

“If I can set my own price for tonight’s show I will pay more after watching it!” – evidence from Pay What You Want experiment in a theatre.

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Abstract In a field experiment conducted in cooperation with city theaters in Warsaw, we allowed some of the visitors to pay whatever they wanted for the tickets (i.e. Pay What You Want payment method). Half of these visitors were asked randomly to make a PWYW payment after (instead of before) the performance. We found a significant positive difference between PWYW payments made after and before the show. In a specially designed survey we capture various factors that may potentially explain this difference. We analyze both the visitors’ general expectations towards the performance and different aspects of the audience experience (i.e. the experience character of the good), as well as some of the individuals’ relevant characteristics. Contrary to what was expected, ex ante PWYW payments reflect the amount of money consumers were willing to spend for the evening, rather than to their expectations of the performance. Ex post voluntary payments were positively related with audience experiences, in particular with viewers who found the performance “opened their eyes to some new ideas” or those who “could really identify with the characters of the story”. Our findings may have important implications for the marketing strategies, specifically for theaters and other live performance institutions considering implementation of the Pay What You Want scheme.

Keywords Pay What You Want · Cultural goods · Uncertainty · Audience experience

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1 Introduction

The pay-what-you-want (PWYW) scheme has been so far successfully applied both in online (e.g. music, games, eBooks) and in offline purchases (e.g. restaurants, museums, guided tours), with payments made before or after consumption.¹ If the payment is made after the consumption buyers have a possibility to learn about the quality of the good, and can make their payments contingent on the quality of the good. If the act of consumption increases a buyer's utility she may be willing to pay a higher price ex post consumption as compared to ex ante assumptions (Egbert et al. 2014).

A rather common feature of the goods sold with the PWYW payment method is its experience character, i.e. the goods have to be consumed first in order to know what utility they will derive. Does the experience character of the good significantly affect the difference between the voluntary ex post and ex ante payments? This question remains unanswered both in theoretical and empirical literature. It is thus our objective in this paper test this question empirically. In a field experiment conducted in cooperation with city theaters in Warsaw (Poland), we asked random visitors to pay whatever they wanted for the tickets before and after the performance. In a specially designed survey we capture various factors that may potentially explain the difference between visitors ex post and ex ante payment decision such as: difference between expectations and satisfaction from the performance (measurement of the experience character of the good), frequency of attending the performances (skills acquired with experience) or individual's propensity to take a risk.

There are several factors pointed out in the PWYW literature commonly used to explain why a buyer pays something at all even if she could pay nothing (see León et al. 2012, p.400 for the extensive overview). First, the concept of a consumer's pro-social behaviour has to be considered. It is assumed that a buyer may derive utility from non-material, pro-social aspects related to consumption of a good. People feel bad violating social norms and thus if they do choose to purchase the product or service, they often choose to pay a "fair" price that does not have a negative effect on their self-image (e.g. Gneezy et al. 2010; Gneezy et al. 2012; Regner and Riener 2012). Other factors commonly stressed as significant in evaluating positive PWYW payments are anonymity and social distance relationship (defined as degree of personal interaction). Researchers found that selfishness increases with increasing rate of those factors (see e.g. Andreoni and Bernheim 2009; Hoffman et al. 1994; Hoffman et al.

¹ Examples: Humble Bundle, Free Tours, some restaurants in UK: Save the Date Café or Galvin at Windows or The New Parkway Theatre in Oakland in Canada.

1996; Kim et al. 2009; Kim et al. 2014. Finally, Greiff and Egnert (2016) suggest that PWYW payments depends also on the availability of substitutes. If no perfect substitutes are available, the buyer has weakened incentive to pay underestimated prices under PWYW since with lower payments the seller can be driven out of business. Such a situation is rather not in the interest of the buyer if there are no substitutes.

In our experiment, participants were recruited on the basis of a short online survey. Respondents provided us with their email address and were obligated to pick up and pay for the ticket in person at the theatre box office. Thus, the anonymity and social distance relationship was strongly limited. Moreover, if we assume that theatre performances are characterized by a rather limited availability of substitutes, we may conclude that the participants of our experiment had strengthened incentive not to make zero voluntary payments.

