EMERGENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS FOR THEATRICAL PERFORMANCES: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

Bem Alfred ABUGH and
Adediran Kayode ADEMIJU-BEPO
Department of Theatre and Film Arts
Faculty of Arts, University of Jos, Jos, Nigeria
Emails: abughb@unijos.edu.ng and ademijubepok@unijos.edu.ng

Abstract
Before the emergence of social media platforms (SMPs) like Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, Zoom and many others, theatrical performances were carried out in dedicated theatre buildings or open air theatres in different parts of the world, since the classical Greek era down to the contemporary times. These performances have continued to be an art. Within the last few decades, however, the emergence of social media as a dynamic space in the electronic media super highway has provided a new 'stage' for contemporary entertainment and social trends worldwide. Social media audiences (SMAs) are now provided with a new form of entertainment that does not require their presence in theatre buildings or production outlets to watch performances. The exigency of this paradigm shift from theatre buildings or stage performances to social media platform is rife and thus, has posed a huge challenge to stage performances as they are gradually going extinct in many parts of the world. Social media platforms have dismantled issues of insecurity and have encouraged the switch from analogue to digital ways of doing productions. With the outbreak of Covid-19 in December 2019 in Wuhan, a city in China and its spread across the world, SMPs have continued to provide an alternative stage for theatrical performance as thousands of performances are streamed live through them to the end users/SMAs. Adopting the social responsibility theory and media dependency theory, the study examined selected production companies and individual practitioners, using interviews and content analysis methods to evaluate the impact of the 'communication revolution', since theatre itself is a form of communication. The conclusion reached is that the world is now technologically-driven and virtually everything has gone digital. Theatrical performances cannot be left out. Therefore, theatre scholars and practitioners are encouraged to take advantage of social media platforms (SMPs) to reinvent their trade.

Keywords: Theatrical performances, SMP, Entertainment, SMA, Communication revolution.

Introduction

Since the Greek era, when theatre began as a form of worship/supplication to Dionysus, the performances were well structured

and performed before an audience and at specific periods of the year. This performativity moved to Rome with little modification and extended to different parts of the world. Till date, the practice of theatre remains mainly an interactive activity where, from its structure, even as Peter Brook's theory of the *Empty Space* holds, the audience is placed at the forefront of theatrical productions. Theatre as a discipline has multiple meanings and has been viewed by different scholars from different perspectives. Owuamalam conceives theatre to mean an art form that captures human experiences in an audio-visual manner and present same for the appreciation of an audience (53-54). This means that theatre as an art transcends the act of entertainment as it subsumes the capacity to present the experiences of the society in various ways.

Another point is that theatre can be engaged in so many areas such as film, stage and radio. This implies that theatre professionals can use any of the aforementioned media to present societal happenings. For instance, Anyanwu contends that "there is no argument as to whether film is a product of arts, especially of theatre arts, from which it took its primordial form" (62). It is within this context that this article busies itself with emerging social media as the new platforms for theatrical productions. It is interesting to note that within the last decade, the theatre has found new platforms like YouTube, Facebook, Zoom, and WhatsApp, among others, through which its productions are aired to the audiences via streaming. The reality that confronted humanity in the last two years, as a result of the advent of the corona virus disease popularly called Covid-19 pandemic, necessitates full usage of the new areas stated above.

Theoretical Framework

The Social Responsibility Theory and Media Dependency Theory are apt and relevant to this study. The latter propounded in 1976 by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin Defleur proposes the explanation of the correlation between media dependency and media effects (Littlejohn et al. 302). This theory holds that citizens depend on media information to meet their particular needs. The former is aimed at providing a model in which the mass media has certain obligations to the society (Hasan 20), with the goal that ….the media as a whole is pluralized, indicating a reflection of the diversity of society as well as access to various points of view (Siebert cited in Anaeto et al. 12). Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria around March 28 2020, the country has experienced partial to full lockdowns of all kinds, leading to interruptions in the major sectors of the economy. Theatre productions were also affected, particularly the film industry popularly called Nollywood.

