

Exploring social media as an apparatus for audience engineering in the Nigerian theatre milieu

Mbede, Aniebiet Unwana^{1*}, Jacob, Okon Udofot¹, Andrew-Essien, Esekong H.¹
and Enang, Edenowo T.²

¹Department of Performing Arts, Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria.

²Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University, Nigeria.

*Corresponding author. Email: aniebietunwana4@gmail.com; Tel: +234 8065807601.

Copyright © 2024 Mbede et al. This article remains permanently open access under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Received 28th May 2024; Accepted 28th June 2024

ABSTRACT: This study investigates the use of social media as an apparatus for audience engineering in the Nigerian theatre milieu. This interrogation becomes vital as live theatre in Nigeria continues to struggle to maintain clientele due to decreasing audience response. Using the mixed-method approach, this paper explores engaging social media channels (Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp and Tiktok) in select experimental productions - Ifure Ufford-Azorbo's *Beyond my Scars*, staged in the Model Theatre Studio (MTS) at the University of Uyo, Daniel Kpodoh's interpretation of Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame* presented at The Arena in Port Harcourt and VickyBon Uzuazor's *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* staged in Akwa Ibom State University Pinnacle Theatre. This study is underpinned by the Technology Acceptance Model, Diffusion of Innovation and Social Media Engagement Theory in its framework. In its findings, the use of social media increases the reach of the production information to prospective audiences and also enhances the reach of theatrical presentations through live feeds; therefore, social media has proven capable of attracting new audiences for wider reception of the theatre product. This suggests that social media has become a useful apparatus for audience engineering in Nigerian theatre, enabling practitioners to leverage online platforms to shape audience engagement, build community, extend conversations and promote artistic works to reach wider audiences. The study contributes to our understanding that; social media technology is a supportive performance apparatus of connectedness and is potent in influencing and transforming the theatrical landscape in Nigeria and beyond through audience engineering. This paper therefore recommends the creative and consistent use of social media platforms as standard production protocol for the reinvigoration of the theatre milieu, especially in Nigeria.

Keywords: Audience engineering, new media, social media, theatre productions.

INTRODUCTION

Human societies evolve in tandem with the technological discoveries, inventions and possibilities in the age. In the twenty-first century, the use of social media involves web-based tools through smartphones and computer devices that make for online interactive communication among people. The global reach and ability to share images, text, graphics, voice notes, pre-recorded and live videos; make social media an apparatus that can effectively serve as a conduit of information, education and entertainment.

Audience Engineering is "the skilled designing, organising and implementation of an action plan aimed at attracting large audiences to a theatrical event using the art and science of human management" (Jacob 32). Audience engineering practice in the theatre is the ability to creatively compel audience members to patronise theatre performances. It comes with it, the art and science woven around different techniques to attract and sustain audiences' interest. This bridging the gap between

presentations and the audience members engineered to see the presentation can be enhanced through digital technology. As such, social media as a congregating information-sharing device has become a part of our daily lives. "The emergence of social media has clearly altered our private lives, public spaces and rewired our sense of reality and community" (Mbede 31). For this reason, creative undertakings, such as theatre productions demand the consistent discovery and deployment of instruments and devices that will enhance their output and move in tandem with the developmental trends present in society at a given time. This makes accurate Oscar Brockett's assertion that "Living as we do in an electronic age, it seems inevitable that theatre would exploit electronic devices" (265). The use of social media as an apparatus to engineer audience members is explored in select productions, *Beyond My Scars* staged in the University of Uyo Model Theatre written by Ifure Ufford-Azorbo, PhD, *The gods are not to Blame* written by Ola Rotimi staged at The Arena, Port Harcourt by Daniel Kpodoh and *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* written by VickyBon Uzuazor staged by Mbede at Pinnacle Theatre, Akwa Ibom State University.

With more experimental productions crafted to complement audiences' taste in a way that laces functionality with achieving the purpose of generating traffic for the theatre venture, for theatre to thrive in the digital age, the use of social must transcend its use as an invitational tool to expressing its position as a medium of disseminating the performance to the storage of the theatre product through live feeds and memories of the productions, which can be retrieved from the meta space. This highlights the acceptance of technology to its advantage for audience engineering, as no production can be said to be successful without the presence of audience members.

In Auslander's view, "the mediatisation of live theatre brings more privilege to live theatre merged with the electronic media" (35). This technical upsurge is appreciated by potential new generation audiences, who in Nwamuo's opinion, remain "a critical component in every theatre experience as many theatre houses experience poor audience turn-out at live theatre productions while alternative entertainment programmes attract large audiences" (17). This corroborates Andrew-Essien's position that, "the twentieth and twenty-first centuries being periods of great industrial and scientific developments, an age of innovation, creative originality will foster greater interdependence between the arts and sciences" (32).