Given our empirical strategy and the current state of the literature, the intended contribution of this paper is two-fold. First, to the best of our knowledge, the paper is the first empirical work analyzing the difference between the prices paid under PWYW ex ante and PWYW ex post consumption scheme. The controlled field experiment and survey answers allow us to identify factors which have a causal effects on this difference in case of theatre performance. The only analysis on the difference in PWYW ex ante and PWYW ex post consumption payments which we found was an online pretest survey made by Kim et al. (2014). Manipulating the time of payment and the satisfaction with the product after consumption, authors found that even though satisfaction was as expected, the prices paid before and after consumption significantly differed, with payments made before consumption being lower. Second, to the best of our knowledge, there was no studies on the PWYW payments in the case of theatre performances.

The goal of our study is to explain consumer's voluntary pricing behavior in PWYW ex post and PWYW ex ante payments. We start with the description of the method, experimental design and the construction of the survey. Subsequently, we discuss our results and derive valuable implications for (potential) sellers using PWYW scheme.

2 Research description and methodology

To answer the research question derived from the theoretical fundamentals, we conducted series of field experiments in which visitors were asked to pay as much as they wanted for tickets to two city theaters in Warsaw – Studio Theater and Ochoty Theater. Half of these experiment participants were asked randomly to make a PWYW payment after (instead of before) the performance. In the field experiment we observed payments made by spectators and conducted a short survey.

The character and audience of each of the two cooperating theaters is remarkably different from the other. The Studio Theater is a city drama theater and is described as ‘performing arts venue for serious drama and avant-garde plays’. In their repertoire, one can find new interpretations of classic drama and variations on Poland's national contemporary literature. The theater has three stages, the biggest has 299 seats for spectators, medium – 100 seats, and the smallest – 80 seats. Price of a normal ticket varies from 35 PLN (8.35 EUR) to 100 PLN (23.80 EUR), with an occasional promotion tickets for 20 PLN (4.75 EUR).

The Ochoty Theater is known for educational projects and support it provides to young artists and playwrights. Part of their performances is prepared by a freelance drama troupe (Drama Studio Circle), which is an initiative of students from Warsaw Drama Academy and the State Drama School in Cracow. Rest of spectacles are written by the Theater's artistic director and played by professional well-known actors. The drama presented to experiment subjects was either a result of competition for young playwrights, or an experimental production directed by the Theater's artistic director. The Ochoty Theater has two stages, one stage with 50-70 unnumbered seats, and the other with 40-50 unnumbered seats. The prices are fixed at 30 PLN (7.15 EUR) for regular and 20 PLN (4.75) for reduced ticket.

To ensure comparability of the data collected within each of the theaters, we examined only spectators of deliberately selected drama performances.

2.1 Experimental Design

2.1.1 Recruitment

The recruitment process was conducted through a short online survey. The survey presented a randomly selected title of spectacle and asked participants whether they had seen it before. If

a respondents ticked the ‘yes, I’ve seen the play’ option then he was redirected to another spectacle and again asked if he had seen it. This procedure was repeated either for all the spectacles available in the experiment at the time of filling in the survey, or until respondent marked ‘no, I haven’t previously seen the play’. Only subjects who had not seen the displayed play before were allowed to continue filling in the recruitment survey. Then the information conditions were created: a description of the play, taken from the theater’s website, and its poster displayed on respondent’s screen. Last, in the survey we collected e-mail addresses and time preferences for a theatre visit.

For each spectacle the theaters decided on the number of seats available in for PWYW scheme. As soon as we collected enough of applications, we distributed e-mail invitations with a plus-one amongst people willing to come for the selected play at an available date. Invitations were distributed 1-3 weeks prior to a spectacle. We asked our potential experiment participants to confirm the attendance at the audience and an accompanying person to e-mail us directly. We informed the participants that the number of seats available in the PWYW scheme is limited. Table 1. presents the numbers of respondents at each level of above discussed recruitment process.

Table 1 Number of seats available and confirmations on different stages of recruitment

Spectacle’s title	Studio Theater			Ochoty Theater			
	<i>Effect</i>	<i>Oleanna</i>	<i>Life is cruel, people are bad</i>	<i>We are not superheroes</i>	<i>Maly has a girlfriend</i>	<i>Thunder</i>	<i>Secret client</i>
Seats in the house (offered for experiment participants x number of spectacles)	299 (100 x 1)	100 (60 x 1)	60 (12 x 2)	60 (12 x 3)	60 (12 x 1)	40 (12x2)	40 (12x1)
Invitations sent	313	136	184	307	79	78	128
Attendance confirmations*	68swr	46	24	55	20	26	15
PWYW ex ante participants	14	16	4	16	2	8	5
PWYW ex post participants	19	13	6	13	2	4	5