The government during the pandemic placed a restriction on all forms of social gatherings; people were not allowed to attend public functions and this affected theatre practice as the practitioners could not present their productions as a social responsibility since the audience were also not available to attend live theatrical productions in public theatres or university-based theatres. The exigency of this paradigm shift from theatre buildings or stage performances to the social media platform (SMP) is rife and thus, has posed a huge challenge to stage performances as they are gradually going extinct in many parts of the world. Social media platforms (SMPs) have dismantled issues of insecurity and have encouraged the switch from analogue to digital ways of doing productions. The recent spate of the Covid-19 pandemic has reinforced this, since the outbreak in December 2019 in Wuhan, a city in China and its spread across continents of the world, social media platforms have continued to provide an alternative stage for theatrical performance as thousands of performances from all over the world are streamed live through SMPs to end users/SMAs. Terkula Adaa, founder of Heritage Theatre Troupe Makurdi said in an interview with the researchers that:

> The year 2020 was a blank year just like in the history of theatre we are told of the Dark Age. The outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic took away everything from us. As a theatre owner, I do performances round the year, we hardly stretch a month without performances, but since the outbreak of the pandemic and the restrictions imposed on social gatherings by the government, our theatre has gone dry as we continue to witness low patronage. We are challenged to looking into an alternative means of doing our productions. Our desire is to build the trust of our audience and migrate from just physical performances to online and virtual performances. This we have started doing in our little way by streaming our recorded videos on our YouTube channel and the viewership we are getting there is gradually giving us the feeling that by the time we migrate totally to the new media platforms, we could still have audiences to watch our performances.

The concern of this article that sees the emerging platforms like YouTube, Zoom, Facebook, WhatsApp and, among others, as handy and viable platforms that the theatre and its practitioners can rely upon to continue to thrive, irrespective of whatever challenges that might surface.

Nature and Development of Digital Platforms
The society has continued to grow beyond the dependence on human beings for most activities. Civilization, particularly digital breakthrough with different kinds of new media platforms have replaced much of the work for

which the physical presence of human beings is required. The advent of new media platforms around the world and Nigeria in particular has become a gateway to the socio-economic development of society. Recently, the clamour by many countries to migrate fully to digital platforms has further strengthened the yearnings for a more inclusive use of new media platforms. The point is noted in a report by the Presidential Advisory Committee on digitization that:

> The concept of convergence refers to separate such as voice (and telephone features), data (and productivity applications) and video that now share resources and interact with each other, to create new efficiencies. In practice, it is the interlinking of computing and other information technologies, media content and communication networks that have arisen as a result of the evolution and of the internet as well as the activities, products and services that have emerged in the digital media space. (50)

The rationale for this was built on the 2006 recommendations by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a world body that is vested with the power of managing and regulating information and communication technology. This body had resolved as cited in Onabajo that "all countries in ITU region 1 (Europe, the former Soviet Republics, Africa, Middle East as well as Islamic Republic of Iran) should move from analogue to digital broadcasting services by 17th June, 2015…"(11). This shows that the globe is growing rapidly in different sectors, the most prominent area being information and communication technologies (ICTs), in which significant growth has been recorded. This new wave of life has provided the society with the avenues of doing new and remarkable things with ease on digital wavelengths. These changes and developmental strides in human existence are masterminded by globalization. Globalization as a concept has multi-faceted meanings and definitions. Sacks conceptualizes it as "the interconnectedness of the world through new systems of communications" (26). Keohane sees globalization as "a state of the world involving networks of interdependence at multi-continental distances, linked through flows of capital and goods, information and ideas, people and forces, as well as environmentally and biologically relevant substances" (par.1).

Brittan views globalization as a whirlwind of relentless and disrupted change that leaves governments helpless and leaves a trail of economic, social, cultural and environmental problems in its wake (par.2). Many other scholars have examined globalization as it affects the world in a new imperial age. From John S. Saul to Charles Derber and Joseph Stiglitz. We are, however, concerned with the discourse about how theatre has responded to globalization, not in

the sense as "globalizing of vulnerability" post-September 11, and post Covid-19, but how "globalization demands a world of open borders, whose goods and services, people, and money are easily and safely exchanged" (Derber 6). Furthermore, Yiakoumetti posits that:

