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**THE NEW MEDIA AND THEATRE MARKETING: AN
EXAMPLE OF THE PLAY PRODUCTION OF *ODUMEGEGE* BY
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Abstract

This paper provides alternative means of bringing theatrical performances to the audience using the new media. The parlance that the theatre cannot be without at least an audience makes it necessary for constant review of marketing stratagem in other to cultivate constant audience for the theatre. The paper reveals how online social networking sites are available for marketing products on the internet for the benefit of the theatre. The research adopted the analytical approach in the investigation of the topic. The basic finding of the paper is that the use of the internet has cut up with the world as evident in the patronage of the production of the play *Odumegege* and therefore recommended the embrace of the new media as a cheaper means yet effective in the marketing of the theatre.

Key Words: New media, theatre marketing, digital marketing, performance, audience, consumer attention

Introduction

Successful marketing in the theatre is the process in which audience survey and provision of adequate theatrical performances to a targeted audience is achieved with satisfaction for all. It is therefore imperative that the audience is necessary in any theatrical performance. According to Bennett (1990), “at least one spectator is needed to make it a performance” (1) and this further leaves us with making sure that the audience is mobilized during performances. Ayakoroma opined that:

Any firm involved in business can only survive if its goods and services are patronized by the targeted consumers. The extent to which this could be realized is dependent in the market approach. In other words, marketing is of vital importance to the success of any firm.

According to Gondo (2002), one of the concepts the artist must fully understand in marketing is communication. He asserts that;

It refers to the exchange of words or written context both internal and external level of the organization that is serving the audience needs. The idea is for Nigerian Theatre organizations to constantly offer adequate information to its audience so that they understand the organization activities. Thus, promotion, advertising and selling are used in communicating with target audience about the performance being offered (p. 2).

Kalu (2019) also stated that:

Marketing is associated with all the activities, processes and organizations for the creation, communication, and distribution of goods and services that have value and capable of satisfying individual and various societal needs and wants (p.1).

The place of communication in marketing concept becomes necessary if the artist must survive in the market place. The ways in which social media are changing communication have received a lot of attention in recent years. According to Dewing (2012), “the term social media refers to the wide range of internet based and mobile services that allow users to participate in online exchange, contribute user-created content, or join online communities” Social media enable users to create and share contents or participate in social networking. It is different from the use of the newspaper, television and radio. And most importantly, it has a faster and wider reach in addition to being cheaper. It uses the web and internet connections which work on devices like smart phones, computers and tablets. The different type of social media includes: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Google+, Tumblr, WhatsApp, telegram and many more.

Facebook for example allows registered members to create profiles, upload photos and video, post comments and links as news on other websites that play games, chat live and even stream live video. It is a medium for making new friends and seeing old friends or persons you know;

it is a user-friendly site and has become the most popular social networking site on the web with hundreds of millions of registered users.

The key features of Facebook are that it allows you to maintain friends list and choose privacy settings to tailor who can see content on your profile, it allows you upload photos and maintain photo albums that can be shared with your friends. It supports interactive online chat ability to comment on your friend's profile pages sometimes called "walls" in other to keep in touch, share information or just say "hi". Facebook supports group pages, fans pages and business pages that let business owners to use Facebook for social media marketing, it allows websites to interact with Facebook and allows Facebook to be used as a universal login. You can also stream video live using Facebook live. The website is facebook.com, described as social networking website, founder is Mark Zuckerberg. It was founded on 4th February, 2004 in Cambridge, Massachusetts United States.

Considering the fact that more than 900 million people use Facebook all over the world and more are signing up every single day, in addition to other social networks that are trending, are these not platforms for the theatre artist to adopt in his theatre marketing strategy in other to take his performance to his audience? According to Abisuga (2015) as quoted by Okpeki (2015):

The Nigerian digital space has witnessed tremendous growth. His observation is based on the fact that many people now turn to their digital devices for a lot of activities, information consumption, communication, socialization, and entertainment. He noted that the impact on the Nigerian society is substantiated with statistical data as follows:

- Active internet users = 70.3 million
- Active social media = 3.6 million
- Mobile connections = 138 million
- Active mobile social media account = 12.4 million
- Total population of users = 183.5 million

This statistics shows the large number of people on digital platform in Nigeria. This implies that social media haven taken a leading role in attracting consumer attention in the Nigerian digital market (pp. 177-178)

This paper is an example of the application of the new media in the marketing of Odumegege by Miesoinuma Minima, directed by Friday Nwafor and business managed by Harold Fyneface.

Odumegege by Miesoinuma Minima- Synopsis

Odum Egege dramatizes the bloody conflict over Oil and the Control of the Oil Trade that turned into a war of resistance and liberation in which the characters are seen locked in the eternal struggle for justice and freedom. Azumini, with its very vital Oil Market, begins to boil

again, following renewed protests against unfavourable trade relations with the Islanders. Odum Egege a leading member of Azumini, is buoyed by a change of attitude of the people of Opuboama. After many years of disenchantment and resignation, he provides the much-needed leadership in their fight for justice and freedom.

