

THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN NIGERIA'S THEATRE AND FILM EVENTS

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Abstract

In today's digital era, the widespread impact of social media has profoundly altered the way people communicate, entertain, and engage with audiences. Nevertheless, the level of effectiveness with which social media stimulates engagement in theatrical and film events, specifically within Nigeria's rapidly growing film industry (Nollywood), has not been thoroughly examined. This study aims to investigate the diverse effects of social media on audience engagement and participation in theatre and film events within Nigeria's vibrant cultural scene. Given Nollywood's increasing global prominence, it is crucial to investigate how social media influences audience experiences. The study adopted Uses and Gratification theory. This study employed the survey approach of the quantitative research methodology by creating a multi-variety questionnaire to answer the research questions and satisfy the set objectives. This study focused on social media users as the target population, recognizing the significant role social media plays in shaping audience engagement and participation in theatrical and film events in Nigeria's Nollywood industry. The population of interest comprised individuals who utilize social media platforms and have an interest in theatre and film events in Nigeria. By targeting social media users, this study aimed to investigate the diverse effects of social media on audience engagement and participation in Nigeria's vibrant cultural scene. This study utilized a quantitative research methodology, employing a survey approach to collect data from both primary and secondary sources. A questionnaire was designed to gather information, with questions formulated to align with the research objectives. This survey design enabled the collection of data to address the research questions and achieve the study's goals. Findings of this research show that social media is a very important source of information for people who are interested in theatre and film events in Nigeria. The study, nevertheless, advised artists and producers to continue to utilize the social media as a means to market their work and engage with their fans.

Keywords: Social Media, Audience Engagement, Participation, Film Events, Social Media Advertising.

Introduction

Social media has fundamentally transformed how audiences experience and participate in theatre and film events in Nigeria. Nigeria's film industry, Nollywood, has witnessed remarkable growth and international recognition, making it the second-largest film industry globally. As Nigerian theaters and film events flourish, social media platforms provide unprecedented opportunities to connect with audiences, promote artistic projects, and cultivate a sense of community.

Theatre and film events are not just entertainment in Nigeria; they serve as a platform for storytelling, social commentary, and celebrating their rich cultural heritage. Traditionally, Nigerian audiences are known for their lively participation, from enthusiastic cheers and call-and-response dialogues with performers during live theatre to passionate discussions following film screenings. Social media platforms amplify this inherent audience participation, creating online spaces for pre-event buzz, discussions, and extending the experience beyond the physical event.

These digital platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, have become integral components of the Nigerian entertainment landscape, transforming the dynamics of marketing, publicity, and audience interaction. The rise of social media has had a profound impact on the theatre and film industries in Nigeria. It has changed the way audiences perceive and engage with these events, and it has also created new opportunities for artists and producers.

In the past, people who wanted to find out about theatre and film events in Nigeria had to rely on word of mouth or traditional media, such as newspapers and magazines. However, social media has made it much easier for people to find out about these events. They can now simply follow artists and producers on social media, or join groups and pages dedicated to theatre and film events. Additionally, social media has made it easier for audiences to engage with theatre and film events. They can now comment on social media posts, ask questions during live streams, or even participate in virtual programmes. These features have led to a more interactive and engaging experience for audiences and it has also helped to create a sense of community around these events.

Scholars have recognized the significant role of social media in transforming the dynamics of audience engagement and participation. According to Jenkins (2020), "Social media has become the new virtual stage, empowering both creators and audiences to connect and collaborate like never before." This highlights how social media platforms provide a virtual space for audiences to actively engage with theatre and film events, thereby blurring the lines between offline and online experiences.