> We are now, in late post-modernity, experiencing the effects of globalization and transnationalism on societies in general… As we continue to travel and/or migrate, there is a heightened inter connectivity between people which breaks the traditional boundaries associated with national states. For many, the congruence of social and geographic spaces has become blurred because of their transnational ties to multiple spaces. These ties are no doubt, facilitated by increased global transportation and telecommunication technologies. (13)

From the foregoing, it is clear that the concept and its operationalization around the world has helped in the advancement of the course of human development. Today, with the help of ICT and its variety of platforms the world is connected to itself and the barriers of communication and information sharing is bridged. Throughout the world and particularly, since the beginning of the 19th century through the 20th and 21st centuries, digital platforms have developed beyond human imagination. These digital platforms continue to evolve in stages as the need arises and as society continues to grow. The fact remains that the entire process of digital development began in the West and as we have mentioned previously, globalization played and has continued to play a huge role in ensuring that these digital entertainment platforms are within the reach of every individual on earth.

The emerging trends and development of these platforms have brought new ways of doing things globally. A recent one is a digital platform called Zoom that became popular in the wake of the corona virus pandemic and took the centre stage towards the end of 2020. Ever since, the global community has become more inclined to deploying digital platforms for doing businesses of all kinds. Governments around the world have equally urged their citizens to leverage on the opportunities provided by the variety of digital platforms to doing things differently so as to avoid overcrowding in places to curtail the continued spread of Covid-19 and other related diseases around the world and within Nigeria in particular. Many organisations and institutions around the globe have continued to deploy different digital media platforms to initiate conversations. Conferences and workshops are now held online without necessarily having people present at the venue of the conference.

This development has provided the theatre with viable options as practitioners within this space of time have seen new media platforms as alternatives through which theatrical productions can get to their audiences

and clients alike, towards harvesting the corresponding rewards. On a whole, the nature and development of digital platforms are gradual but at the same time a radical one since the internet space is taking over the spaces of interpersonal communication around the world. In virtually all countries of the world, there is the presence of one form of digital platform or the other that people use in sharing information or other products and services.

Online Platforms for Theatre Productions: Concepts and Kinds

Today, online platforms like Zoom, YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and many others have become a new form of stage for theatre productions across the world. For a very long time, in the history of theatre practice, there has been two traditionally most used media platforms of entertainment and showcasing theatre productions. The first included live performances in theatre houses, be they educational theatres, civic theatres, commercial theatres or community theatres. The other is the film medium that screens recorded images with storylines in cinemas and digitized in DVDs that are sold to a variety of audience across the globe for rewarding viewership. The story is different in the present day because there are several platforms through which theatrical productions can be sold to the audience across the globe. Let's consider some of the online platforms and how they can be leveraged on by theatre practitioners in showcasing and marketing theatrical productions.

Facebook as an online platform was founded on February 4th 2004 by Mike Zuckerberg and his fellow college students/roommates. The process was started by a group of young boys who wanted to bridge the gap of long distance and at the same time enhance free flow of communication among themselves. This initiative has become a global entity. "As of 2020, Facebook claimed 2.8 billion monthly active users and it is ranked seventh in global internet usage" (Facebook par.1). With internet connectivity, no one is restricted from using Facebook, provided such a person is above eighteen years of age as the required age for opening an account. Since the introduction of Facebook as an online platform in 2004, most countries of the globe have taken advantage of this platform as a means of communication and information sharing. Through it, information and other services are provided online, businesses of all kinds are traded online without necessarily having to meet with the business owners. People place online orders for goods needed even from far away countries via Facebook and the products are supplied to them in whatever location.

This digital platform has given the theatre and its practitioners a viable template to trade their act. As well, Facebook platform has helped filmmakers,

comedians, and many other content developers in the entertainment industry to showcase and promote their art. In an interview in July 2021, Lawrence Agbo, filmmaker/comedian, informed the researchers that:

> I graduated as a theatre artiste some nine years ago in one of Nigeria's famous universities with a good honours degree and my passion for the profession is a burning one. Right from my undergraduate days, I had wished to become a great actor, director and filmmaker. After graduation, I moved to Lagos thinking it was a bed of roses for theatre graduates, the story is sour and you wouldn't want to hear it. I returned to my town in Apa Local Government Area of Benue State and began to develop little comedy kits using my phone and streaming them on my Facebook platform. The number of likes began to increase and each kit I dropped attracted considerable viewership. This platform called Facebook brought me to limelight and I became a household name in the comedy world with the user name #McBornAgain#. Today, people call me for different kinds of jobs within the country and I am making a living out of the benevolence and opportunity provided me by Facebook. Don't forget I have opened a YouTube channel where I drop my works and make some cash to survive as well.