This paper explores the tools and tact social media deployed to attract audiences to live theatre productions, which is considered necessary for the survival of theatre as an art form in the age of new communication technology. "Theatre being one of the oldest art forms, has in times past survived every technological change

witnessed in society, and in fact adapts to and adopts same for the improvement of theatre practice. This makes true the account that, theatre can be enriched by social media platforms with the viewer's interest in the live event and real-time interaction merged to forge a new theatrical experience (Sujata Pandey and Manoj Pandey 41)". Social media offers such creative possibilities through the merging of traditional methods of art making to technological innovations in a bid to woo audiences to keep coming to see theatrical renderings.

In the light of the evident global shift, it becomes essential for theatre practitioners to reinvent the mode and modalities for publicity and production participation through the integration of socially driven electronic devices to enhance the reach and output of theatrical productions. There is therefore a dire need for theatre to imbibe these emerging technologies and become an electronic theatre (e-theatre) to reinforce the patronage of its dwindling audiences. This is where the application of social media becomes an indispensable for the 'engineering' of audience members, who are critical for the survival of live theatre in Nigeria and beyond.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM)

The Technology Acceptance Model is a theory that assesses the use of any given technology and the pace of acceptance within a given society. "In the performative arts, technology has the power to glamorise productions and improve the quality and delivery of messages" (Andrew-Essien 399). According to Davis et al. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) posits that, "there are two factors that determine whether a computer system will be accepted by its potential users: (1) perceived usefulness, and (2) perceived ease of use. Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (as illustrated in Figure 1) was introduced by Davis et al. in 1986 for his doctorate proposal as an adaptation of Theory of Reasonable Action, TAM is specifically tailored for modeling users' acceptance of information systems or technologies" (3).

The key feature of this model is its emphasis on the perceptions of the potential user. That is, while the creator of a given technology product may believe the product is useful and user-friendly, it will not be accepted by its potential users unless the users share those beliefs. This draws largely from Stelarc's Evolutionary Futurism, "which focuses attention to the human-machine interface; extending conversations from the robotic to the actor-interactive work which incorporates the web, sound, music, text, videos and other computer generated assistance through the concept of "Absent Bodies" where the actor is allowed to interface with his environment" (59). Supported by the theory Diffusion of Innovations,

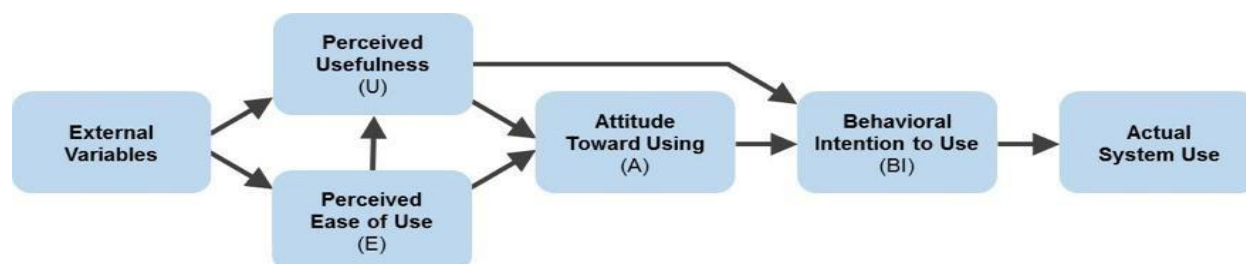


Figure 1. Fred Davis' Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) (Source: <https://www.redalyc.org/Journal>).

propounded by Everett Rogers, a Professor of Communication Studies popularised by his book *Diffusion of Innovations*; the book was first published in 1962 and updated to fifth edition in 2003.

Diffusion of Innovation Model (DIM)

The media theory, Diffusion of Innovations Model (DIM) propounded by Everett Rogers explains the how, why and at what rate, new ideas and technology spread. "This theory describes how new ideas spread through communities" (1). Interrogating the spread in the use of social media in the Nigerian Theatre Milieu, the rate of decline in the patronage of theatre has since been blamed on the slow pace of spread, in the use of emerging and changing technologies. The advent of radio and television, cable network programmes and the internet, make for multiple format entertainment, which seem to endear prospective audiences away from the theatre. However, through the use of social media to gain audiences for contemporary performance structure, there is hope to retain theatre's unique actor-audience symbiosis, while injecting the potency of social media as part of technological innovations that keep theatre evolving in tandem with relevant technologies, present in the society. According to Everett Rogers,

There are identifiable characteristics that predict whether and how quickly an innovation will spread through a community, which includes: Relative Advantage: people are more likely to adopt an innovation if they perceive it as having some advantage over their current situation. Compatibility: people are more likely to adopt an innovation that fits with their cultural norms, attitudes and beliefs. (55)

In discussing the complexities of adopting new technologies, Rogers observes that, "people are more likely to adopt innovations that are easy for them to understand and use trialability (testing an innovation)

before committing to its adoption. He further argues that, "the principle of observability applies to the use of innovative systems, especially if the technology is adopted successfully" (56). Corroborating Roger's Model of Innovation Reception, which states that, "innovations are communicated over time through a social system, while innovations diffuse through communities, these communities are made up of individuals making their own decisions about whether to adopt the innovation or hold on to traditional methods" (58).