The advancement in technology has been the reason for the emergence of social media platforms for sharing, advertising and uploading films events. Cote (2012) as cited in Oluyi (2023) averred that the new media is any media from newspaper articles and blogs to music and podcast that are delivered digitally. Moreover, the increasing accessibility and popularity of social media platforms have attracted a diverse range of audiences and expanded the reach of theatre and film events. As stated by Boyd (2014), "Social media has democratized cultural participation, allowing individuals from various socio-economic backgrounds to access and contribute to the theatre and film industry." This implies that social media has the potential to bridge gaps in audience diversity and foster inclusivity in Nigeria's theatre and film events.

Overview of Nigeria's Movie Events

The history of cinema in Nigeria commenced on August 12, 1903, with the restricted commercial screening of the documentary "Coronation of King Edward VII at Westminster" at the Captain Memorial Hall in Lagos. It marked the first-ever film exhibition in Nigeria. Film had recently gained popularity worldwide in the same year, and the British colonial masters introduced it to their colonies as a means of spreading their ideologies. Edwin S. Porter's silent film, "The Great Train Robbery," released in the same year, laid the foundation for Film Noir.

In 1904, film exhibitors like Mr. Balboa and European merchants were invited to Nigeria by Mr. Herbert Macaulay, a prominent nationalist advocating for independence. The film "Aleke of Abeokuta" was exhibited with great excitement among the audience. The Nigerian government's success in using film for public enlightenment led to the adoption of film as a propaganda strategy. In 1931, Mobile Film Units (MFU) were created to produce documentary films based on real-life events in the country.

On August 12, 1903, the documentary "Coronation of King Edward VII at Westminster" was screened in the Captain Memorial Hall in Lagos, marking the beginning of film in Nigeria. The silent film "The Great Train Robbery," which is regarded as one of the first in the film noir genre, was released by Edwin S. Porter in the same year, 1903. The colonial masters quickly started showing this film in other regions of the country due to the technological breakthrough that captivated people in Nigeria.

The Nigerian government started using movies as a propaganda tool in 1931. They developed mobile movie theaters that toured the nation playing movies that supported the agenda of the ruling party. These movies frequently drew inspiration from actual occasions, such the 1937 anti-plague effort. The Federal Film Unit (FFU) replaced the Colonial Film Units (CFU) following World War II. A group of Nigerians were dispatched by the FFU to Ghana to receive filmmaking training. The first generation of Nigerian filmmakers was formed when these trainees returned home.

"Fincho," the first Nigerian feature film, was created by Sam Zebba in 1958. This movie was both critically and financially successful, and it paved the path for the growth of the Nigerian film industry. A new generation of Nigerian film makers developed in the 1970s. Films by these directors, like Eddy Ugbomah, were more artistically and intellectually ambitious than those that came before them.

The Structural Adjustment Program (SAP)'s inception in 1985 had a detrimental effect on the Nigerian film industry. The declining value of the Nigerian naira made it challenging for film makers to buy equipment. But the SAP also aided in the growth of the Nigerian video film sector. The creation of video films by soap opera producers started in the late 1980s. These movies gained popularity fast since they were less expensive than movies in theaters. The motion picture "Living in Bondage" by Kenneth Nnebue was released in 1992. The success of this movie contributed to the development of the Nigerian video film industry.

Nollywood, often known as the Nigerian video film industry, has expanded quickly in recent years. Films from Nollywood are currently made in many different languages and released globally. The Nigerian film industry has, however, undoubtedly advanced significantly in recent years. Nollywood is already a significant player in the international film business, and it will undoubtedly keep expanding in the years to come.

