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Dancemania: Analyzing the Commercialization of Dance Crew Competitions

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Abstract: ***This research delves into the intricate landscape of commercialization within dance crew competitions, employing a focused examination of prominent television series, notably the widely recognized "Dancemania." As the dance competition model gains unprecedented popularity and financial success, there is a discernible risk that the core authenticity of this expressive art form may be compromised. Rather than adhering to artistic values, there is a growing concern that these competitions may veer towards catering primarily to mass entertainment tastes. To comprehensively unravel the increasing commercial influences and economic incentives shaping the competition format, this study employs a multifaceted approach. Interviews and surveys are conducted, drawing perspectives from dance professionals, competitors, and television producers intimately involved in the dance competition milieu. Through qualitative insights and firsthand accounts, the paper aims to shed light on the evolving dynamics propelled by commercial interests. Quantitative data analysis forms a critical component of this research, uncovering correlations that exist between success metrics and influential factors, such as viewership ratings, which may take precedence over the technical prowess of dance ability. The findings from this analysis serve as a catalyst for discussions surrounding potential policy and structural adjustments. The overarching objective is to realign the priorities of competitive dance with a renewed emphasis on artistic values, countering the prevailing trend of prioritizing commercial interests. This research signals the need for holistic interventions and shifts in the competition landscape to preserve the inherent artistic integrity of dance within a commercialized context.***

Keywords: Dance, Competition, Television, Economics, Culture.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past two decades, reality television dance contests have witnessed an unprecedented surge in popularity, captivating audiences worldwide. Notable series such as "So You Think

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You Can Dance" and "Dancemania" have become cultural phenomena, drawing millions of viewers with their dazzling displays of dance prowess. However, amidst the widespread acclaim, a growing chorus of critics voices concerns that the competition-centric model may jeopardize the intrinsic artistic value of dance, reducing it to mere entertainment or spectacle in pursuit of commercial success.

This paper seeks to delve into the heart of this debate by focusing on a specific facet of reality dance competitions—the dynamic world of dance crews. Comprising street and contemporary dancers, these crews engage in weekly challenges, vying for supremacy as determined by audience votes. The stakes are high, with the promise of not only accolades but also lucrative show contracts for the victorious crews. Through the lens of popular dance crew competitions, this investigation aims to scrutinize the alleged commercialization of dance, probing the extent to which external influences impact the authenticity and artistic integrity of the performances.

Employing empirical methods, we aim to dissect the commercial influences inherent in this format. By analyzing the intricate interplay between artistic expression and commercial success, we seek to contribute valuable insights into the evolving landscape of dance within the realm of reality television. As we navigate through the complexities of these competitions, we aim to unravel whether the commercialization hypothesis holds true and to what extent dance, as an art form, may be compromised in the pursuit of widespread appeal and financial gain.

2. RELATED WORK

1. In the realm of dance education, Risner (2002) addresses the unspoken truths and rehearsals of heterosexuality, revealing hidden dynamics within the educational context. This exploration is pivotal for understanding the nuances shaping dance education.
   2. The political dimensions of dance education are explored by Dryburgh and Fortin (2010), who weave together politics and pedagogy to unveil the political potential inherent in dance education. Their work delves into the intricate interplay between political ideologies and pedagogical practices.
2. Uhrig (2015) delves into the creative practices of online television talent competitions, conceptualizing the internet as a platform for artistic expression. By exploring the intersection of technology and artistic endeavors, Uhrig sheds light on the evolving landscape of creativity in the digital age.
3. De Silva's (1998) research in the realm of film selection and ratings provides a framework based on production theory. This study investigates how consumers make choices and assign ratings to movies, contributing insights into audience preferences and decision-making processes.
4. Gamson (2019) examines the changing role of expertise in reality TV, specifically tracing the journey from librarian to celebrity judge. This work critically analyzes the evolving nature of expertise within the realm of reality television, offering perspectives on the intersection of celebrity culture and professional judgment.
5. Oliver (2016) raises questions about the perceived seriousness of dance, prompting an exploration of the art form's standing. Through an investigation into the extent to which

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dance can be taken seriously, Oliver contributes to the ongoing discourse on the significance of dance as an art form.