Social Media Engagement Theory

Social Media Engagement Theory propounded by Paul M. Di Gangi and Molly Wasko refers to the concept that individuals engage with content on social media platforms through active participation and interaction. This can include likes, comments, shares, and other forms of engagement that allow users to express their reactions and opinions about the content they encounter. "One key aspect of social media engagement theory is the idea that users have a sense of social presence or "connectedness" to the content and other users on the platform. This can lead to a sense of community and belonging among users, and can also foster a sense of trust and credibility in the information being shared" (Di Gangi and Wasko 1).

Another important aspect of social media engagement theory is the role of social influence. This is reflected in the phenomenon where individuals are more likely to engage with content that is popular or has been shared by others they trust. There are other factors that can influence individual level engagement on social media. These can include the platform itself (e.g. Facebook vs. Twitter), the type of content being shared (e.g. text, images, video), and the user's personal characteristics and motivations (e.g. age, gender, interests).

MULTIMEDIA PRODUCTIONS: INFORMATION AND SYNOPSIS

Multimedia productions require the basic raw material,



Figures 2 and 3. Writer and Director, *Beyond My Scars* - Ifure Ufford-Azorbo, PhD (Source: Director's Collection, University of Uyo Model Theatre Production, 2019).

which is the script (or description of scenarios) for the artistic interpretation and technical implementation of the performance idea by the director. This study documents the use of multimedia elements in Ifure Ufford-Azorbo's experimentation in *Beyond my Scars*, staged in the Model Theatre Studio (MTS) University of Uyo, Daniel Kpodoh's multimedia interpretation of Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to Blame* presented at The Arena in Port Harcourt and VickyBon Uzuazor's *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* experimented by Mbede in Akwa Ibom State University Pinnacle Theatre, Obio Akpa Campus, all in South-South Nigeria. These productions provide practical ways which theatre can adapt emerging technologies through the use of compelling scripts, creative directors, 'tech-savvy' actors and multimedia adept directors to create a more stimulating theatre environment and bring to fore the innovativeness of digital theatre conventions. This exploration of multimedia theatre constructs a new paradigm that embraces digital presentational styles in productions.

Synopsis of *Beyond My Scars*

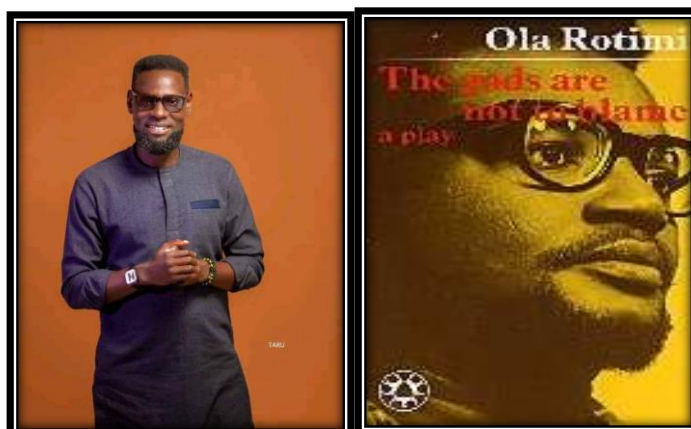
Beyond my Scars is a striking and classic dramatic piece from the imaginative oven of a theatre academic, Ifure Ufford-Azorbo (see photo in Figure 2), artistic and scholarly concerns to give further visibility and perspectives to ritualized abuse of the African fragile angel, the girl child, the feminist question in Nigeria and the global arena. The play voices concern against female genital mutilation and challenges the control of female sexuality and fertility through infibulation perfected and masterminded by the patriarchy. The story parades diversity of stimulating and mind driving angles to the phenomenon of female circumcision (see flier in Figure 3). According to Effiong Johnson, "Ifure Ufford-Azorbo's piece

is a moral flame that burns passionately, and an intellectual spark that pumps the divine fuel of strong enlightenment on this fundamental subject matter around eleven (11) subdivisions of the drama christened situations (3)". It deploys a total theatre canon of presentation in a compelling use of the multimedia narrative technique.

Synopsis of *The gods are not to Blame*

The gods are not to Blame written by Ola Rotimi is an adaptation of the Greek classic *Oedipus Rex*. This reworking of *Oedipus Rex* was staged in 1968, was part of the African Arts (*Arts d'Afrique*) playwriting contest in 1969 and later published in 1971 by the Oxford University Press. The drama is about Odewale, a boy who was born and was fore seen that he will end up killing his father and will get married to his mother, but he was not aware of that fact, until by a stroke of fate, he ended up killing his father in a bush path because of a land conflict and married his own mother.

