

THE THEATRE MANAGER'S CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES TOWARDS SALVAGING THE THREAT OF LIVE THEATRE UNDER THE MOVIE INDUSTRY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Apparently, in our contemporary society, entertainment is predicated on accessibility of the medium and the channels with which its identity is commonly distributed and received by people in the society. In Nigeria, the film cinema and most importantly the movie industry has taken over the field of entertainment so much that, the earliest medium of the theatre known for live performances over the years has fast declined. People no longer patronize the live theatre complex performances at the times of performance. However, while they are there, they glue to their phones onto the social media platforms. Others discharge the need of going there at all. Hence, so many of these social media platforms are readily available with information of entertainment. This paper explored the difficulties faced by live theatre industry and the managers' approaches towards salvaging its threat to the movie industry. The origins are also discoursed and conclusions drawn to foster the link of development salvaging the problem in the country.

Keywords: Theatre Management/Manager, challenges, approaches, threat, movie industry.

Introduction

Basically, live performances of any kind (drama, songs, music and dance) in Nigeria have played a vital role in the socio-political and economic activities of the society. It involves an artistic expedition into the inner mind of people, their experience in words and in actions. It explores the natural endowment, having reactions with a face-to-face contact with the audience.

Live theatre x-rays life and presents it before the public (audience) and by its physical and direct contact with the performers-performance to the audience. The audience has a direct bearing of interaction and what they seem to hear, think and react positively or negatively to lies in the live experience received from the performance. In schools, churches, mosques, market places, funerals, political rallies and at various places of human endeavor, live theatre has fostered the skills, feelings and ideas behind policy making for nation building through the arts of theatre participation and performance.

The Origin in Brief

The idea behind live performance can be linked to the origins of theatrical performances of festivals, myths and rituals which are synonymous in history with every society for onward development which in the past where to appease the gods and, fear of the unknown.

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In Nigeria for instance, the art of live theatre performances began as a medium of public expression and communication in indigenous Nigerian cultures by different ethnic groups each with its style and pattern of performance. They were ceremonial art objectives of annual festivals valued within the ethnic groups for communication, entertainment and exposure of evil within such societies. One among the major festivals was the Yoruba egungen; which had a spiritual link between the living and the dead.

According to Brockett (1999):

The festival was performed annually at the beginning of the planting season. On the night before the festival, in an all night ceremony, sacrifices were offered and petition for blessings and prosperity were addressed to the dead in the sacred egungen grave (636).

These performances were later grouped under the indigenous theatre, popular travelling theatre and the literary theatre traditions. In view of this, the Alarinjo, and the Ogunde, Ladipo, Adejumo (Baba Sala) and a host of their theatre performances occurred in organized places referred to as travelling theatre even though, were tagged travelling theatre troupe's, places where they performed were identified and audiences go there to watch at those stipulated times of event live and direct.

Accordingly, the ancient Greek theater in Egypt, (www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk/oxyrhynchus/theatre.html) puts that;

European theatre traces its roots to ancient Greek theatre, with architectural, literary and religious presence. From the fifth century BC, ancient Greek cities staged tragedies, comedies or short satyr plays composed specially for dramatic performance in specific festivals (religious times) and in specific theatres (religious civic architecture), with fixed conventions for main characters, chorus, manner of delivery, plot. However, there is no Ptolemaic theatre building prescribed in Egypt. Excavation has revealed great theatres in the architecture of the Roman period, at Alexandria, and Oxyrhynchus. The theatre portico of Antinopolis is one of the magnificent Roman monuments of that city recorded by the French military expedition of 1798-1801 but destroyed in the early 19th industrialization.

This means that live theatre was the main performance in most cultures worldwide. However, with the current trends of civilization and modernization, most activities of the theatre are modified to suit the need among other developments in the 21 century. This leads to the gradual and aggressive spring into action of the film and movie industries in the world. In America and India for instance, the movie industry took to its heels as far back in the 10th century with sophisticated names to suit its bid.

www.historical.com/hollywood/history/html posits that:

The name Hollywood was coined by Hobar Johnson Whitley, the Father of Hollywood in 1888 along side his wife Gigi. (from Margaret Vorgimic Whitley; Mumori;) a locally popular etymology is that the name Hollywood traces to the ample stands of native Toyon or California Holy' that covers the hill sides with clusters of bright berries each winter.