This is just one out of many success stories of practitioners of the theatre who have used the medium to showcase and of course sell their products. One of the major highlights of Facebook as an online platform is that it is highly interconnected and its interconnectedness is what has arguably made it the most-accessed online platform. The point we are trying to establish here is that one does not necessarily need to be a direct friend of the content owner but once any content is shared on the platform by one's friend, such a content can be viewed from anywhere around the globe by subscribers or operators of the platform. It is in this context that this paper posits that this online platform since its emergence has continued and will continue to provide the theatre and its practitioners with an avenue through which their contents can be aired. The platform became better or more relevant in the wake of the corona virus pandemic. It was through this platform that several of the videos of the deadly virus and ways of preventing it were presented and shared amongst nations of the world. This viability transcends mere going to the theatre house to watch a performance or to the cinema to watch a movie.

YouTube is another online platform that allows its users to upload and share their videos across the globe. YouTube has given theatre and its practitioners the opportunity to leverage on its services to promote and market their entertainment content(s)/productions. Through this platform, different

contents in video clips, TV show clips, music videos, documentary films, movie trailers, live streams, educational videos and blogging videos are all uploaded for easy access throughout the globe provided one is in an area with internet services and free range rights to the usage of YouTube in such a country. YouTube was introduced or invented by three Americans, namely, Chad Hurley, Steve Chen, and Jawed Karim in February 2005. Following its viability and profile yielding benefits, Google bought the site in November 2006 for US$ 1. 65 billion and the platform now operate as a subsidiary of Google, as the second most popular website in the world, behind Google (Alexa Internet par. 3). Also, Loke reported that as of 2019, "more than 500 hours of video content are uploaded to YouTube every minute. And it is estimated that YouTube generates a whopping sum of US $15 billion as revenue annually" (par. 1).

Recently, the movie and music industry in Nigeria and elsewhere had taken advantage of YouTube in promoting and marketing their contents. This is evident in the number of movies and musical contents on the YouTube online platform. One is only required to have internet connectivity to access any kind of information that one needs. The situation has even improved and is oscillating higher because, once one has a YouTube channel and hits a particular subscription mark, one begins to enjoy a certain dividend as reward. This has spurred many content developers to put their contents on the YouTube channel so as to begin to not only promote their products but earn money as well. Many Departments of Theatre Arts in several Nigerian universities have opened YouTube channels. Productions in those departments are uploaded to the channels and streamed for viewership. For instance, the Department of Theatre and Film Arts, University of Jos has a YouTube channel. Since its creation, departmental productions are uploaded on www.youtube.com/**TFAUnijosTV**, and through the link, all production in the Department of Theatre and Film Arts can be viewed anywhere in the world. This is a positive development because it prepares the department for the eventual migration from the analogue (live) stage performances to the virtual space.

Daniel Musa Yaki, a lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Film Arts, University of Jos also operates a YouTube channel tnamed "Yaki's Art" where he streams all his dance productions. He told us that "the only way I can sell myself to the public is by streaming my works to my YouTube channel. There, I am fully convinced that lovers of dance will view my craft. But don't forget also that, I will begin to make some cash once I hit the mark of one thousand viewership" (Daniel M. Yaki in an interview with the researchers in 2021). Another lecturer, Justin Tijime Awauwer of the Department of Dramatic

Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University equally has a YouTube channel through which all his dance productions are streamed.