The story unfolds with a mythological plot, the moral construct and oral traditions inherent in the production would instruct one to watch what we say, do, watch, portray and even man's anger and pride can determine his destiny. Daniel Kpodoh uses multimedia technique to interpret Ola Rotimi's classic staged at The Arena, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria in 2021. Dan Kpodoh (see Photo in Figure 4) works with the Institute of Arts and Culture, University of Port Harcourt, he is a visiting lecturer to Federal University, Oye-Ekiti and University of Africa, Toru Orua. Dan is a prolific multimedia experimentalist, theatre maker, film maker, artistic director, choreographer, festival curator, content developer, theatre consultant, dancer, pageant coach, the Founder/Director of Active Playhouse in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. He staged Ola Rotimi's classic *The gods are not to Blame* (see play text



Figures 4 and 5. Dan Kpodo – Multimedia Director, *The gods are not to Blame* (Cover) (Source: Active House Collection, Port Harcourt, 2021).

cover in Figure 5) using the multimedia presentational style in The Arena in 2021.

Synopsis of *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*

Diary of a Pastor's Wife is a social commentary which borders on the credibility of some religious leaders, and their treatment of family as opposed to the façade of chanting, “*It is well*” to cover up for lifestyles that lack integrity to hold such divine assignment and leadership role in the society. A sense of familiarity resonates within the audience members when they find observable everyday patterns reflected in the story. Either as Pastor David, who was gullible to internal desires (to carry his own baby) and susceptible to external pressure (from his mother who needed a grandchild) and cowed in at the expense of his once loving and united family. The themes explored are: fidelity, forgiveness and fostering formidable families. *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* is written by VickyBon Uzuazor (see photo in Figure 6). VickyBon was born on 20th May, 1989 in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Vicky studied script writing at Royal Arts Academy Lagos and has written over sixty scripts.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR AUDIENCE ENGINEERING IN THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

In the productions, *Beyond my Scars*, *The gods are not to Blame* and *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*, dedicated social media platforms were used to create awareness and gain patronage for live theatre productions. Dedicated use of social media engagements with prospective audiences through Facebook posts were made and virtual updates/



Figure 6. VickyBon Uzuazor – Scriptwriter. *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* (Source: Director's Collection, Pinnacle Theatre Production, 2023).

production information and invitations were posted at intervals by the cast and crew members of the production team. The presence of clusters of people in virtual social circles especially on Facebook, WhatsApp, X (formerly known as Twitter), TikTok, Instagram, Snap chat and YouTube made it easy for publicly posted information to reach the target audience (see Figure 12).

These social media platforms also helped the virtual audience members to leave comments as they followed the progress of *Beyond my Scars* (2019), *The gods are not to Blame* (2021) and *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* (2023) went live on Facebook from different locations. The hybrid production was aired live on stage and assumed a virtual live on Facebook, which drew delayed viewership from other places around the globe. To initiate, develop and coordinate all the work involved in a theatrical production,

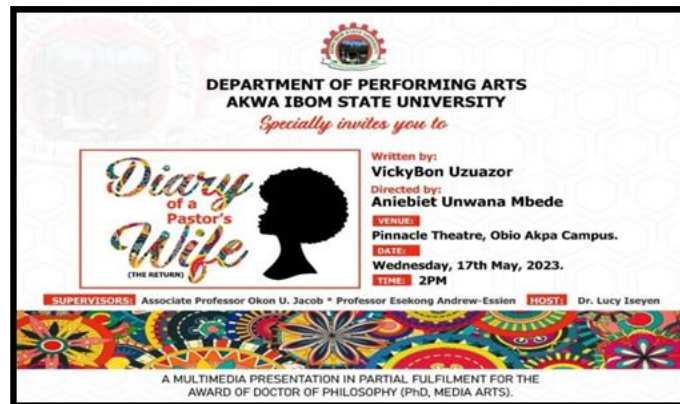


Figure 7. Online Invitation Material for *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* (Source: Director's Fieldwork, Design by Saviola Digital Solutions).

to say the least, is tasking; to lift a performance from its linear sequence to an experimental format involving multimedia is more tasking. The use of traditional media like the Radio News, Jingles, Television announcements and the printing of production fliers was replaced by the use of digital technologies to reach audiences. The new media system of information dissemination for audience engineering was achieved through the following methods:

Use of Short Message Services (SMS)

This feature uses internet enabled devices to send out invitational and promotional messages to a large number of people at the same time. An account is created on computer software with a connection to a web browser. For instance, in *Beyond My Scars* The Bulk SMS Web and eBulk SMS were selected and activated and bulk messages (SMS) were sent using hyperlinks to select the target audience, especially around the location of the production. The list of phone numbers was uploaded and the mass text was crafted and sent out to the public around the vicinity of the production (Uyo and Abak precisely). The audience response shows that 15% of audience members were reached through this medium in *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* (2023).