This paved way and encouraged the idea behind series of motion pictures being produced under the platform of technological advancement. Since not only companies that can afford the equipment for production, families and individuals have also sprung up into the movie industries.

The Bollywood and Hindi Cinema of the Indians came on board with significant roles of improving their economy by generating revenue and promoting culture. It is rated one of the largest movies industry in the world. The earlier source props it that, "the terms Bollywood has its origins in the 1970s when idea overtook America as the world's largest film producer". So, as entertainment is concern, bollywood has gone international and has put the discovery of cultural transformation in the Indian Nation and its diaspora.

The above opened up ways for other film makers and movie industries across the globe to thrive which the Nigerian Nollywood is inclusive. Accordingly, the history-of Nollywood explains that:

Nollywood ranks third in the movie industry after dollywood (USA) and Bollywood (India). It has been able to hold its own despite so many deterrents which to a few include expensive technical tools of the trade, inconsistent supply of electronic (which is taken for granted in almost every other country in the world) the horrible traffic-jam a condition which can lead to extreme lateness in production. What makes the industry so unique is that it is video driven industry. The movies in the early days were produced and put straight on vits cassettes and then released and distributed for sale to the public. Now with the new technological advancement in place they are usually on VCD's Nigerians refers to the movies as "home video".

This act has successfully been embraced by our culture and people, and is fast consuming the place of the live theatre in Nigerian traced back to the 80s. Afolabi Adesanya posits that:

Video production (in Nigeria) started in the late 80s out of a desperate desire by producers to remain in the motion picture business and thus as on a shoe string budget. The videographers and their products were readily embraced by distributors. Who had established themselves in the marking of audio-cassettes. Undoubtedly the '90s are the decades of videographers. While theoretical release is the principal market for the film producer, the video graphs, has been able to combine theatrical release and the video cassette market. The possibility of this was enhanced by provisions in the National film policy of 1992 and the cinematographic act review act as contained in Decree No. 85 of 1993, which guaranteed censorship of video for both private screening and public exhibition (17).

With this on board for its numerous roles played in the entertainment filed through socio-political, economic and cultural menu, the place value for movie industry in Nigeria today has overwhelmed the live theatre. What then can be ascertained for this reason is what we seek to eerily (find).

Conceptual Clarification

Theatre

Theatre is a collaborative form of performing art that uses live performances, typically actors or actresses, to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place, often a stage....modern theatre includes performances of plays and musical theatre.

The Theatre Manager/Management

The act of management in theatre deals with the running and maintaining of the theatre complex for live performances of drama, songs, music and dance, including variety of humorous/comedy series like 'night of a thousand laugh' etc. This includes harnessing of resources and coordinating of individual efforts in the theatre industry to achieve the set goals for the organization. By implication, it means that the success and failure of the industry revolves on the head of the manager. <https://study.com>articletheatre> explains thus; As a theatre manager, you will coordinate theatres finances, administration, event planning, and marketing aspects. You 'll also hire and train theatre staff. The level of your involvement will largely depend on a theatre size. A job as a theatre manager may require long night and weekend hours, which are some of the busiest times for this programme. Similarly, Langley; p22 states thus; A good art theatre manager is a person who is knowledgeable in the art with which he is concerned, an impresario, labour negotiator, diplomat, educator, publicity and public relations experts, politician, skilled businessman, a social sophisticate, a servant of the community, a tireless leader-becoming humble before authority-a teacher, a tyrant, and a continuing student of the arts.

Contributory factors to declining nature of live theatre over the movie industry

The declining nature of the theatre over the movie industry in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. This can attribute to the typical belief and the usual African mentality that theatre performers are unserious set of people, the only thing required of them is dance and music. This phenomenon has remained in the minds of the individual so much such that most whatever performances of the theatre has been neglected especially now that there is enough alternative of the movie to live performances.