King Jaja declares a military action in Azumini in order to restore law and order, protect the vital booming oil trade, dissuade the white traders from getting into the interior, and also check the British expansionist drive in the region. Opuboama people defeats the Azumini people and Odumegege is captured and tried by King Jaja. Odumegege is condemned and killed in the end.

Marketing the University of Port Harcourt Theatre Productions before the New Media

The University of Port Harcourt markets her activities by advertising and showcasing her productions to prospective patrons in the existing possible ways that had being found adequate before the introduction of the use of the new media. After a thorough survey of the environment in relation to the product, price, promotion and place, some methods were conceived adequate for the dissemination of her information. The chosen methods include the use of posters, handbills, Banners and guerrilla publicity stunt respectively.

The choice of the different publicity methods mentioned above is motivated by the fact that it served the purpose of servicing the immediate need of the producers and also reached the audience at the time. The producers didn't think of raising the audience from outside the university environment. It was a carefully escape from the radio, television and print media considered expensive.

Posters and banners are put up at strategic places in and around the campus for at least two weeks before the date of the production. Handbills are taken to the different offices of the university and environs. Guerrilla stunt is organized around the campus sharing handbills in the process.

The Use of The New Media in the Marketing of Odumegege Production

Marketing for the play which ran from Tuesday 28th to Thursday 30th March 2019 started two weeks before the performance proper. Publicity materials were put together using photographs and dramatic lines from the play text. Scenes were photographed – both still and motion and used for the production of posters, handbills, banners and promos.

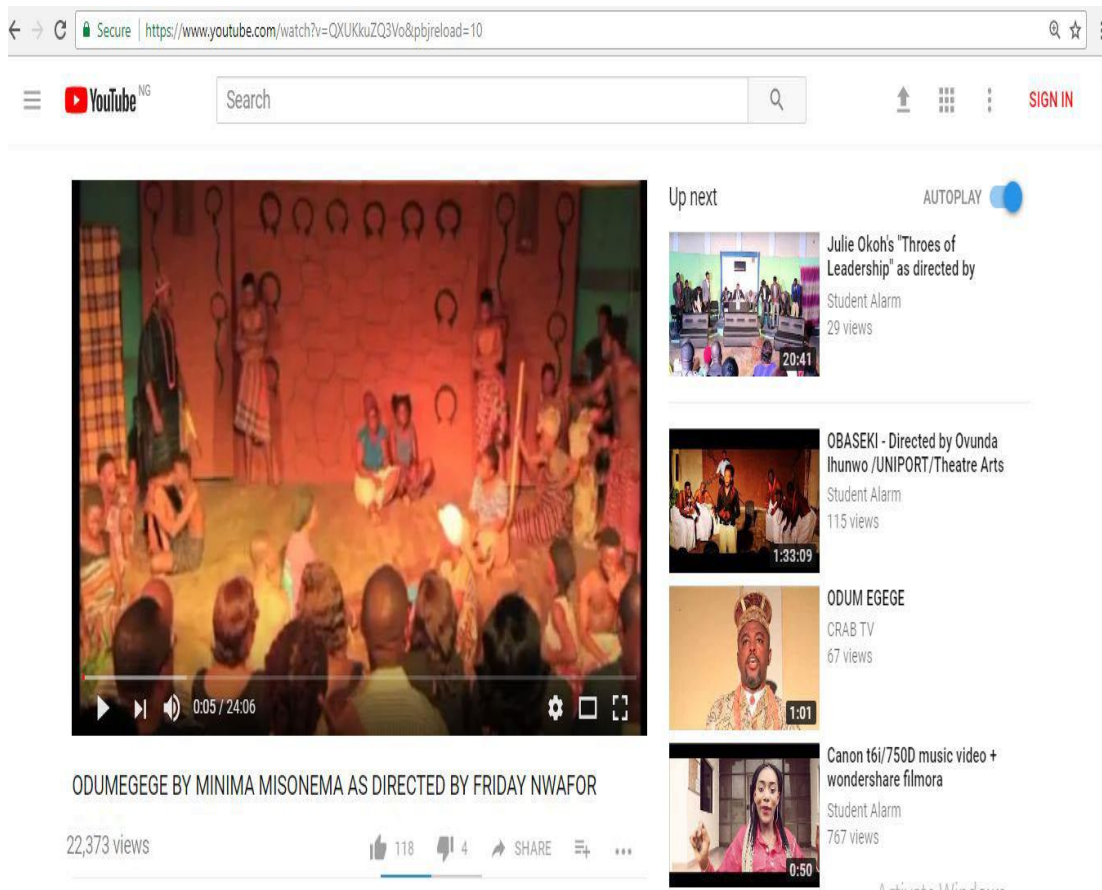


PLATE 1: Odumegege addressing the people of Azumini

Plate one is the new media motion shoot used for the publicity of *Odumegege* on YOUTUBE viewed by not less than twenty-two thousand people as can be seen from the record above.