Use of Podcasts

In *The gods are not to Blame*, Daniel Kpodoh engaged the use of podcasts as part of the strategic multimedia platform used to engage the cast and crew members before the production, to raise awareness for the multimedia production in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. In a pre-production podcast, the multimedia director promotes the classic show, sharing information on schedules, ticket links, and special offers to drive sales and fill seats. The

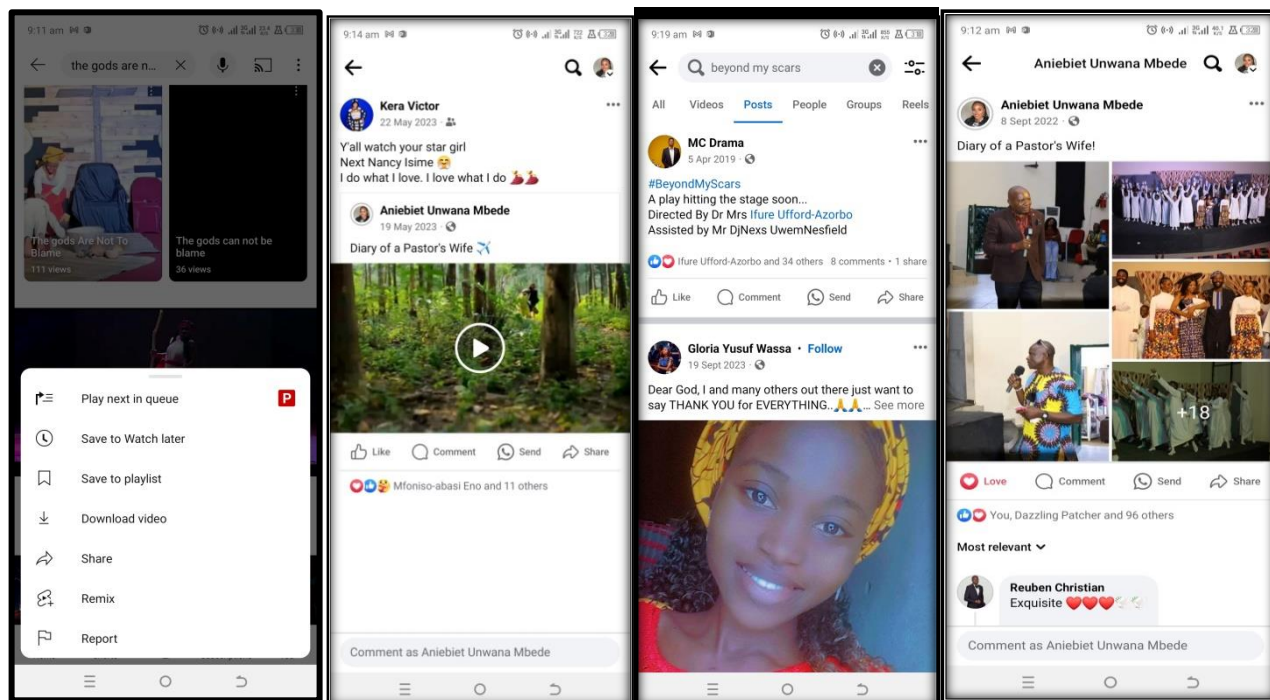
result of engaging with live and delayed audiences is reflected in response to comments, answers to questions in the comments section, and encouraging feedback to build a loyal community that will patronise the production.

Use of Content Shoot

In *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*, the production engaged a total of eighty-six (86) content shoots with a variety of graphic designs, illustrations and photos of cast profiling posted on social media platforms to engage audiences (see Figure 7). These contents were intentionally crafted to get audiences interested and then committed to coming to the theatre to see the multimedia production. This hyper-digital activity connecting to the trends and creating a posting schedule was undertaken by the cast and crew members at specific intervals. Also, engagement contests and giveaways were instituted to encourage engagement and drive ticket sales from the 86 cast members to the online community.

Participatory content

The publicity team of the production *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* made use of Questions and Answers (Q&As) on multiple social media platforms and giveaways to participatory engagers in the online conversation. Recharge Vouchers, Tickets for the Show and free meals were won as the users, liked, commented on and shared the posts. This user-friendly slant is arranged with the intention to widen the reach and as such it becomes easier to sell tickets on these platforms. This engagement created Buzz Online by sharing engaging content (See Figure 9), behind-the-scenes photo insights, and sneak peeks to generate excitement and anticipation of the production.



Figures 8, 9, 10 and 11. Screen shots of online promotion and production review on Facebook (Source: facebook.com/Pinnacle Theatre Productions).

Leverage Facebook pages and WhatsApp groups

Apart from individual team members sharing the production fliers online, the social media committee created a group on Facebook for the production, *Beyond my Scars* by Ifure Ufford-Azorbo, PhD helped the production to connect with audiences, share updates, and foster discussions relevant to the subject matter, which is Female Genital Mutilation. Collaborating with online influencers (see Figure 10) with large followers on Facebook to share on their 'Facebook Stories' further drives the conversation on their handles, using the hashtags #beyondmyscars the director theatre enthusiasts to reach wider audiences.

The cast and crew members updated the production fliers on their WhatsApp statuses which would run for twenty four (24) hours before it disappeared and the process repeated.

Use of YouTube channels

Share short videos, interviews, and behind-the-scenes footage to engage audiences and promote shows, the teams made use of Reels. The productions deployed authentic video content, iconic monologues and behind-the-scenes activities and artists profiles to give production information and also create a 'production vibe'. These

short length reels, captures the minds of prospective theatre goers in the humour, framing, lighting, video and audio quality of the performance. This technique was deployed in Daniel Kpodoh's presentation of *The gods are not to Blame* (see Figure 8).