* - halved between treatment ex ante and ex post

2.1.2 Treatments

Up to 2 days before the spectacle, the experiment participants and their plus-one guests received unique codes, which enabled them to buy a ticket for a price they could decide

themselves. Besides the code, the experiment participants received an attachment with the play description and a poster, to reassure that they have the same information about the spectacle. At this time the experimental subjects were divided into two equal treatments: Pay What You Want *ex ante* and Pay What You Want *ex post* performance. In the e-mail we emphasized: “We give you the possibility to decide about the amount of money you want to pay yourself. The price that you pay will be a valuable clue for us about your expectations towards the performance.” or (depending on the treatments) “We give you the possibility to decide about the amount of money you want to pay yourself after the performance. The price that you pay will be a valuable clue for us about whether the performance met your expectations.” The message also instructed on how and when the ticket might be picked up at the ticket office and how to pay for it.

2.1.3 Subjects

Despite collecting attendance confirmations, a number of participants did not show up at the day of performance (statistics presented in Table 1 above). During December 2015 – May 2016, a total of 125 subjects participated in the experiment on 7 different plays. They constituted between 7% and 30% of the whole audience. Besides the experiment participants we also surveyed all the audience (264 surveys filled in).

2.2 Survey

Besides observation of payments made via PWYW, we distributed a paper survey amongst the whole audience to learn more about their expectations and experiences. At the ticket office we observed the spectators to recognize whether they participated in experiment or bought a regular ticket. There were three versions of the survey (questionnaires are presented in the Appendix B). We recognized to which treatment each spectator belongs (normal ticket/ PWYW *ex ante*/ PWYW *ex post*) and handed the surveys accordingly. There were slight differences between these versions.

The subjects were informed that the survey consists of two parts: one to be filled out before the spectacle and the other afterwards. Before the spectacle they were asked about the price they paid, expectations towards the spectacle and uncertainty, previous theatrical experience and reasons to attend the performance. Regular ticket holders were also asked about declared willingness to pay under PWYW before spectacle.

The second part measured satisfaction and experience. The audience experience questions were taken from a handbook for the theatre by NEF (2012) and concerned seven aspects: concentration, learning new ideas, captivation with performances images and sounds, atmosphere within the audience, connection with the characters/story, fun, overall experience and fulfillment of expectations. Responses were measured on a 5-point scale. Further, regular ticket holders were asked about declared willingness to pay under PWYW after spectacle and ex ante tickets holders were asked if they want to something extra for the ticket.

At the end of the questionnaire respondents answered a set of socio-demographic questions and were invited to take part in free ticket drawings for completion of the survey. We further ensured anonymity by allowing the customers to put the survey in a large box after the performance.

3 Results

As shown in Table 1, a large percentage of people who have confirmed coming to the performance and to pay what they want for the ticket finally decided not to come. As a result, we received a much smaller sample than we expected, which significantly limited possibilities of conducting empirical analysis. We start this section with reporting the effect of treatments, i.e. we investigate if there is a significant difference between the voluntary ex post and ex ante payments for ticket. In the second step we move on to the analysis of the role of the audience experience on the voluntary ex post payments.

3.1 Treatment effects

Since the theatre performance has a characteristics of experience good we expect that there is a significant difference between the voluntary ex post and ex ante payments for the ticket. As shown in Table 2, our expectations are confirmed. There is a significant difference between mean ex ante and ex post payments with higher mean in case of ex post payments. This difference could be even greater if consumers considered filling the survey as a form of favor. Contrary to the subjects in the PWYW ex post treatment, subjects in the PWYW ex ante treatment filled the questionnaire before making payments. Filling the survey could thus reduce their final ex post payments for the opportunity to watch the spectacle. Moreover, while ex post payments are significantly correlated with all of the aspects of audience

experience (see Table A1 in Appendix), there is no significant correlation between voluntary ex ante payments and the expectations regarding the performance. Finally, after watching the show PWYW ex ante ticket holders were informed about the possibility to pay more for a ticket and 11,4 percent of those participants took advantage of this chance.

Table 2 Differences in ex post and ex ante the show PWYW payments (values in PLN).

VARIABLES	PWYW ex ante	PWYW ex post
Min	1	1
Max	30	50
Mean	17.26	21.05
Standard Dev.	7.01	9.36
Pr(T > t) (1)		0.0054
Observations	70	56
(1) H_a : mean "PWYW ex post" > mean "PWYW ex ante"		

As it was expected, we have no zero voluntary payments. However, in both theaters, mean PWYW payments were approximately equal to the cheapest ticket price (see Table 1A in Appendix). Those voluntary payments could be lowered if consumers viewed our events as a short-term price promotion marketing instrument. Kim et al. (2014) suggest, that consumers may justify lower prices paid in PWYW scheme when PWYW is viewed as a short-term price promotion. This is because of the common belief that prices must be lower on promotion.