Influence of Social Media on Audience

Social media usage in Nigeria has seen a significant surge over the past decade, transforming the country's social landscape and communication patterns. Social media platforms played a pivotal role in this digital revolution, enabling Nigerians to connect, share information, and engage with a global audience. Facebook remains the most popular social media platform in Nigeria, boasting millions of active users. It serves as a primary avenue for connecting with friends and family, sharing updates, and consuming news and entertainment content. Twitter also gained massive popularity, especially among the country's tech-savvy youths. The platform became a hub for discussions on social, political, and cultural issues, leading to the coining of the term "Twitter NG" to refer to the Nigerian Twitter community. Instagram, Snapchat, and WhatsApp have also experienced significant growth in Nigeria. Instagram is especially popular among influencers, celebrities, and businesses, who use the platform to showcase their lifestyle, products, and services. WhatsApp has emerged as a vital communication tool, with many Nigerians using it for personal and business messaging, as well as for sharing media files and creating group chats. The influence of social media in Nigeria extends beyond personal connections and entertainment. It has played a crucial role in shaping public opinion, political discourse, and activism. During elections and times of social unrest, platforms like Twitter have become avenues for citizens to voice their opinions, organize protests, and mobilize support for various causes.

Social media's recent emergence has profoundly changed our daily lives, transforming the ways in which we interact with one another, share information, and engage in various forms of entertainment. The technology revolution has not spared Nigeria's theater and film events, since social media has had a significant impact on audience involvement and participation in these cultural endeavors.

Smith (2015) claims that social media has caused a paradigm shift in audience involvement by providing forums for people to freely voice their thoughts, share their experiences, and engage in conversation with performers and other audience members. This increased degree of participation has been facilitated by the simplicity of access and the ability to interact with others who share similar interests. According to Johnson (2018), social media sites like Twitter and Facebook have created online communities where fans of theater and movies can debate, rate, and recommend performances, fostering a sense of community and common interests.

Additionally, a study by Ogunleye et al. (2016) found that social media makes it possible to provide real-time input before, during, and after theater and cinema events. Performers and organizers can evaluate audience reactions, modify their approaches, and improve subsequent productions thanks to this immediate feedback loop. According to Thompson (16), who emphasizes how fan communities have developed as a result of social media's interactive nature, these groups are crucial for generating and maintaining interest in Nigeria's theater and film events.

Beyond audience engagement, social media has a big impact on audience participation in Nigerian theater and film events. Okonkwo (2021) asserts that social media platforms have democratized information access and ticket sales, making it simpler for people to find and attend shows. According to Nwosu (2016), who emphasizes how social media has dismantled boundaries and broadened the reach of Nigeria's theater and film events beyond traditional audiences, this greater accessibility, has led to a more varied audience base.

Social media's inception and explosive expansion have changed many facets of contemporary society, including the entertainment sector. The growth of social media platforms has had a notable impact on theatrical and film events in Nigeria. Through this literature study, we want to investigate the impact of social media on audience participation and attendance at these events. We seek to comprehend how social media has altered the dynamics of audience engagement, event promotion, and the general expansion of the nation's entertainment industry via these digital platforms by analyzing pertinent studies and scholarly papers.

Nigeria has seen rapid development in smart-phone and internet use over the past ten years, which has fueled a rise in social media usage. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp are now commonplace in the daily lives of millions of Nigerians. Hadley points out that the internet has changed from being a static database to a dynamic, democratic communication medium as a result of social media, enabling all users to be both content consumers and producers (2016). This phenomenon creates hitherto unimaginable opportunities for theater professionals, viewers, and the general public to collaborate on shaping and interpreting theatrical performances (Hadley 2016).

In summary, Hadley emphasizes how social media gives everyone the freedom to create theater content on their own or interact with others' works, solidifying its status as a platform that encourages theatrical expression. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and more recently, TikTok, are some of the most popular options among Nigerian users out of the broad landscape of social media platforms.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of social media in the twenty-first century because it has ushered in a time of "global village" where connectivity knows no boundaries. It goes beyond the restrictions of the Web 1.0 static internet platform, which only permitted one-way information reception. Social media, on the other hand, has developed into a really interactive and interesting medium. The distinction between creators and recipients is becoming hazier today since consumers and producers can engage directly (Omoera and Guanah 2016). Its transformational nature has given rise to the term "Web 2.0."

