

A Contextual Examination of 'Theatrepreneurial' Aspects of Nigerian Theatre Arts Practice

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Abstract

This paper is based on a contextual examination of 'theatrepreneurial' aspects of theatre arts education and practice in Nigerian universities. Theatre Arts is a discipline that harbours diverse fields of specialty and with enormous potentials which students and graduates could engage in with prospects of becoming employers of labour rather than seekers of employment opportunities. The analysis takes qualitative mode in which descriptive method is used as research approach, and the theoretical framework is Market Orientation Theory. Findings show that ticketing in Theatre Arts, among other entrepreneurial strategies, can be deployed in different ways to inspire and encourage investment consciousness in theatre craftsmanship, reconceptualised as 'theatrepreneurship'. 'Theatrepreneurship' advocates early inclusion of investment tactics in educational theatre practices aimed at inculcating learning how to develop creative powers beyond intellectual acquiring. The analysis focuses on ticketing techniques in theatre arts production with potentials for investment mind-set. It concludes that the inclusion of investment techniques will make theatre a sector of skill acquisition with endowments for theatre graduates to survive in the society which can attract government supports for skill acquisition, jobs creation and human development. It recommends that theatrepreneurship should be used as cogent statement to inform theatre graduates on the investment knowhow in creative endeavours from school productions to the investment society.

Keywords: Economy, Investment, Performance, “Theatrepreneurship”, Ticketing, job creation

Introduction

The need to consider the investment prospects in theatre practice in educational theatre has woken entrepreneurial consciousness that shapes the portmanteau word “theatrepreneurship” which represents the business entities of theatre discipline. It clarifies the speculation that the collage making up theatre arts discipline maintains a distinct investable hub within which the serious-minded practitioners could fashion out opportunities to invest for self-reliance and job creation in the society. The thought of creating wealth from educational theatre experiences which is primarily designed for impartation of knowledge, can to some extent be viewed as a necessary innovation to escape the prevailing economic downturn in Nigeria. This agrees with the position of Sunday Umanah and Anietie Udofia that; “entrepreneurship reshapes the artist's view of his creative activities to lucrative possibilities which pave way for career opportunity to evolve” (151). One of the concepts of theatre enterprise is the act of ticketing, which allows for due contract negotiations between the theatre producers and audience members who are the consumers.

Ticketing streamlines the modus of tracking the audience members and documenting their presence along with their patronage to theatre productions. While “a ticket is a slip of paper or card that identifies an audience member, or something like “a written or printed slip of paper, cardboard, etc., affixed to something to indicate its nature, price, or the like; label or tag” (dictionary.com). It becomes a system because there are strategic methods in the various types of ticketing which include: “Group Plans”, “Popular”, “Season”, “Pulley”, “Complimentary” and “Advance”. These are inherent within the configuration that determines its workability in varying occasions. Ticketing typology in Theatre Arts is conceived based on the modus for operating each as a system with full internal logistics that initiates the take-off point to its elapsing point; yet, not actually about its investment fecundity to the theatre manager. There is a way a member of the audience is ushered into the auditorium to watch a production as an embodiment of status symbol, which such person's presence accords the production itself, ticketing for such persons will be different from the one in which someone collects an identifiable card along with others to sit and watch a production as regular patron of theatre production. There is a way a theatre manager schemes a production or builds a production around a significant factor, and the returns at the box office yields a significant kickback to the theatre, and there is a way it is organised, debts for some material used in spicing the show linger with appalling embarrassment. Ticketing, as Barclays Ayakoroma puts it, is the certified act of giving a member of the public “the legal right or privilege of watching a programme (production) without fear or molestation” (98), this act gives rise to theatrepreneurship which Tracy describe as 'the ingenuity of mapping out a credible difference in a creative endeavour that appeals to the extent of unfolding outlets of investment opportunities' (39) through the arts of the theatre entrepreneurship.