Zoom is another online platform invented by Eric Yuan. Yuan is someone with vast knowledge of telecommunications, having worked with telecommunications companies like CISCO Systems and WebEx for many years. His passion to bridge the gap of long distances birthed the world acclaimed telecommunication online media called Zoom which today, has become one of the most used online media in the world. It was popularized by the Covid-19 pandemic. The journey started a very long time ago for Yuan but his media platform received little or no recognition. In the wake of the corona virus outbreak that ravaged the world, the platform became handy. It has the capacity to admit as many people as possible to participate in a conversation provided the intended participants have internet connectivity. Since the beginning of 2020, Zoom has become both a popular online platform. Governments of the world, universities, business firms and families have adopted it for holding conversations to avoid or reduce interpersonal contacts. The cultural and creative industries (CCIs) have leveraged on this platform to continue to make the arts industry viable.

Characteristics and Management of Online Platforms

With the advancement in digital technology, information sharing has changed to a large extent. The extent to which this has changed is in the nature and manner to which information is transmitted globally. Fundamentally, information is transmitted using codes across regions. In another sense, the media platforms or online platforms as we refer to them in this article has brought about convergence of different kinds in information sharing. Information is passed via text, audio, visual gadgets, among others. This could be the radio, television, computer sets or phones. With the above mentioned gadgets, information gets across to the target audience without delay and a response is got.

Another major characteristic of the online platform is that it allows both the consumers and the users to access every information shared. The point here is that within the parameter of the online platform, a person is at liberty to engage another person in a far location and still get instantaneous response without break in transmission. Online platforms have provided a more engaging environment where the producer and the user are on the same page engaging simultaneously. In this new age of online platforms, the world has become a more conglomerate entity. Therefore, global network is just but a thing at the tip of every individual who wants to be informed of the

happenings across the globe. Global businesses, intelligence, music, arts and many other services are made bare through online platforms.

Desirability and Relevance of New Media

The new media has come to stay and it has taken over virtually every aspect of human existence. The platform has continued to make wave in different areas. The desirability and relevance of new media platforms is on the increase and it will continue because researchers are researching into possible ways of making living more pleasurable and flexible for humanity. Lippe et al. in their attempt to advance reasons with regard to the values and opportunities provided by the new media platforms, they were emphatic when they said that "It is very true that digital platforms and other very important technologies might have driven near-term inequality as innovations have increased the level of out puts while at the same time simultaneously cutting the cost of low skilled work" (par.1). The point is that media platforms have created more space for interaction among people. A considerable percent of the activities done across the globe are chaperoned via digital platforms. Schools and businesses of all kinds make use of media platforms to share information and at the same time have their activities done through media platforms. This strengthens the argument that Lippe et al. have advanced that the new media and other technologies have helped to improve innovations and outputs in different sectors of the economy (par.2).

In the Department of Theatre and Film Arts, University of Jos, the use of media platforms has become rife. Recently, an adaptation of Iyorwuese Hagher's play, *We Protest* was done by the diploma students via radio drama medium. It had the playwright and other guests from across the country in attendance via Zoom. The course lecturer remarked to the researchers: "my intention is to bridge that gap between audiences, either physically or virtually. The new normal caused by corona virus that stares theatre practice in the face must be dismantled through the utilization where audiences can partake in a production from anywhere without necessarily being present in the theatre hall" (Longgul Dakwom in an interview with the researchers 2021). The playwright in his response to the production, applauded the course lecturer, Longgul Dakwom and the department for taking bold steps towards embracing the new media platforms. The department has taken into account inter-mediality as a sure way of teaching and doing productions and in the recent past, most of the productions in the department use different approaches to telling their stories through this inter-mediality medium. This has continued to open up discourses on the relevance and desirability of the new media platforms as people continue to engage with the production and its models.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) submitted that "digital media, over the years have opened up and eliminated many barriers of information exchange and go beyond national boundaries" (par.1). With the advent of new media platforms, there is no barrier whatsoever to information sharing. There is a free flow of information since people have handy platforms of different kinds to utilize in the exchange of information and other services. Media platforms have helped the theatre and its practitioners a great deal since many of them have resorted to deploying these media platforms to showcase and sell their productions. This has advanced its desirability and relevance because the viewership of the media platforms is large.