3.2 Survey results

Beside the socio-demographics and audience experience questions, we also asked regular ticket holders the following question:

If you can make an independent decision to pay whatever price you deem appropriate for the ticket to the performance, what do you think the average, willing payment for the ticket would be?

Those declared PWYW payments are almost twice higher than real ex post voluntary payments (on average 40 pln. compared to 21 pln.). The reasons of such a difference could be three-fold: declared payments are usually overestimates of real payments (Blumenschein et al.

1997), declared payments were anchored with prices already paid for the ticket (the correlation between price paid and declared PWYW ex post payments is positive and significant) and/or our experiment was attended mostly by people with lower willingness to pay for the performance. As a next step we thus compare regular ticket and PWYW ticket holders.

The correlation matrices for real and declared PWYW ex post payments represent rather similar correlations with all of the aspects of audience experience (see Table A2, Appendix). Real voluntary payments are positively correlated in the first place with “feeling connection with the characters” and “openness to the new ideas”. We observe some small differences in declared reasons for coming to the show between regular and PWYW tickets holders. Compared to the first one, participants with PWYW tickets more often had higher expectations about the performance and saw the performance slightly more often “to feel the emotions associated with the show” and “to take part in cultural event” (see Table A3, Appendix). However, compared to the regular ticket holders, PWYW ticket holders more often perceived their financial situation as worse, more often had not attended any theatre performance during the last 12 months, and were less likely to have attended theatre performances at least once a month. (see Figures A1 and A2, Appendix).

Summing up, the possibility of voluntary payment for the performances’ ticket attracted mostly people who were interested in the show but who perceived their financial situation worse than did regular ticket holders.

4 Conclusions

Although the growing popularity of the Pay What You Want scheme, relatively little is known about the conditions under which this method can be profitable, which is why this pricing mechanism remains intriguing from both a managerial and theoretical perspective. From the field experiment conducted with city theaters in Warsaw, we found that voluntary payments made before the show are significantly lower than payments made after seeing the show. PWYW ex post payments are significantly correlated with all of the aspects of audience experience and are approximately equal to the cheapest ticket price. PWYW ex ante payments are independent of the expectations regarding the show which may suggest that additional advertising campaigns may have no effect on voluntary ex ante performance payments. Thus,

if voluntary payments are considered by live performance institutions as a long term alternative pricing method, we would rather suggest a payments to be made after the show.

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Appendix A

Table A1 Differences in ex post and ex ante the show PWYW payments (values in PLN), by theatre.

VARIABLES	Studio Theatre		Ochoty Theatre	
	PWYW ex ante	PWYW ex post	PWYW ex ante	PWYW ex post
Min	5	1	1	10
Max	30	50	30	35
Mean	19.06	24.65	15.46	17.93
Standard Dev.	6.18	10.67	6.84	7.53
Observations	35	26	35	30

Table A2 Correlation matrices for real PWYW and hypothetical PWYW ex post payments and the characteristics of audience experience (question 6 in survey questionnaire, see Appendix B).

	Real PWYW ex post Payments	Hypothetical PWYW ex post payments
Distraction	0.3077**	0.2969***
New ideas	0.3445***	0.2628***
Images and sound	0.3368**	0.3081***
Atmosphere	0.2617*	0.2034***
Identification with characters/ story	0.3817***	0.2748***
Fun	0.2836**	0.3047***
Observations	57	247

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A3 Reasons of attending to the performance and expectations about the performance: normal ticket holders vs PWYW ticket holders, percent of participants (questions 4 and 5 in survey questionnaire, see Appendix B).

	PWYW ticket holders	Normal ticket holders
Reasons of attending to the performance		
I was invited	0,201613	0,3125
To spend my leisure time	0,354839	0,3125
To take part in cultural event	0,516129	0,421875
To feel something new, open me to new ideas and solutions	0,387097	0,304688
To feel the emotions	0,556452	0,445313
To see the work of given director/ actor/ scenographer	0,137097	0,183594
To spend time with friends/ family	0,540323	0,523438
Expectations about the performance		
I'm sure I will not like it	0	0.78
I will probably not like it	3.15	4.30
I don't know if I will like it or not	27.56	33.20
I will probably enjoy it	55.91	46.48
I'm sure I will like it	13.39	15.23
Observations	124	256

Figure A1 Perceived financial situation: normal ticket holders vs. PWYW ticket holders, percent of participants (question 14 in survey questionnaire, see Appendix B).