In the Theatre Arts discipline, many components of it intertwine and thus one factor

depends on the other for the wholeness of it to function properly. One such pointer is the interplay between the ticking aspect and theatre business owners, which play different roles that in the end each other towards giving the theatre audience realise the desired expectations. This shows how important the audience as the integral part of the theatre. The importance and role of the audience make the consideration for comfort to rise practically since their presence constitutes part of the success of the playwright, director, actor and the technical crew activities. As Hansen and Ojunta acknowledge, “people (audiences) are willing to pay more for products they like; while producers (theatre persons) can generate more income from what they can make people to like” (202-203,). Assembling them properly is one step forward towards a successful presentation. According to Effiong Johnson, “the primary reason for assembling an audience is for them to be entertained. Nobody really goes to the theatre to be schooled on some philosophical, ideological or metaphysical stuff...” (93), instead, people who come to the theatre, come with expectations to be entertained, educated and enlightened!

One of the skills to negotiate the interaction between the theatre and the audience is ticketing which defines a kind of contract between the partners. A ticket elevates members of the audience beyond the mere privilege to watch a show, to the right to relax and think ahead while the experience lasts. In a theatre production, Barclay Ayakoroma writes:

...a ticket is a legal instrument that one obtains (mostly after due exchange with money) which guarantees one enjoying certain services. When a member of the public buys a ticket for a theatre performance, a musical show, a football match or a local trade fair for example, he acquires the legal right or privilege of watching the programme without fear of molestation. However, there are various types of tickets a potential member of the public could acquire to see a show... (197-198).

From the assertion above, a ticket authenticates someone's status to watch a performance, and tickets vary considerably based on the adopted ticketing systems within the production cycle. Some tickets are bought because of necessity while some are bought because of the impression the ticket itself conveys. Such impression could go deeper to prefigure the subject matter of the show. It can add additional information that may motivate unwilling persons to buy existing tickets and sit to watch a production. When a production is viewed by many people, it is deemed that many people have been informed, and this high audience population impacts significantly on the tickets sales as well as on the commercial value of the theatre production. Ticketing could be used to weigh publicity spread and as strategies to ensure the task of filling the theatre with authentic audience. When there is a good turnout of Box office activities of any theatre production, the return on investment of such theatre is seen to be appreciably impressive. The paper thus focuses on the various ticketing systems towards highlighting how they encourage 'theatrepreneurial' engagements.

Theoretical Framework

This paper draws its theoretical standpoint from Market Orientation Theory. The

theory discusses the intent with the rapport that exists between theatre producer and the consumer (audience) in identified marketing structures. A ticket serves two purposes in the theatre: one as a mark of identification which makes one eligible to legitimately enter the hall and watch a production; the other is highlighting productions that are available, the place and the time in which the productions can be watched. The second part of ticketing is actually a process that suggests the potentiality and utility of theatre as a commercial venture. This means that the orientation for the commercialisation of production has to be linked to the aspect of ticketing. Market Orientation Theory was developed in early 1990s, and it is linked to John Narver and Stanley Slater. They observed that its focus is on the knowledge of competition through which the need of the consumers is identified and projected to draw attention to the available products or services in the industry at given time. It sets the philosophies that unify the workable organizational areas of a firm to the surrounding it operates to create awareness, attraction, product delivery and feedback. The theory is much concerned with “the intent of a product promoted to draw the consumer's interest” (Ajay Kohli and Bernard Jaworski 1993). The theory aligns with the engagements that are put in place to motivate enhanced patronage.

Another view of the theory is that, it focuses on the need to idealize public interest and bend production towards such intent. According to Patrick Ijeh, “the theory focuses on the provision of intelligence about what is going on in the internal and external environment.... The correlation of responses on environment function (that) heaps to harmonies responses to societal issues...” (91). By this, the intent of the theatre in ticketing is easily realised and made known; yet the aim of the theatre surfaces to work along the mind-set of the public within which investment by the theatre persons is conceived. Considering the need to project ticketing to sustain the confidence of both parties, Nancy Irek clarifies that the theatre box office in most case, “is always faced with challenges of how to identify target audience and other audiences and how to develop strategies to woo them to patronize the organization's artistic product” (57). Sustainable patronage of theatre products is bound to encourage investment which is conceptualised as theatrepreneurship.