Peak and Lee hold the view that digital media is a very good avenue to the sharing of information but can also be a good tool for the dissemination of maleficent content and propaganda (83-92). The point here is that in so far as media platforms provide the society and its users with great desirable values, it can also be used as an avenue through which maleficent contents could be thrown up. Given the fear expressed by Peak and Lee, Cambron noted that many social media platforms like Facebook, Google, and Twitter occasionally review their terms of conditions to forbid activities such as "terrorist activities", "gory content", "threat of violence" (par.2). This is to say that media platforms ought to be properly managed so as to avoid unwanted streaming of hate speeches or obscene images.

Possibilities/Sustainability of Theatrical Performances in the Face of the New Normal

Media platforms have brought countless possibilities to the world and the theatre profession in particular. In the past, theatrical performances were carried out in theatre houses with the actors performing live to the viewership of the audience. But since the 1990s, particularly within the last decade, the proliferation of media platforms have brought new possibilities in doing theatre. Patrick Jude-Otteh, the Artistic Director of Jos Repertory Theatre (JRT) affirmed in an interview with the researchers that:

> The discussion about the online performances started on December 25 2020. The trial performances started in January 2021 and the commercial online performances started in March 2021. We simply got tired of waiting for the ideal situation after Covid-19 lockdown. When we finished the Jos International Festival on March 14, 2020, the lockdown commenced on March 21. We erroneously thought that Covid-19 will end when the lockdown ends. We were thus very confused and shocked when no work was forthcoming and we were bored, hungry and very pessimistic. It was in this mood that we

decided to look for a way out of the situation, hence, online performances. Prior to the December 25 meeting, we actually got a challenge gift from one of our ardent supporters, Prof. Akogun who gave us a monetary challenge to be creative as artistes and find a way to earn a living outside the confines of Covid-19. The funding helped to motivate the push to perform.

Extrapolating from the above, it is pertinent state that the possibilities of new media platforms are enormous and yet to be properly harnessed by theatre practitioners in Nigeria. The question of its sustainability must be answered if truly we have any reason to clamour for migration to new media platform as new means through which theatrical performances can be transmitted, showcased and sold to the general public. Advancing the potential of online platforms and their sustainability, Otteh recounted in an interview that the beginning at Jos Repertory Theatre thus: we had six online trials. First, was within ourselves on Zoom platform. Then we widened the circle to about ten, and then widened the circle again and we now involved the audiences in three countries, then five. After this, we decided to go commercial. We have had four online commercial performances. The fifth is happened in August 29 and another in September 5 all in 2021.

Okigbo observes that "globalization does not simply refer to the objectiveness of increasing interconnectedness; it also refers to cultural and subjective matters, namely, the scope and depth of consciousness of the world as a single entity" (3). This statement has given credence to the governing argument of this study. It makes it clear that the desirability, opportunities and benefits of media platforms remain sacrosanct to theatrical productions. Hamelink cited in Okigbo claims that "globalization refers to the worldwide expansion of media production and distribution companies that trade on the emerging global media markets" (33). This expansion is evidently facilitated not only by technological development, but also largely through the pressures on countries to open their domestic markets to foreign supplies and the concomitant neo-liberal claim that cultural products should not be exempted from trade rules. The delivery of cultural content has, therefore, become a crucial issue. Nonetheless, as social networking becomes more popular among older and younger generations, it is hoped that sites like Facebook and YouTube would gradually become leading platforms that many businesses of the world including theatre would be conducted on.

It is expedient to note that with every sense of humour that every medium of engagement that cannot be sustained is not worth diving into. This is to say that for media platforms to remain active, policymakers must ensure that the platforms are subjected to integrity test and found worthy of operation

in any country. The reason is not farfetched. Recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria through its Ministry of Information and Culture suspended the use of Twitter in Nigeria by Nigerians, giving reasons why its operation was suspended. To avoid this kind of situation theatre practitioners should migrate a significant percentage of their productions to new media platforms. To do this, it behooves on the practitioners to note all kinds of platforms, their characteristics and the cost of installation and usage to enable them to sustain such platforms. Theatre practitioners have to process the acceptability and readiness of the audience should there be a total switch from the well-known convention of theatre productions to the emerging platforms. This is a gradual process because a majority of the audience might not have the gadgets required to follow up on theatrical performances. But the truth remains that the sampling of audience must be taken to ascertain the readiness of the audience to migration and sustainability of new media platforms. Issues surrounding data and other related network problems must be addressed if truly the new media platforms must be sustained by theatre practitioners.