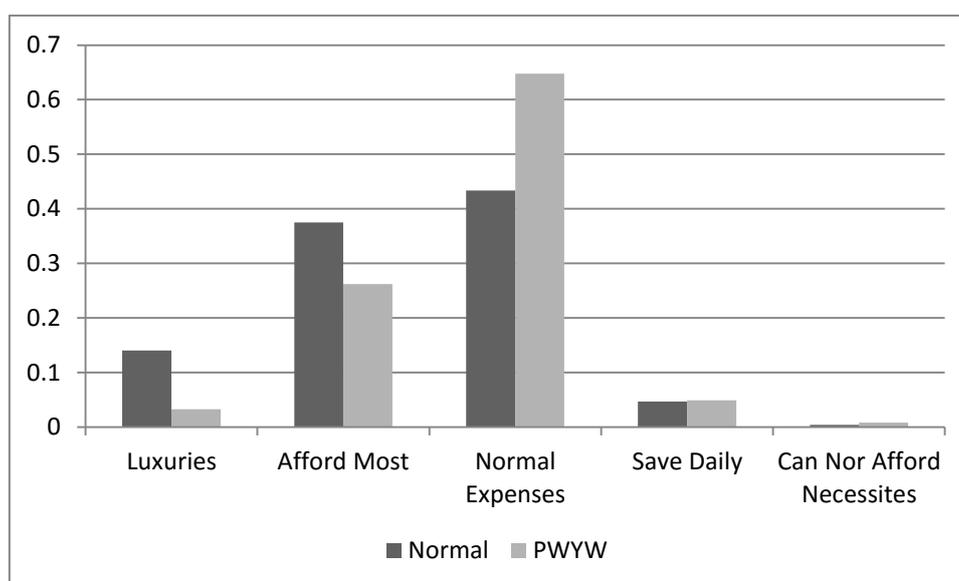
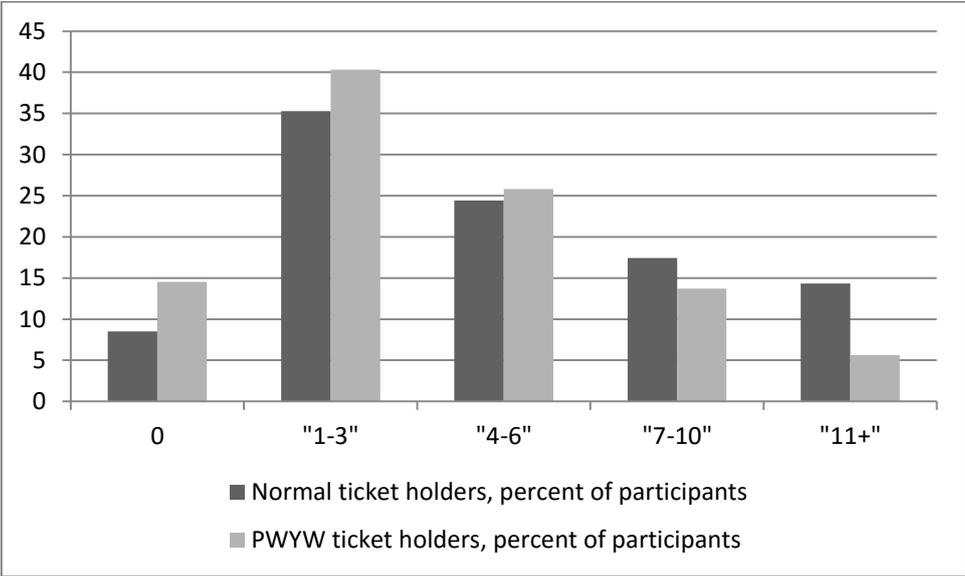


Figure A2 Theatre performances attendances frequency in the last 12 months: normal ticket holders vs. PWYW ticket holders, percent of participants (question 12 in survey questionnaire, see Appendix B).