The theory is a trend in the publicist's mind-set through which the publicist organises his market interacting sales' points, to constantly draw his consumers' interest, especially in the midst of numerous contending interests. To the theatre manager, the need to improve on the quality of productions and audience participation cannot be over emphasized. This might be the essence of carrying a production's crusade, and likely a single production with which opinion for social adjustment, updates for newness or adjustment in life...might be learnt. Such critical intention requires creative embellishment in catchy designs to woo, pleasant ambience to sustain, and thrilling spectacles to re-invoke the audience's consciousness on the matter at hand in the theatre” (Palme Scott).

Also, the theory is a network of inquiry into opportunities for both patrons of the products of the firm itself. It allows the theatre practitioner to observe, evaluate and envisage possibilities in his or her practice. That is, through a theory like this, Chris Nwamuo observes that “the theatre artist predicts and anticipates... alternative courses of action open to him” (5). Since this theory focuses on the need for theatre producers

to study the perception of delight and the dimension of interest, the consumer puts forth, it guarantees the audience's assurance that a given production, its theme and aesthetics are intact for their delight. Based on this notion, ... Sylvia Hollensen asserts that:

...those resources necessary to respond to the opportunities... providing tempting opportunities for expansion minded firms... this include knowledge about foreign consumers, market places or market situation that is not widely shared by firms. Such specialized knowledge may result in from insight based on ... special contacts a firm may have, or simply being in the right place at the right time (6-57).

Ticketing may not actually suggest canvassing for the members of the audience in Theatre Arts, but as part of the activities to draw the audience's interest to the activities of the theatre, ticketing should be recreated, rebranded and made to also showcase creativity through distinguishable labels that are attractive to the eyes, that prefigure the deep thematic concerns for humanity. When a product projected for sale is appealing, satisfaction for both the producer and the consumer mind is possible.

Perspectives of Ticketing in Theatre Arts in Nigerian Universities

Ticketing is the method tickets are delivered to prospective members of theatre audience. The variance in ticketing is conceived from the technique used in negotiating the contact between the theatre manager and the audience at the box office. In artistic production and ticketing system, there are tickets produced at a very low price or without price tag at all; there are tickets packaged as a mark of honour to distinguishable dignitaries; there are tickets reserved as a mark of respect without the intent of generating income; and there are tickets that are promoted and appropriated some days before the production - all these are approaches of delivering tickets in Theatre Arts Department, as exemplified in the University of Uyo case. The ticketing variation is as discussed below:

Popular Ticketing: This is a ticket that is produced along with other labels of tickets. In the theatre, there are certain productions in which dignitaries of the University community may be invited to watch; the same production may serve examination purposes for students at various levels. When a production is made this way, there may be low-cost tickets for interested student-viewers, not-too-high tickets for the target class; and a priceless but expectant one to the dignitaries. The dignitaries or some of them can pay exorbitantly for the show as a way of appreciation. However, popular ticket is labelled as general ticket and it is given out to encourage a wider participatory yet regular audience. According to Nisha.

These tickets...allow attendees entry to the event along with access to the regular event activities...used only when you have other more exclusive and expensive offerings like VIP or All-Access Pass. This way, attendees who want the complete experience can purchase a costlier ticket and others can go with a general admission ticket (zoho.com). Popular ticketing has its advantage and disadvantage. Much as it could lead to larger audience participation, it could also result in overcrowding which

may be difficult to control.

Pulley Ticketing: This is a ticketing system that prioritises the elitist class in the theatre. In this form of ticketing, there is the recognition and provision of dignified seats for people within the leadership cadre of the university and outside. These could include the Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Deans of Faculties, Heads of Departments and respective Directorates in the institution. It could also accommodate personalities like the President of a Country, Governors of State, etc. Ayakoroma asserts that "...pulley tickets are special tickets, which are reserved for important theatre patrons whom you cannot afford to turn back" (100). Nevertheless, this method of ticketing can cause confusion if the theatre manager fails to be proactive. In a situation where a seat reserved for an expected dignitary is re-assigned to an unexpected dignitary and almost immediately or thereabout, the expected guest walks in with his pomp, now to unseat the first dignitary for the second dignitary to occupy the seat, may create embarrassing scenarios. The arrangement thus needs tact and high sense of responsibility on the part of the theatre manager.