Future of Live Theatre versus Digital Platforms

The future of live theatre is at the tailboard of a moving vehicle. The justification for the above statement is not farfetched given the realities surrounding live theatre performances in Nigeria and elsewhere. Following the high level of insecurity in Nigeria, many theatre lovers are not prepared to go to any theatre house to watch a live performance. For instance, for over a decade the Department of Theatre and Film Arts of the University of Jos had resorted to doing matinee productions that have contributed to keeping many theatre lovers away from theatrical productions. Many of its productions are done during the day and office hours. This scenario plays out in many other theatres be they commercial, civic, community or educational theatre. With this, one would not be wrong to say that the future of live theatre is threatened.

Another issue that is responsible for the decline in live theatre is the influx of digital platforms. Today, no single production is made sacred like it used to be. In the past, productions were held sacrosanct but today, even before the rehearsal session is concluded for a production, excerpts from such a production saturates new media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. With this pre-knowledge of the production, many of the audiences with high sensibilities develops cold feet for such a production and are not willing to waste either their money or time to go experience it. This unfortunate circumstance takes place even in the movie industry where the production crew members are well versed professionals, but parade scenes from a movie in progress and during its premiere, most audience lose interest in such movies having had a peep into their storyline through media platforms.

The future of digital platforms is really at a high pace in this age and time; the internet has made live so easy such that information sharing across the globe is a click away. With these new platforms, the exchange of theatrical performances is a click away. Since the advent of digital platforms, the security threats to the lives of the audience has reduced to a large extent because all an audience needs is to have internet connectivity via his gadget and such an audience can be part of a production anywhere around the world. This has given the audience the opportunities to be part of theatrical productions even abroad without necessary being present and also participating live with the people in the venue.

Challenges of Using New Media Platforms to Stream Theatre Performances
There are several challenges that bedevil online or virtual theatre performances. Patrick Jude-Otteh recounted in an interview with the researchers the experiences of Jos Repertory Theatre:

> Jos Repertory Theatre is currently involved in both online and virtual theatre. However, virtual theatre is more expensive and technology-driven but our network and bandwidth is problematic and does not permit a free flow of performances without static breaks while online theatre is cheaper and easier to control. But this involves the streaming of pre-recorded materials with online presences. We had a very recent experience with both at the on-going "All the World's a Stage" New Swan Shakespeare Festival at the University of California, Irvine. Involving actors from about 23 countries, it is a beautiful mix of both formats, the performances are pre-recorded online while the post-performance discussions are virtual and these two are then uploaded to YouTube Channels and views are tracked.

From the little experience recounted by Otteh, it becomes expedient to note that doing virtual or transmitting online performances is very expensive. For anyone to successfully carry out a virtual performance, such a person is required to have a bandwidth that has the capacity to enable a free flow without static breaks in the course of the performance. In Jude-Otteh's explanation, we discovered a very salient issue which also serves as a great challenge to virtual or online performances. The fact that productions are pre-recorded before they are streamed through any of the channels is another huge challenge for theatre owners. This is because logistics required for a production must be put in place to ensure that the production is up to standard. The feedback mechanism is not fully present as many who watch these performances virtually or through online platforms are not present to give feedback to the actors or theatre owner(s). This to a large extent has the

capacity of whittling down the quality of productions that are streamed online. In instances of physical performances, the feedback is got immediately without recourse to who is affected or not and the theatre owner(s) with their team make amends to perfect the production for another audience.

Another serious challenge is the issue of content(s) that are streamed online. The audiences are not there to appraise or condemn what is streamed. The theatre owners stream whatever is readily available without recourse to viewership discretion. This is even more common now that a majority of people (both theatre owners and the audience alike) have access to online platforms. In all, streaming online performance could be very taxing and requires a lot of creativity, resources and technology to carry out. Anyone meaning to engage in online performance must ensure that all the equipment needed are available for ease of transmission.