Appendix B Survey questionnaire

Only questions relevant for the article are included in translation, contest questions, some demographic questions and questions included on request of the cooperating theaters are omitted. When reading this survey mind that:

* - this question was only presented in PWYW before spectacle treatment and to regular ticket holders

** - this question was only presented to regular ticket holders

*** - this question was presented in both PWYW treatments, but not to regular ticket holders

**** - this question was only presented in PWYW before spectacle treatment

***** - this question was only presented in PWYW after spectacle treatment

Part I

WARNING: Please fill out this part of the survey before the performance

How much did you pay for the ticket for today's performance? *

 pln

If you had the option to make your own decision about what price to pay for a ticket to today's performance before the performance, according to you, what would the average payment per ticket be? **

The average payment would be: pln.

From where did you get information about the possibility to attend today's performance and having the option of making your own decision about the price of the ticket? (please select 1 answer) ***

- I filled out the online survey
 from the person accompanying me tonight

1. **When is the last time you attended a theatre performance?** (please select only 1 answer)

- (0, 1> month ago (2, 3> months ago more than 6 months ago
 (1, 2> months ago (3, 6> months ago

2. **How would you rate the last performance you attended?** (please circle one of the ratings)

very bad	➔	decent	➔	very good
1	2	3	4	5

3. **Who decided to attend today's performance?** (please select only one answer)

- me my spouse or partner shared decision someone else

4. **Please select up to 3 of the most important reasons as to why you decided to attend today's performance:**
(please select up to 3 answers)

- I was invited to the show
- To feel the emotions associated with the show
- To spend time with my family/partner/friend
- To feel something new that will open me to new ideas and solutions
- To see the work of a given actor, director or scenographer.
- To take part in a cultural event
- To spend my leisure time

5. **What are your expectations for today's performance?** *(please circle only one rating)*

I'm sure I will not like it	I will probably not like it	I don't know if I will like it or not	I will probably enjoy it	I'm sure I will like it
1	2	3	4	5

Part II

WARNING: Please fill out this part of the survey after the performance.

6. **The sentences below describe certain experiences associated with the performance you have just viewed** *(For each pair of sentences please select an appropriate answer from the 1-5 scale.)*

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| | 1 2 3 4 5 | |
| My concentration was wandering | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | I was completely absorbed by what was happening |
| I do not feel as if I learned anything new | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | My eyes were opened up to new ideas. |
| The performance did not captivate me | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | The performance captivated me with its images and sounds |
| There was no sensible atmosphere within the audience | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | I was moved by the emotion of the audience |
| I didn't feel much connection with the characters/story | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | I felt I could really identify with the characters/story |
| I did not have fun. I am not happy with how I spend my time | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | It was fun |
| Overall, I found the experience disappointing | <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> <input type="radio"/> | I found the whole experience really worthwhile |

7. **To what degree did the performance meet your expectations?** *(please circle the appropriate rating)*

Below my expectations	→→→→	My expectations were met	→→→→	Above my expectations
1	2	3	4	5

8. **How would you rate today's performance?** *(please circle your choice)*

I will definitely not like it	It was okay, but I didn't really enjoy it	I have no opinion	It was good, I enjoyed it Dobrze,	I enjoyed it very much
1	2	3	4	5

If you can make an independent decision to pay whatever price you deem appropriate for the ticket to the performance, what do you think the **average, willing payment for the ticket would be?** **

Average payment would be: pln.

Now, after watching the performance, you can select how much you are willing to pay for the performance for the ticket of the show you just watched. Please write the amount you are willing to pay and make your way to the ticket booth. ****

I am paying pln.

Before the performance, you were given the option to decide on the price you were willing to pay for today's show. If you were given the option to pay for the ticket now, after viewing the performance, rather than before, how much would you be willing to pay? ****

I would pay pln.

If now, after seeing the performance, you would want to pay more for than the price you paid before the show, how much more would you be willing to pay. ****

I would pay an additional pln.

Demographics

9. Gender: female male

10. Age: 15-20 21-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+

11. In the last 12 months, how many times have you attended a theatre performance? (operas, musicals, theatre productions, dance performances)? 0 1-3 4-6 6-10 11+

12. How many times in the last 12 months have you attended a performance at The Studio/ Ochoty Theatre?

0 1-3 4+

13. How would you rate yourself:

Are you a person who is always willing to take on risk or are you more risk-averse? (please select an answer on the 11 point scale)

I am very risk averse 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 I am always ready to take on risk

14. Which of the below statements best characterizes the way you handle your personal finances in your home?

- we can allow yours certain luxuries
- we can afford most things without having to save up
- we have enough for our normal expenses, but we have to save up for more serious purchases
- we have to save accordingly daily
- we cannot afford even our necessities