Advance Ticketing: This is a ticket the prospective member of the audience books ahead of time of the production. Ayakoroma avers further that the prospective audience should be encouraged to obtain advanced tickets long before a show. This helps them avoid last-minutes-rush and scrambling at the box office. It is possible for the promoters of the tickets to offer incentives for the audience to buy their tickets before the show. The advantage is that there is assurance of putting up the show with expected theatre goer who had paid for a seat to watch the show. The money so paid can be used to sort out other necessities of the production as scheduled or rescheduled as the case may be. In this case, there is a wider coverage of prospective audiences since the ticket is customized with properly embossed information on the production. This is activated by the fact that customised tickets have basic information about the production. Information like: date, time, venue, title of the play, playwright and possibly the director can motivate a potential audience member to take informed decision in favour of watching the production. Advanced ticketing gives the producer opportunity to plan ahead for his clients (the audience), although some fraudsters may capitalize on the window to produce and sell illegal tickets. Advance ticketing can encourage repertory theatre practice by which the same production can be staged for many days. This practice can motivate prospective audience to select a day as would be convenient. With this ease, encouragement to patronize stage production could be assured.

Season Ticketing: This method is another form of advanced ticketing but it is rather slated for the entire production season. It encourages parents, guardians, well-wishers and families to troop into the auditorium with their friends and loved ones to watch a show they had already booked. In this case, the theatre promoter must develop a promotional activity to reach out to target audience. Also, the production should be made to accommodate wholesome interest that can convince the audience, because the audience "must be convinced of their need to watch the production" (Nwamuo 100). Season ticketing "guarantees audience, operational funds; helps in publicity through

those who have booked, and create goodwill between the theatre and the patrons...the money is like a loan which has to be repaid in kind” (Ayakoroma 100). This connotes an existence of a transactional contract between the producer and consumers in the production cycle.

Group Plan(s): It is a ticketing style that is used in Theatre Arts to solicit for groups' production. It is the same thing as what Nisha calls “Group Package Tickets” (zoho.com), and in it, an entire community, a school, a church, a union, an association of people, an entire family or such bulk can book for a show. This allows every member equal opportunity to enjoy theatrical production at affordable rate which is a collective amount accepted for all. As Nwamuo writes, it is a good opportunity for the theatre to reach out to the audience to inform, educate and suggest a way out of militating human conditions which some of the people in the group might not have had access to. “Individual members of the group may be interested in the...amount of exposure they receive from each performance or the skills they acquire to enable them grow” (86). Also, Robert Kiyosaki and Sharon Letcher observe, people learn fast in a group lesson since situations are put forth on a generalized atmosphere. It often brings out best in the willing persons because they weigh their capabilities against a collective force. Nevertheless, “in a group plan ticketing, you (may) receive group reactions during the performance because each (person) has a common field of experience...” (Ayakoroma 99).

Complimentary Ticketing: This is a situation in which a select-few may be given a free ticket to see a show free of charge. Many people enter to watch a production without buying tickets. The lecturers for instance, do not need to buy tickets when coming to the theatre to administer the practical examinations. Many of them are likely coming to watch a production with members of their family. All those they come with into the auditorium are accorded automatic warrant to see the production free. Many students also dodge the buying of ticket. Some may hang around the stage or backstage pretending to be busy, some hide in lecturers' offices only to sneak in along with legitimate audience for the production. They may be spotted, yet allowed to see the show. That does not count for complimentary ticketing anyway. Complimentary ticketing is a situation that tickets, as the case may be, Ayakoroma points out:

...are given to patrons or friends of an organisation to see a show free of charge. It is not as if they do not have the means to pay for their tickets, it is a way to make certain people see a show they would otherwise fail to attend... it is used to prospective sponsors and patrons to watch performance. It is used to show appreciation to the theatre benefactors. It makes people to cultivate theatre culture..., an avenue to boost audience attendance. It is a way of sustaining Theatre-Community relationship...(but) it could be easily abused by beneficiaries, which some persons may take it as a right and would not want to pay to see any production. It affects the gate taking as many people enter free, and it is a risky venture as one is not sure if that recipient of the ticket would respond (98-99).