Particularly in Nigeria, Facebook has ingrained itself and is now widely known, even among non-users. Its prominence as the most commonly used social media network is widely acknowledged by researchers (Dolan 21; Hadley 32; Krishna et al. 2675; Alidu 147; Ehiemua and Omoera 2019). Its widespread influence is a reflection of how social media is playing a larger role in influencing public opinion and participation in a variety of cultural and creative fields, including the thriving Nigerian theater industry.

Social media has not only changed how viewers view and interact with theater and cinema events, but it has also given producers and artists new chances. They previously relied on traditional media to promote their work, but social media now gives them the opportunity to reach a considerably larger audience. Their work has been seen and heard more widely thanks to this enhanced exposure, which has also created new opportunities for networking and collaboration.

In conclusion, the theater and film industries in Nigeria have been significantly impacted by social media. It has changed how people engage with and participate in these events, and it has given producers and artists new ways to engage with audiences and present their work. In the upcoming years, social media's impact on these businesses is projected to become even greater as it develops.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study is anchored on Uses and Gratifications Theory. The Uses and Gratifications Theory also called Needs and Gratifications Theory is a model that focuses on why people use certain media rather than on the content. Uses and Gratifications theory was propounded by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler and Micahel Gurevitch in 1974. According to Daniel (2020), the uses and gratifications model posits that audience members have certain needs or drives that are satisfied by using both non-media and media sources.

This approach focuses on what people do with the media rather than what the media do to people. Okunna (2017) says uses and gratifications theory is concerned with the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of mass media or other sources, and which leads to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities) resulting in need gratification and other consequence, mostly unintended ones. One of the tenets of the uses and gratifications theory is that audiences are active, and they seek to find out the mass media that satisfy their gratifications. The Internet has enabled audience to find and also have more options from which they are able to select the websites and web pages that satisfy their specific needs. The Internet also allows audiences to be in more control of the media.

Ruggiero (2019) claims that the deregulation of the media and the convergence of the mass media and digital technology, have changed the number of times and ways people are exposed to the media. New media give their users more choice and possibilities to enjoy and use media. While using the new media, people are actively combining several motives to fulfill their yearnings and aspirations, properly referred to as gratifications.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory provides a valuable lens for understanding media use in today's complex landscape. By recognizing audiences as active agents seeking specific gratifications, it helps us understand why people choose certain media and how these choices fulfill their social, psychological, and informational needs. In an era of constant media innovation, this theory remains a relevant framework for analyzing how audiences navigate the ever-expanding media environment.

Methodology

This study employed the survey approach of the quantitative research methodology. The study utilized survey design, where a questionnaire was employed to collect data. The questions were derived from the research objectives. Population of the study was drawn from a group on Facebook named RANT with active members of over two million followers. The sample size of 300 was drawn from the populace using the Taro Yamani formula. It is a formula used to determine the sample size for a given population to ensure that the sample is representative. This formula helps researchers determine the minimum sample size required to achieve a certain level of accuracy in their results.

Copies of the questionnaire were shared on the Facebook page and the questionnaire was distributed via online using the Google forms. A total of 280 copies were filled and submitted successfully online. Data generated was analyzed using a simple percentage tables.

Data Presentation

Table 1: Gender of Respondent

Gender	No of Respondents	Percentage
Male	135	47%
Female	150	53%
Total	285	100

Analysis in table 1 shows that 47 percent of the respondents are male while 53 percent of the respondents are female. It shows that the majority of the respondents are female.

Table 2: Age of Respondent

lassification	No of Respondents	Percentage
18-25	95	34%
25-35	75	26%
35-45	60	21%
45 years above	55	19%
Total	285	100

Table 2 indicates that those in the age range of 18-25 years are the majority of the respondents. Age 25-35 had 26%, 35-45 had 21% while 45 above had 19%.

Table 3: Frequent use of social media platforms

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Daily	190	67%
Weekly	55	19%
Monthly	35	12%
Less frequency	5	2%
Total	285	100

Going by the analysis in table 3, its shows that 67 percent of the respondents use social media daily, 19 percent use social media weekly, 12 percent use social media monthly while 2 percent use social media once in a while.