Monitor analytics

This strategy was used in tracking the engagement metrics to understand audience preference to attend the production in person or online. This helped the production team to set up a live streaming platform where the activities on stage are recorded live, can be viewed by online engagers across the globe and can also be retrieved for documentation and future reference purposes. Share Reviews and Testimonials: Highlight positive feedback and reviews to build credibility and attract new audiences (see Figure 11).

CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA APPLICATION TO LIVE THEATRE THE NIGERIAN THEATRE MILIEU

Navigating the changing theatre environment as the field has experienced a transformation in lieu of the new era of digital devices. According to Duro Oni, "the viability of the theatre was not in dispute until the emergence the

Nigerian video industry, hence the need for the repackaging of theatrical productions by paying more attention to and creatively navigate the design and technology aspects of the production (1)". However, this navigation of live streaming comes with its attendant challenges in the procurement, hiring or even handling of technical devices like interactive whiteboards, laser beam projectors, touch screen computers, three-dimensional sets, animation and robotic projects. The hybridisation of art forms to a scientific (technical) turf via the application of new media to live theatre creates new opportunities for expressing ideas, but with recorded challenges to be surmounted by the twenty-first-century theatre practitioner.

The following challenges were recorded from the productions under review. This study supports the notion that the budding experimentalist should expect streaks of expected barriers or strokes of technical glitches to surmount when a new media approach is envisioned for any production. With the integration of new media channels into theatre productions, new junctures of performances have emerged as experimented in virtual and live characters presented simultaneously on stage and through live streaming to online audiences. Theatre is changing fairly significantly and audience behaviour has dramatically changed with equal and newer trends becoming entrenched into theatre practice. The use of social media clearly deepened the theatrical experience in the cases under review and was used effectively in its function as an agent of change in society, leaning in on the role of technology and media in creating and enhancing dramatic presentations that are spectacular in delivery. In *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*, as well as, *Beyond my Scars* and *The gods are not to Blame*, the tickets were sold out before the show and the audience engaged in the process of the production with rapt attention. According to Jennifer Ogunkojo, "the production can be judged successful by the intensity of the audience experience" (197).

The productions under review deployed High Definition Video (HDV) cameras to capture images and record videos through computer laptop channels projected to large screens confirming that this is an era for collaborative art, using multimedia. However, other techniques are required for designing interactive multimedia in which content influences the design, and more importantly, helps the designer to create interactive scenery that will enhance the message of the production. Therefore, the productions borrow a variety of techniques. Holistically, the techniques include "more than one medium of communication, artistic expression and designating or relating to applications which incorporate a number of media such as text, still images, audio, video, and animation, especially interactively" (Derrida 54). For the productions, equipment like High Definition Video Cameras, Digital Photo cameras, MP3 players, Camcorders, Tripod Stands, Projector Screens, Computer Laptops with Adobe



Figure 12. Logo showing social media online promotional Applications Twitter, WhatsApp, Yahoo mail, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram (Source: www.google.com).

Premiere Pro CSS editing software, ULead Video 3D After Effect., Television monitors, Sound Mixer, Large Woofer Speakers, Amplifiers, Microphones, Banana Cables and Compacts Disk Plates were used. The assemblage of these ideas and structures also required technical skills to enhance the audio-visual quality of the performances under review.

To initiate, develop and coordinate all the work involved in a theatrical production, to say the least, is tasking; to lift a perform from its linear sequence to an experimental format involving the use of new media technology is more tasking. The following challenges are recorded from the productions under review and readily provide a streak of expected barriers to surmount when a new media approach is envisioned for any production.

Mobilization and technical challenges

Theatre as a place of seeing art and an art form thrives before audience members. "As an art which the public views, theatre is a basic nature of man's means of expressing his internal perceptions of life." (Ayakoroma and Obafemi 2). Oscar Brockett identifies theatre as, "a complex art which has not only undergone many changes that have followed 'diverse paths' (2). It is worthy of note that the fusion of technology to theatre has become one of such necessary paths theatre practice must follow for increased audience patronage. This is the premise on which the experimentation with social media as an apparatus for finding and retaining audiences to live theatre is predicated.

In lieu of this, the task of finding cast and crew members who have the devices and skill set to 'create a buzz' online becomes a challenging factor as there are factors to be considered. One of such factors is the need for data (internet) subscription to be online to engage was one of

the limited resources available to the team, as the contest had to be completed within a stipulated time. The rigours of commenting on every potential audience member's comment, sharing and emoji reactions stretched team members beyond the conventional medium of production participation. The application of social media in contemporary theatre is dependent on the availability of equipment, the technical skill of the production team and their understanding of the medium. The select productions ran on a minimal budget, hence there was a need for prudent management of resources. The venues for the final presentation of two of the productions (*The gods are not to Blame and Beyond my Scars*) were not originally built to accommodate such technical presentations. The architecturally deficient Model Theatre Studio, with the limitations of rigging and fly system to a high degree, altered the design concept of the productions, making for multi-improvisations.