As asserted above, complimentary ticketing is the culture of giving a free ticket to select concern or special persons, sometimes along with their family members to watch a production free of charge. It is a show of endearment and tenderness to the attendee. There are other forms of ticket depending on the circumstances that surround a chosen performance. We also have VIP and VVIP- VIP meaning an acronym for very important personalities, describes a situation where the price of ticket is raised to accommodate certain incentives or refreshment items, to attract VIP or Luxury, Early Bird, Reserved Seating, Invisible, giveaways, pay-what-you-can, and virtual pass; but the most commonly used methods which have insight to the philosophy of the theatre are the ones discussed above. Some of the ones mentioned have the same denotation with the ones that are not considered suitable for theatre operation. It is the name that varies; operation and purpose are viewed alike. These aspects of ticketing have bearing with the entrepreneurial realities in the Theatre Arts Department.

Theatrepreneurial Consciousness in Theatre Arts is therefore coined from a Greek origin, *theatron* suggesting a place, a location or a spot (where action is done). Entrepreneur is seen as “the ability to use the factors of production- land, labour, capital... (and also) the managerial process of organizing, operating and assuming the risk of a new business venture” (Chima Onuoha 2). However, Joseph Uduak and L. Amadi detour to conceiving it along marketing index when they posit that it is “the proactive identification and exploitation of opportunities for acquiring and retaining profitable customers through innovative approaches to risk management, resource leveraging and value creation (from the perspective of performance)” (185). These ideas: making use of economic opportunity without fear, exploration of existing resources, the organizational abilities of an individual resulting to investment in venture, and the proactive identification of opportunity to create wealth from people by rendering their deserved services – are fused into the bolt of theatre system to form “Theatrepreneurship”. This means in context, making investment through the use of theatre crafts. However, consciousness suggests the wakefulness of the theatre person to the investment opportunities in theatre practices.

In the educational theatre, nonetheless, as practiced in Nigeria, especially the University of Uyo, the intent is to generate income in a particular production is nonetheless paramount, the purpose of productions is solely for knowledge impartation, whereas the topmost objective of the theatre, building the human capacity is paramount. As Muiyiwa Awodiya puts:

Any arts organization that cannot attract an audience to its programme of activities cannot fulfill its aim and objectives... there is a kind of excitement for performers, audience and managers when all seats are filled at performance time. To develop audience and raise funds, arts institutions in Nigeria traditionally apply marketing principles to achieve these objectives. The marketing principles include: subscription promotion, direct mail, price discount, the brochure, effective display, advertisement and publicity, personal selling, (and) public relations tactic (199).

All these are dimensions of engaging the audience for information, relationship but the one that has a direct bond with investment is the techniques to engage the audience through ticketing for entrepreneurial purpose. The use of theatre tools, tactics and ingenuity to satisfy cardinal theatre aims to the society and equally satisfy the practitioners, is theatre utility but exploring the same avenue to ascertain investment is theatrepreneurship. In any case, the introduction of advance ticketing in theatre production is a critical concept for income generation. This can fetch income as the actors improve and as more crowd gathers to patronise theatre productions. Below are samples of good ticketing as aspect of theatre entrepreneurial consciousness.



Fig 1: Ticket Branding



Fig 2: Ticket Branding

Theatrepreneurial Consciousness through Popular Ticketing: Actually, as the name implies, the ticketing system is usually the free-style ticket. Even when it is common, there is usually the presence of the elitist set. The elites could as well be motivated to pay more in order to balance the shortage hovering over the all-comers one. Besides, the popular ticket might attract price discrimination. Using this measure, the same ticket might be practically sold at different prices at different places to different people as the case may be.

A more rational sense of stimulating theatrepreneurship by the use of popular ticket is in branding. Branding of one ticket will make the audience opt for the most fanciful; and becoming choosy can make the common-man's ticket to turn uncommon. As a skill to fine-tune ticketing, this could be done through colour psychology. It is possible to deploy the sparkling of hues to draw concern for one's product. This is the strength of colour psychology. It is the use of colours to play with the minds of the audience in ticketing, hence through the alteration of colours aesthetic intensity could be stimulated making a ticket buyer to fantasize the same production as different productions based on the colour of a ticket. This is a way of teasing the mind by variance of colour. According to Gregory Gotti:

Colour psychology is the study of how colours affect perceptions and behaviours. In marketing and branding, colour psychology is focused on how colours impact consumers' impressions of a brand and whether or not they persuade consumers to consider specific brand... 90%. Snap judgments made about products can be based on colour alone (<http://www.helpscout.com>).