Another fact is that the increase in crime rate is threatened for ones safety at night to risk his/her self just to go watching a performance in the theatre, when so much can be hocked unto at home since electronic media has made it a lot easier for one to capture the whole world right at his/her bedroom, making use of sufficient whatsapp pages, facebook, twitter, zoom and so on.

Poor release of fund by the government to the managerial team to improve themselves and improve the facilities needed for the conducive atmosphere of such theatre halls is one other factor. It is obvious that the theatre alone cannot uplift the standard of the venue since not such performance do not regularly take place, the fund raised at times of performance becomes insufficient to pay the staff and improve or service the facilities for better patronage. The government of the days is expected to service and maintained theatre halls owned by the government just while the national theatre in Abuja recently to be renovated.

The government in question also contributes to the decline nature of the live theatre patronage. This simply means that since not many of those in position are interested in the area arts and performances, their support is not so much drawn to improving the standard of things in live theatre performances. It takes courage and interest to be able to facilitate a thing to an amiable standard. If those in power at one time or the other were regular and understood the social and economic need of these area, encouragement and improvement would have been pronounced in this field of discipline by trying to build or renovate most theatre houses in Nigeria since there are very few theatre structures and even those available are not properly equipped with the rightful equipments needed to be used. Just like the recently approved renovation of the national Art theatre, Abuja by the central bank of Nigeria.

Poor publicity in terms of marketing the product available to the public. In case of the live theatre performance, the rightful of the audience. This means that the strategic avenues for the publicity has to be taken with the right message put across if for instance the production carrying a particular culture is adulterated and the audience are not informed of the correct information, this can discourage the patronage. Other factors as stated by Dandaura and Asigbo (2002) include economic factor. The battered economy has made theatre audience a Luxury for the majority of the urban populations, especially where gate fees are involved.

There is epileptic nature of theatre production in few playhouses. This means that the theatre hall for all theatrical performance should not lack a play or any live performance of any kind. It is expected that at every point in time the theatre should always have one thing or the other to perform. It should always be an avenue where people go to ease up to tension from a hectic day live and direct reducing the habit at drinking alcohol various so at night and attracting more crime in the society.

Lack of managerial skills by the theatre manager or by person in control. today most of those who manage these play houses are so selfish and self centered that they do not consider their partners in practice for instance, theatre performance cannot others involved like the musician, crew and a host of others. In view of this both have to be treated and given due regards in order to be interested in doing the job well. However, most management do not understand this fact, instead of attracting the juicy packages accordingly as expected, they claim superiority over the other and this does not go well in terms of participation by all members involved and this leads to its declining by all members involved and this leads to its declining nature.

The Managers Approach towards Salvaging these Dilemmas

The manager of a theatre house is that who organizes coordinate and, a policy maker of that complex. According to Oshiombebo and Idebi:

The personality combines the duties artistic and administrative responsibilities together in the day-to-day running of the theatre. He/she is responsible for all the happenings in the theatre, ranging from policy formation, execution of policy and programme. He/she is answerable to the board of directors of organization. He is the boss of the business manager who is more or less the accounting officer of the theater.

Having extracted who the theater manager is, he/she is expected to carry out the following duties in order to salvage the drastic threat of the live theatre against the movie industry.

- i. Getting together with other theatre managers in order that he/she too can improve upon those areas in lack and also, having a good rapport with other members of this cabinet.
- ii. Proper check and balancing should be adopted by the whole establishments in order to monitor and solve areas which are found lacking in one way or the other.
- iii. The manager should be willing to learn even from the lesser group if he or she is found wanting or stand corrected.
- iv. Ensuring that the theatre meets the correct requirements of legislation such as health and safety and licensees. This will usher in a new drive of confidence into the live theatre thereby reinvigorating it for sustainable national growth.
- v. The guarantee for breath and safety must come to re-shape the live theatre scenario.