The number of people the marketing stratagem reached would have been impossible with the original methods adopted by the theatre. The YOUTUBE is the number one place for creating and sharing video contents and it gives the audience a clearer picture and better understanding of the proposed production. It can also serve as a means of income for the theatre if the entire work is on YOUTUBE for online viewing.



PLATE 2: Odumegege on trial before King Jaja

The plate above is a FACEBOOK post showing the proposed performance of *Odumegege*. The post attracted three hundred and seventy-four comments and seven thousand three hundred and seventy people sharing it. We can also see some of the interesting comments that read differently:

- Thank God am in Port Harcourt. I will be there.
- This is going to be great
- I can't miss this.

The FACEBOOK is a social network site that allows conversation with prospective patrons, post photos, videos, promote special offers and more. It is a place where people can chat with friends in user friendly environment. FACEBOOK is the largest community worldwide with over 1 billion users and more are still signing up daily. It is therefore the best for theatre marketing because users come online every second and will see any new post and once a user likes or comments on a post, other users see it. It is less stressful and was adopted during the marketing of *Odumegege*.

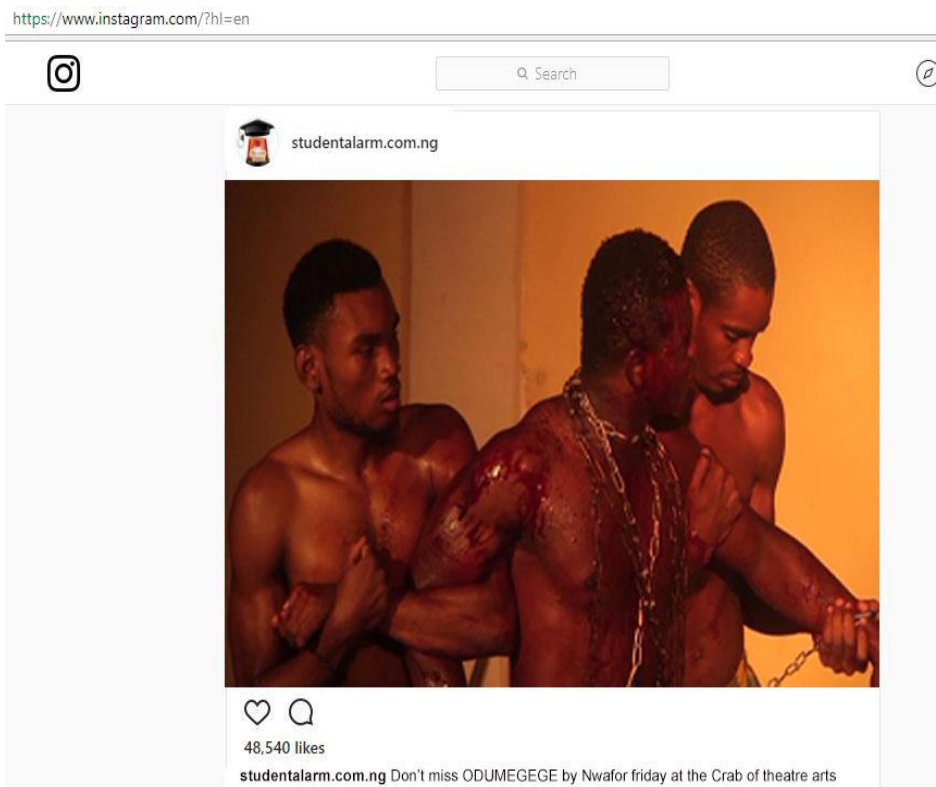


PLATE 3: Odumegege brought for trial before king Jaja of Opoboama

Plate 3 is an INSTAGRAM - a social network that provides a great marketing platform to reach potential customers from every corners of the world with over 700millions active members and user-friendly interface. It allows the posting of short video clips of 59 seconds and post photos too, audiences can make comment and the administrator can reply their comments, it has great followership and engaging audiences like FACEBOOK or YOUTUBE. It is an opportunity to market the theatre to a more targeted and interested audience without spending an enormous amount of money on paid advertising and *Odumegege* production exploited it. Forty- eight thousand, five hundred and forty people liked the post.

The use of the new media provides the advantage of achieving so much with little funds. The new media afforded the *Odumegege* crew the opportunity of reaching out to thousands of people at very cheap cost. It eliminated the challenges of going to negotiate airtime with both the television and radio houses yet it is viewed online.

The new media wide coverage attracted patrons from different places other than the usual university community and her environs and this is evident in the audience turn up and the gate proceeds recorded at the end of the three days performance. Post production engagement of members of the audience also indicated that the social media contributed to the success recorded in the general marketing of the production of *Odumegege*.

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