6. Towse (2011) defines cultural economics and its scope, offering a comprehensive understanding of the field. This foundational work outlines the contours of cultural economics, providing essential insights into the economic aspects of cultural production and consumption.
7. Hoeven and Hitters (2019) investigate the social and economic effects of a theatre's cultural policies. By examining the intersection of cultural policies and their impact, this study contributes to our understanding of the broader implications of cultural management in the arts sector.
8. Stahl (2019) explores the political dimensions of dance, focusing on states of exception. This investigation into the intersection of dance and politics sheds light on how dance can be a tool for political expression and resistance in exceptional circumstances.
9. Joseph (2015) addresses the shifting paradigms for dance pedagogy in the context of contemporary dance, cultural diversity, and global dance practices. This work explores the evolving landscape of dance education in response to changing cultural dynamics and globalized dance practices.
10. Kawano's (2018) work on taiko drumming and Japanese American celebrity in California delves into tradition and transnationalism. By exploring the cultural dynamics of taiko drumming and its impact on identity and celebrity, Kawano contributes to the understanding of cultural traditions in a transnational context.
11. Metcalfe (2018) explores the inseparable entanglements of dance and media. This work critically examines the complex relationship between dance and media, shedding light on how these two realms intersect and influence each other.
12. Barr (2011) tackles the ethical considerations of appropriation in modern dance, investigating the fine line between cultural interchange and exploitation. This study delves into the ethical dimensions of cultural appropriation in the context of modern dance, contributing to discussions on ethics in dance practices.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a comprehensive mixed methods approach, seamlessly weaving together quantitative analysis of viewership statistics and qualitative insights gathered through interviews. The analytical lens focuses on the results of the Dancemania series over the past five years, employing rigorous statistical scrutiny through regression models. These models intricately incorporate key metrics such as viewership ratings, social media engagement, sponsorship profiles, and the diverse backgrounds of judges. The goal is to unearth correlations that transcend mere technical ability scores provided by specialist judges, instead spotlighting the interconnected metrics that underscore commercial success within the competitive dance landscape.

In tandem with the quantitative analysis, qualitative depth is added through in-depth interviews involving diverse perspectives. Ten former contestants, five seasoned dance producers with experience on shows, including Dancemania, and three influential corporate sponsors contribute their insights. These interviews serve as a rich source of firsthand

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narratives, offering nuanced perspectives on the intricate dynamics at play within competitive dance contexts.

To extract meaningful themes and patterns from the qualitative data, transcripts of the interviews undergo a meticulous thematic coding process. This coding not only surfaces prevalent themes but also aims to discern whether financial considerations wield a conscious or unconscious influence, potentially swaying competitive dance outcomes in comparison to other driving factors. This dual-method approach, encompassing both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted influences shaping the landscape of competitive dance on platforms such as Dancemania.

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

Upon a preliminary analysis, compelling evidence emerges, pointing towards statistically significant positive correlations between viewership votes and the final competition standings spanning the past five seasons of the renowned show, Dancemania. Intriguingly, even when accounting for the technical assessments rendered by judges, it becomes apparent that audience preferences consistently wield a more influential predictive power in determining eventual winners. Beyond the confines of the competition stage, interviews with sponsors, producers, and former contestants unveil recurring themes surrounding crew identities and success metrics, with social media engagement and advertising values taking center stage.

A noteworthy revelation in these discussions is the sponsors' admission of a preference for dance styles perceived as cool and edgy, strategically targeting the elusive youth demographics. This revelation introduces a complex dynamic, potentially exerting pressure on dance crews to conform to these preferred styles to secure sponsorship. The producing teams involved in these competitions shed light on the pervasive influence of personality-focused drama, asserting its frequent impact on decisions ranging from casting to editing, crucial determinants in shaping audience perceptions.

Incorporating the perspectives of dancer respondents into the narrative further accentuates the nuanced relationship between commercial factors and the artistic essence of dance. Many dancers express concerns that these commercial considerations may undermine the meticulous cultivation of technique mastery and compromise the pedagogical integrity that should ideally pave the path to recognition. As a response to these concerns, some suggest the implementation of policy changes, advocating for a recalibration of scoring mechanisms or the establishment of rules to preserve the authenticity of original dance forms.

While it is evident that participating dance crews value the extensive exposure afforded by the show, a palpable undercurrent of tension arises from the heightened commercial stakes inherent in the competition. This tension underscores the delicate balancing act that dance crews navigate, appreciating the platform's ability to showcase their art on a massive scale while grappling with the inherent pressures and conflicts arising from intensified commercial competition.

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5. CONCLUSION

Upon thorough analysis, it becomes evident that the dominant forces of entertainment allure and sponsorship preferences actively mold success trajectories within the realm of competitive dance television. The conventional judging metric, which focuses on technical proficiency, takes a backseat to the commanding influence of viewer engagement and the commercial underpinnings surrounding dance teams. The infusion of reality television norms, particularly the foregrounding of personal drama, permeates pivotal production decisions, further emphasizing the sway of entertainment dynamics.

While platforms like Dancemania undeniably broaden access to dance and bolster economic prospects for participants, there exists a palpable risk of diluting artistic values in the absence of strategic reforms. To recalibrate the delicate balance between entertainment-driven success patterns and the preservation of artistic craftsmanship, considerations should be given to incorporating alternative community peer evaluations. Restricting viewer influence and mandating authentic choreography could serve as pivotal measures in reinstating the integrity of competitive dance.

As our cultural landscape progressively migrates towards online platforms, future research endeavors should extend their scope to delve into digital spaces and practices. Understanding how these digital realms can be harnessed to uphold and propagate original dance forms is crucial for the continued evolution and preservation of the art in an increasingly digitized era.

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