Conclusion

It has been established in this paper that the emergence of social media platforms has largely helped in information sharing across the globe. It is clear from the arguments advanced that some of the media platforms examined served as veritable platforms through which theatrical productions were presented to the public during the Covid-19 pandemic. Theatre practitioners throughout the globe and Nigeria in particular have taken advantage of the new media platforms to continue to promote and market their artistic works. It is projected that with the rising profile of new media platforms and the development in technology, the world is likely to migrate to a digital environment where every single transaction will be done via the internet. Opportunely, theatre practitioners have taken appropriate steps to optimally use the new media platforms to advance their profession.

Works Cited

Adaa, Terkura. Telephone Interview. 22, August 2021.

Agbo, Lawrence. Personal interview. 27 July 2021.

Anaeto, Solo. G. et al. *Models and Theories of Communication*. Maryland: African Renaissance Books Incorporated, 2012.

Anyanwu, Chukwuma. "Theatre Arts as a Melting Pot of the Arts: A Study." *The Crab: Journal of Theatre and Media Arts* 1.1 (2005): 61-71.

Brittan, Leon. *Globalization vs. Sovereignty the European Response*. The 1997 Rede Lecture and Related Speeches. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Cambron, Rebecca J. "World War Web: Rethinking "Aiding and Abetting" in the Social Media Age." *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law* 51.1 (2019):288-299. https://scholarlycommons.law.case.edu/jil/vol51/iss1/24

Dakwom, Longgul. Personal Interview. 10 August 2021.

Facebook Reports First Quarter 2021Results: Facebook investor Relations. 28 July 2021.

Gill, K., Mao, A. et al. *Digital Reader vs Print Media: The Role of Digital Technology in Reading Accuracy in Age-Related Macular Degeneration. Eye* 27.5(2013): 639-643. https://doi.org/10.1038/eye.2013.

Hasan, Seema. *Mass Communication Principles and Concepts.* 2nd Ed. New Delhi: CBS Publishers and Distributors Pvt. Ltd., 2013

Jude-Otteh, Patrick. Jos Repertory Theatre Jos. WhatsApp Interview. 19 August 2021.

Keohane, Robert O. "The Globalization of Informal Violence, Theories of World Politics, and the Liberalism of Fear." 5 August 2021 <http://essys.ssre.org/sept11/essys/keohane2.htm.>.

Littlejohn, Stephen W. and Foss Karen A. *Theories of Human Communication.* Belmont: Thomas Wadsworth, 2008.

Loke Hale J. "More Than 500 Hours of Content are Now Being Uploaded to YouTube Every Minute." 25 July 2021 TubeFilter.

Morozov, Evgeny. "Iran: Downside to the "Twitter Revolution" in "Dissent" Magazine, Fall 2009.

Okigbo, Charles. "Broadcasting in the Age of Global Communication: Challenges of Programming and Audience Segmentation." A Paper Presented at the International Conference for Africa Broadcasters, AFRICAST, Abuja, 26th October, 2000.

Onabajo, Olufemi. *Fundamentals of Broadcast Journalism.* Lagos: Gabi Concept, 2006.

Owuamalam, Emma-Owuams. *Audio Visual Mediums: Radio, TV, Film and Theatre.* Owerri: Top Class Agencies, 2000.

Paek, Byungjoo and Lee, Heesang. "Strategic Entrepreneurship and Competitive Advantage of Established Firms: Evidence from the Digital TV Industry." *International Entrepreneurship and Management Journal* 14.4 (2018): 883-925.

Presidential Advisory Committee on Transition from Analogue to Digital Broadcasting. Final Report of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Transition from Analogue to Digital Broadcasting, Abuja, 2009.

Sacks, Jonathan. *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations.* London: Continuum, 2019.

The Top 500 Sites on the web. Alexa Internet. 28 July 2021.

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). *Digital Economy Report 2019. Value Creation and Capture Implication for Developing Countries, 2019.* New York: United Nations.

Yaki, Musa D. Personal Interview. 10 August 2021.

Yiakoumetti, Androula. "Language Education in our Globalised Classroom: Recommendations on Providing for Equal Language Rights." *Language Education and the Challenges of Globalization: Sociolinguistics Issues*. Ed. E. Esch and M. Solly. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

"YouTube.com Traffic, Demographics and Competitors." 25 July 2021 <www.alexa.com>