Table 4: Social media platforms usage patterns.

Classification	No of Respondents	Percentage
Facebook	100	35%
Whatsapp	90	32%
Twitter	35	12%
Instagram	40	14%
Telegram	20	7%
Total	285	100

Based on the data in table 4, 35 percent of the respondents chose Facebook as their often used social media platform. 32 percent chose whatsapp, 14 percent chose instagram, 12 percent chose twitter while 7 percent choose telegram.

Table 5: If respondents have ever come across theatre and film events promotion on social media.

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	265	93%
No	16	6%
Maybe	4	1%
Total	285	100

From table 5 data, 265 respondents have come across promotions and advertisements of theater and film events on social media making a total of 93%. Respondents that have not come across theater and film events promotions on social media had 6 percent while respondents that are not sure if they have come across theatre and film events promotion on social media had 1%.

Table 6: How likely to attend a theatre and film events based on social media promotions.

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Likely	235	82%
Most likely	32	11%
Unlikely	4	7%
Total	285	100

Analysis in table 6 shows that 82 percent of the respondents are likely to attend theatre and film events show based on social media promotion. While 11 percent revealed that they were most likely to attend and 7 percent indicated that they were unlikely to attend.

Table 7: Purchasing a ticket for a theatre or film events through social media platforms.

Responses	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	203	71%
No	67	24%
Maybe	15	5%
Total	285	100

In table 7, the data presented shows that 71 percent of the respondents confirmed that they have purchased tickets for theatre and film events through social media. 24 percent stated that have not while 5 percent of the respondents expressed uncertainty.

Table 8: Audience engagement with theatre and film events on social media

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	242	85%
No	43	15%
Total	285	100

Table 8 data shows that 85% of respondents answered affirmatively, while 15% of the respondents stated no.

Table 9: Is social media platforms necessary for theatre and film artists?

Response	No of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	262	92%
No	23	8%
Total	285	100

From the analysis in table 9, 92% of the respondents strongly in support of artists to have a social media presence while 8% of the respondents disagree.

Discussion of Findings

In this research endeavor, the primary focus was to investigate the level of engagement that respondents experienced with theatre and film events through the influence of social media. The results presented a noteworthy revelation, as an overwhelming 82% of the respondents responded affirmatively, choosing “yes” to the proposition. This resounding majority indicates that social media has undeniably and positively impacted the way in which people engage with theatre and film events.

The findings of the research question indicate a strong and positive relationship between social media promotion and individuals' likelihood of attending theatre and film events. The substantial percentage of 82% of respondents expressing a positive inclination towards attending events based on social media promotion highlights the significant impact that social media has on attracting potential audiences and generating interest in entertainment activities.

One of the key implications of these findings is the effectiveness of social media as a promotional tool for theatre and film events. Social media platforms provide event organizers and promoters with a direct and efficient way to reach a wide audience. By leveraging various social media features such as targeted advertising and event pages, they can effectively engage with potential attendees and create a buzz around the events. The high percentage of respondents who indicated a likelihood of attending Theatre and film events based on social media promotion suggests that this form of promotion is highly successful in capturing the attention and interest of the target audience.

It is worth noting that social media promotion can be particularly impactful for reaching younger audiences. In today's digital age, younger generations are more active on social media platforms, making them more

accessible to promotional efforts conducted through these channels. By tailoring promotional content to suit the preferences and habits of younger audiences, event organizers can tap into this demographics' potential and boost attendance rates.

The implications derived from these findings are quite significant. They suggest that social media plays a pivotal role in enhancing the overall engagement and involvement of a substantial portion of respondents with theatre and film events. This connectivity fostered through social media platforms has the potential to revolutionize the entertainment industry.