The quotation for technical and artistic requirements for *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* though tasking on the lean financial budget of the researcher, threw the crew into a search for partnership funding strategy as measures to achieve an excellent production within the limited financial resource. The following partners took interest and sponsored the multimedia aspects of the production: Hangers Supermarket, Uyo, World Changers Community, Amazing Pot, Dazzling Patcher Fashion Hub and Bush House, Nigeria.

The filmic projections and popular music interjections created a symphonic aura for the production. This validates the outcome of the presentation because they can be relied on to underscore the differences between theatre as it was, and theatre as it is and will be with the application of multimedia. This brings to fore the need for theatre practitioners to experiment using theatre in innovative ways to win patronage as the technology itself continues to evolve. This study explores the evolution of contemporary theatre in lieu with multimedia exploration of experimental theatrical diversities. The following findings were made:

1. There is a growing significant correlation between the use of social media in theatre productions and audience patronage in the Nigeria Theatre Milieu.
2. The communicative and aesthetic qualities of productions are meaningfully improved by the use of emergent technologies in theatre production.
3. There is a significant difference between productions that infuse social media activities in the production process and traditional stage presentations.
4. The integration of social engagement into live theatre motivates contemporary audiences to go see live productions in the Nigerian theatre milieu.
5. Innovative theatre conventions significantly contribute to the acceptance of theatre productions in a digitalized artistic world.

In articulating the creative trends and innovative trajectories that can woo and sustain audiences' interest, it is observed that more conscious efforts should be exerted by practitioners of performing arts to engage the use of social media for the aesthetic assemblage of new and digital flavoured performances - especially in the twenty-first century. Foremost Nigerian theatre technologist, Molinta Enendu's establishes this practice with J.P Clark's *The Raft* (staged at the University of Calabar Theatre). Enendu's experiment confirms that, the use of technology in theatre has become indispensable in the digital age. Enendu creatively places the ambiance of the play on a floating raft throughout the duration of the production. According to Theatre Design and Technology expert, Esekong Andrew-Essien, "Enendu sees the play as profoundly challenging, in drawing the designer's creative energy. The designer depended on the technology of optical projection from the *Patt 252* projector lanterns to achieve water upon which the raft floated and relied on projected sound to simulate running water" (401). This kind of techno-performance presents a fresh dimension of theatrical production that can easily go viral and cause a buzz across social media platforms. This will become a springboard, which is essential for the growth and sustenance of the nation's creative and economic development. On this premise, it is safe to conclude that, productions which engage social media have more reach and influencing effects on audience members, thus it makes productions more appealing with the potency to draw audiences to patronise live theatre in Nigeria. This exploration reveals the yearning of theatre productions to embrace multidisciplinary collaborations, especially with futuristic aspects of technological innovations to improve stagecraft. As Duro Oni aptly states, "in the twenty first century, theatre is merely surviving extinction - owing to the influx of an assortment of electronic sources of entertainment" (19). This study identifies that the intentional structuring of contemporary productions through the use of social media as a digital and creative tool in the production processes of live theatre improves the communicative value of stage productions to survive extinction and thrive in the digital age.

This paper submits that, the use of social media should be engaged as tooling measures adopted in the production processes to increase the communicative value of productions in creating exceptional theatre experiences for twenty-first century audience members. Through the creative use of multimedia equipment, there is an overt possibility to achieve extraordinary aesthetic possibilities in creating an appealing performance environment capable of satisfying new audiences, both in its modes of presentation and reception in the Nigerian theatre milieu. Evaluating the audience responses to the select multimedia productions namely: VickyBon Uzuazor's *Diary of a Pastors Wife*, Daniel Kpodoh's direction of Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to Blame* and Ifure Ufford-

Azorbo's presentation of *Beyond my Scars*, the enthusiastic audience response to underscores theatre's capacity keep audiences yearning to see multimedia productions in the Nigerian theatre milieu.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, technology as a driver that moves and nurtures the engine of human advancement has moved through to transpose other fields of human endeavours to meta-life, the nature and demands of post-postmodern theatre are stimulated by the use of multimedia elements in theatre practice. The way of thinking and the evolution of industry and technology usually affects every philosophy of life in that era. Artwork will reflect on ever-changing thinking and technology. The study is momentous for the survival of theatre as an art form in the age of new communication technology, hence exploring the potential of multimedia techno-performances to reach to new generation of audiences. In all, this paper recommends the creative and consistent use of social media platforms; not just as a streak of trend, but as standard protocol for contemporary performances.

This digital competence provides new ways to get the message across to audiences in images, audio, video, textual and animated form, sharing ideas, conveying feelings and disseminating information in a creative module. In light of the forgoing, it is safe to submit that, the constant engagement of social media platforms to theatre productions improves the aesthetic and communicative value of the performance, which in turn attracts audiences to patronise live theatre productions as a global best practice that should be holistically adopted in the Nigerian Theatre Milieu.