Based on the evaluation of the mind on the appeal of colours elucidated above, each ticket can be made to look different for different days. As Jennifer Aaker puts it, “purchasing intent is greatly affected by colours due to their effect on how a brand is

perceived; colours influence how customers view the 'personality' of the brand in question... certain colour do broadly align with specific traits” (18). In other words, “this shows that the way people see things depend on the way things appear to them; the way things appear shows what has taken effect as a structure of reality in their mind” (Udofia, Atakpo and Udoinwang 47). By this aspect of variation, the audience may scramble for a ticket to view the same production they had viewed the previous day as if it is a new one. The ability to maximize this subtle craft for investment is theatrepreneurship in action.

Variation of tickets through Colours



Fig 4: Brown/yellow ticket of Anietie's Village



Fig 5: Black/White ticket of Anietie's Village



Fig 6: Blue/Yellow ticket of Anietie's Village



Fig 6: Black/Yellow ticket of Askari



Fig 7: Brown/White ticket of Askari

Theatrepreneurial Consciousness through Group Plan: This plan is usually packaged to identified families or a group, tagged “a command performance” since the script may be predetermined by the families or the group involved. A theatre person can raise the price index since it is a commissioned performance. Taking advantage of the fact the potential members of audience have a dire need for the product; and in the spirit if entrepreneurship, where profit to be generated is expected to sustain the commercial cycle, the price could be higher to ensure a delectable package for them.

Theatrepreneurial Consciousness through Complimentary Ticketing: This kind of ticketing is mostly churned to lecturers and visiting academic persons. Such persons may not provide funds. On the other hand, if the production is used to accord the dignitary elevated status among, many, by human nature of consumers of article of ostentation, which Babalola Gbenga discusses that those who consume it do so because it marks them as a significant wealthy elite in a superlative air. The more expensive the product is, the more enticing it becomes to the consumer (122). Through the use of this mechanism, many select-recipients of complimentary tickets would oblige to donate freely. Adopting a technique that can stir the desire to be acknowledged as a distinguishable and wealthy person through the invite for an occasion in which the patron seals his accorded status with a good sum of money.

Observing the various units of the theatre, likely all the units embody its entrepreneurial prospects and perspectives; yet in bringing all the sectors to form a united thrust using ticketing as an object of contact negotiation, there should be an aggregate fall-back to the primary essence of theatre. Theatre ticketing is a practice with its inherent but distinguishable system of administration. Each unit has a unique way of stimulation investment impulse in the theatre production independently. Thus, there is need to encourage investment as part of classroom experiments to avoid relegating a good measure of intellect to the background on the excuse that theatre it is meant for teaching and learning in classroom alone.

Conclusion

This study explored means, modalities and related aspects of awakening 'theatrepreneurship' as a re-conceptualisation category in the theatre arts craftsmanship and discipline towards realising the holistic goals of higher education everywhere in the world. The study further aimed at engendering investment-based theatre practices along with the artistic, didactic aspects towards making graduates of the theatre more inclusive and self-sustaining in the face of the current global socio-economic trends and national realities in the polity. The discipline has the fecundity to hatch and nurture investment lifeline but the hitherto prevalent culture of making every theatre production a free-show seems to inhibit entrepreneurial mind-set to the extent that graduates of theatre studies in Nigeria tend to relapse into despair for want of non-existing white-collar or government jobs. Worse still, they begin wondering in search for something to start life with, whereas many people who never studied theatre arts are living comfortably by using theatre means as path to wealth and fame. It is the conscious thrust of this critical analysis that the awakening to experiment on the possibilities of investing in the various units forming the collage of the theatre craftsmanship be factored into theatre tutelage and properly streamlined and harnessed by marrying intellectual development to job creation and for the promotion of national cultural heritage and entrepreneurship among the teeming youthful graduates of theatre arts in Nigeria. The study therefore recommends that right from the university, the students should be exposed to the techniques of negotiating entrepreneurship and income in the process of performing arts tutelage to enhance mastery of the dynamics and opportunities linked to theatre practice at the point of graduation.

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