By facilitating seamless interactions and providing a platform for discussions, social media proves itself as an invaluable tool in the realm of entertainment. The wide-reaching influence of social media enables more people to participate in discussions, share experiences, and actively participate in the excitement surrounding theatre and film events.

This effect underscores the importance of incorporating social media strategies into marketing and promotional efforts for theatre productions and film releases. The ability to tap into the vast network of social media users can significantly expand the reach of these events, drawing in audiences from diverse backgrounds and geographical locations. Moreover, the findings also hint at the democratizing nature of social media. It breaks down barriers that may have previously limited access to information about theatre and film events. Now, anyone with an internet connection and a social media presence can participate in the discourse, creating a sense of inclusivity and community within the entertainment sphere.

The research further explores the prevalence of using social media platforms for purchasing tickets to theatre and film events. By delving into this aspect, the study seeks to shed light on the popularity and effectiveness of social media as a ticket purchasing platform for entertainment events. Notably, an overwhelming majority of 71% of the respondents confirmed that they have indeed bought tickets through social media. This significant percentage clearly indicates that social media has attained widespread adoption as a preferred avenue for ticket transactions due to its inherent convenience, user-friendly nature, and easy accessibility. These findings underscore the immense relevance and influence of social media platforms within the ticketing industry, providing a seamless and accessible option for audiences to acquire tickets for their desired entertainment experiences.

Recommendations

This study recommends the following recommendations for theatre and film practitioners to maximize their online presence and engagement. These recommendations aim to enhance the visibility and appeal of theatre and film events, fostering a stronger online connection with audiences and promoting a thriving scene.

1. **Leverage Social Media Platforms:** Theatre and film practitioners should actively use popular social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube to promote their events. Engaging content, such as trailers, behind-the-scenes footage, and interactive posts, can help generate excitement and attract a broader audience.
2. **Creating Online Communities:** Establishing online groups or communities dedicated to discussing theatre and film events. These spaces can facilitate organic discussions, provide additional insights, and foster a sense of belonging among attendees.
3. **Responsible Usage:** Promoting responsible social media usage by addressing misinformation and online toxicity. Theatre and film practitioners can play a role in fostering positive online interactions and digital citizenship.
4. **Visual content** such as trailers, teasers, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and interviews with actors or performers can be highly effective in piquing the audience's curiosity and motivating them to attend the events. Interactivity, such as live Q&A sessions, polls, and interactive challenges, can also foster a sense of community and excitement among potential attendees.

Conclusion

This research sheds light on the significant impact of social media on audience engagement and participation in Nigeria's theatre and film events. The findings underscore the pivotal role of social media platforms in amplifying awareness, fostering interaction, and cultivating a sense of community among audiences. The ease of access and rapid dissemination of information through social media have revolutionized the way theatre and film events are promoted and experienced in Nigeria.

The study reveals that social media platforms have become powerful tools for audience involvement, encouraging active participation, and shaping their overall theatrical and cinematic experiences. Through the creation of online discussions, live updates, and interactive content, social media enables audiences to play a crucial role in shaping the narratives and success of theatre and film events.

Moreover, the research highlights the importance of content creation and tailored strategies for engaging different target demographics effectively. By understanding the preferences and behaviors of their audiences, theatre and film practitioners can harness the potentials of social media to create impactful and memorable experiences that resonate with the Nigerian audience.

However, while social media offers numerous advantages in enhancing audience engagement and participation, the research also underscores the need for thoughtful management and responsible usage. Addressing potential challenges, such as misinformation, online toxicity, and information overload, is vital to maintain a positive and inclusive digital environment for audience engagement.

Overall, the study emphasizes that social media's influence on audience engagement and participation in Nigeria's theatre and film events is undeniable. Embracing these digital platforms strategically and ethically can foster a vibrant and dynamic cultural landscape, enriching the connection between performers, creative's, and audiences alike. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, further research and adaptable approaches will be essential to fully capitalize on the potential of social media in shaping the future of theatre and film experiences in Nigeria.

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