Recommendations

Having discovered that creative industries need not depend on analogue and traditional tools of information dissemination, there should be a suitable infrastructural and structural transition in the infusion of digital art to ensure compatibility to international levels in terms of technical training and provision of equipment in the theatre, in a manner that brings the greatest benefits to the greatest number of people.

- The world has evolved in the use of technology and is in a digital era. There should be a policy for theatre practitioners (Scriptwriters, Actors, Artistic Directors and Technical Directors) to learn and be acquainted with the use of new media technologies to intentionally create and disseminate artistic messages in the production of stage plays, in a way that appeals to twenty-first-century audiences. Hence, the structure of

contemporary productions in the use of multimedia as a digital and creative tool in the production processes to improve the aesthetic quality and communicative value of stage productions.

- The use of social media options should be engaged as a tooling measure in the production processes (pre-production, production and post-production) phases to increase the communicative value of productions in creating exceptional theatre experiences for twenty-first-century audience members.
- Theatre practitioners should deepen the study of online applications and how they function as agents of storytelling, learning the role of technology and media in creating and enhancing theatrical works in the live theatre through the use of multimedia to win audience interest to patronise live theatre.
- Practical experiments and training on the application of multimedia to live theatre should be encouraged by introducing new media technology-related courses into the theatre studies curriculum. This is to link these multimedia collectivities to mainstream theatre, in its study curriculum in tertiary institutions to train creative/theatre artists that they can have a firm footing and relevance in futuristic theatre expressions in society.

In conclusion, emphasis should be given to industry collaborations and effective training and capacity development in the area of theatre media and technology for better economic sustainability for theatre practice. Further research and exploitation of human and technological resources should be encouraged by all stakeholders, especially in the use of social media in the Nigerian Theatre Milieu.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Andrew-Essien, Esekong. "Theatre design and technology in an age of postmodernism". *Theatre and Media in the Third Millennium*. Eddelji, Liwhu Betiang & Esekong Andrew-Essien (eds.) Kraft, 2017.
- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. (3rd ed.) Routledge, 2023.
- Ayakoroma, Barclays and Obafemi, Olu (eds.). *Perspectives on Cultural Administration in Nigeria*. Kraft Books Limited, 2011
- Azorbor, Ifure Ufford. *Beyond My Scars*. University of Uyo Publication, 2019.
- Brockett, Oscar. *The Essential Theatre* (5th ed.) Harcourt Brace: Jovanovich Publishers, 1992.
- Davis, Fred, Granić, Andrina and Marangunić, Nikola. *The Technology Acceptance Model: 30 Years of TAM (Human-Computer Interaction Series)*. Springer, 2023.

- Derrida, Jaques. *Videor*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Di Gangi, Paul and Wasko, Molly. Social Media Engagement Theory: Exploring the Influence of User Engagement on Social Media Usage. *Journal of Organizational and End User Computing (JOEUC)* Vol. 28, No. 2. Pp. 53-73.
- Enendu, Molinta. "The Development of Technical Theatre Practice in Nigeria: The Role of Duro Oni". 2012. Toyinfalola.com. 12 August, 2016.
- Jacob, Okon Udofof. "New Control Technology in Stage Lighting Theatre Development in Nigeria". Department of Theatre Arts, University of Calabar. Unpublished PhD Thesis, 2000.
- Johnson, Effiong. *Vision Towards a Mission: The Art of Interpretative Directing*. Concept Publications, 2003.
- Kpodoh, Daniel and Olatunji, Olalekan. Playwriting: Therapies and Prophecies, Finding Meanings in Ogunkojo, Jennifer. "Nigerian Theatre Audience and Calabar Carnival Floats". *Nigeria's Theatre and Drama: Audiences, Communities and Constituencies. A Festschrift in honour of Professor John Sani Illah*. (Tor J. Iorapuu and Festus O. Idoko eds.). Jos University Press, 2019.
- Mbede, Aniebiet. *Social Media and the Evolution of the Fifth Estate of the Realm*. 2nd Calabar International Conference of Theatre and Media, Book of Abstracts, 2019.
- Nwamuo, Chris. *Theatre Audience Engineering in Nigeria: Paradigm and Syntagm*. Inaugural Lecture, University of Calabar, Nigeria. University of Calabar Press. March, 2006.
- Ola Rotimi's. *The gods are not to Blame*. Port Harcourt Journal of History and Diplomatic Studies. Vol. 9, No.1 pp. 63.
- Oni, Duro. "Toward the Development of Theatre Practice: The Design/Technology Dimension". *Nigerian Theatre Journal: A Journal of the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artistes*, 2005. Vol. 4, No. 1. pp 154-161.
- Pandey, Sujata and Pandey, Manoj. *Multimedia: System, Technology and Communication*. S.K. Kararia Publications, 2009.
- Rogers, Everett. *Diffusion of Innovations*. Free Press of Glencoe, 1962.
- Rotimi, Ola. *The gods are not to Blame*. Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Uzuazor, VickyBon. *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*. Bon Fictions, 2019.

NOTE: The reference style is MLA based on authors request.