- vi. Improving the standard of production and performance by searching and involving well skilled actors and actresses to keep the theatre active and in livable mood for active.
- vii. Motivating participation by giving, by giving actors and actresses' juicy packages from time to time in order to take their minds away from searching for greener posture so as to keep the live theatre going, this will include sourcing for sponsorship from big aid popular firms which may also attract the audience interest and patronage.
- viii. Ensuring proper use of fund by the manger. This implies that hence the manger is in control of every aspect and the execution of law in this case, all the project executed to carryout should not be taken advantage of but should be mined as stipulated.
- ix. Even schools and colleges who offer Theatre Arts as a course should not relent in serious practical to reinforce the spirit of participation. the theatre should always be kept live with various live performance.
- x. Planning forthcoming events by applying knowledge of audience, ensuring a balance between different types of productions, been aware of other productions well received elsewhere and accepting new net work offered b reputable production companies. This will enable ea quality production that is likely to attract high degree patronage.
- xi. Competition of festivals should be encouraged annually with the right attractions awarded to the right winners to enhance the strong will of serious participation by participants to emerge as the winner when next, and to keep the spirit of oneness among members of participants. For instance, festivals of Arts and Culture which keeps most of the rural participants should not be neglected but be active as it used to be when most of them were sponsored abroad in early '80s, by the state government and wealthy sons of the soil.
- xii. A good rapport with the government by the manger to help bring the government closer to look into problems of the live theatre thereby bringing solutions to the needed.
- xiii. Children participation in the Arts of the theatre should encouraged by the manger to keep the pace from generation to generation for live theatre to continue.
- xiv. Above all, security measures should be employed and mounted of strategic points to keep watch over the complex environment so as to avoid evil eye and penetration of attack.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopts the contingency theory of leadership proposed by Fred Edward Feildler 1964 which emphasizes the importance of both the manager's personality and the situation in which that manager operates. Theorist group common characteristics into models of "x" and "y" to make such characteristics stand the taste of time. This theory allows for flexibility in solving complex problems by managers and whatever successes that may be archived in the theatre organization are products of the situation of the organization. The adherents of this theory see the major factor affecting management practice as the organizational environment, which precludes external influence like economic, political and social impact on the organization or internal constrains, which anchor on the resources (including human/personal) available to the organization. This theory recognizes that effective managers must be adaptable to unique situations and circumstances. It found that high performing organization make better use of technology and their managers make better context.

This theory is best applied in this paper as it highlights the major factors affecting the live theatre to be in the context of organizational environment including external influences such as economic and social impact. This is anchored on the technological advancement in all sectors of life in the society which has grown to a maximum proportion. If the live theatre is to still have its way in the society, it will also have to advance its form to the current trend of digitization which allows the audience/viewers to have their viewing in their comfort zones as the performances are ongoing. Individuals today all have access to personal phones and can access the different social media forum of their choice such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Opera-mini, Chrome, Instagram, Twitter, MiChat, MySpace, MapsGo, Zoom, YouTube etc. The managers of live theatre industry can therefore have their apps which people can easily connect to it.

Suggestions/Way Forward

With this development, the hazards and risk with which people fear at night will be reduced. Even with the current situation of corona pandemic and other transmittable diseases on health ground will be curtailed. Performers of live theatre may only need to buff up their publicity/advertising skills to win people's interest. In another development based on security reasons which people fear mostly in attending the live performances at night, the installation of Circuit Television (CCTV) can best be employed to secretly arrest the offenders and crime perpetrators.

On political ground which the contingency theory also highlights, it is deduced that most political office holders are not given their rightful offices considering their disciplines. The minister for information, culture and tourism which the entertainment industry (live theatre) is a part needs to be given to one who knows the importance of all that is involved to keep it a brace with the development of the day. Because the political times are expected to be the times which things should move but on the contrary, these times are the times which things go the opposite direction most times.

Conclusion

For live theatre to continue in Nigeria it is not an easy task. Serious competition abound. This in recent time, however, keeps a brace with the above mentioned strongly and with all seriousness, it is hoped that live theatre shall not be a victim of decline in Nigeria.

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