. My confidentiality will be respected in any subsequent publications, presentations, or reports regarding the findings of this research.

☐ I would like a copy of the research results summary emailed to me at:
_____ at the conclusion of this project.

By signing below, I fully understand my rights as a participant in the research project as outlined in the letter above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

V2 – Jan 11, 2020

Appendix C.

Guided Reflective Journal

SFU SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
ENGAGING THE WORLD

Journal Entry

Arts Audiences and Information Sessions: Impact on Audience Attendance and
Attendance Advocacy

Dear Participant,

      Thank you for your participation in this research project. I hope that you enjoyed
the performance and information session. Within 48-hours of the performance, I would
appreciate if you could take 30-minutes to complete this journaling exercise. The six
headings can be found on page two of this document.

Journal Entry Instructions

1. Think about the pre-performance or post-performance information session you attended.
2. After reading the heading, type as quickly as you can, as though you were talking to
   someone. Write down everything that comes to mind.
3. Simply keep writing, no matter what, following your train of thought wherever it leads.
4. Stop at the end of the five minutes and move on to the next heading.

Once you have completed the journal entry, please email it to me at ▓▓▓▓▓▓▓▓.

Thank you again for your participation in this project and I look forward to speaking with
you in our upcoming interview.

Warmly,

Andrea Leveille

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
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Journal Entry Prompts

(1)ideas, conclusions, prompts

(2)emotions, feelings

(3)questions, confusions

(4)past experiences

(5)help, facilitate

(6) hinder, constrain;