

Interrogating the Use of Multimedia for Audience Engineering in the Nigerian Theatre Milieu

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Abstract

This essay examines the usefulness of technology to theatre practice in a digital age. This becomes imperative as the Nigerian Theatre milieu continues to struggle to maintain patronage due to dwindling audience response. The use of multimedia applications allow for the digital integration of texts, graphics, audio, still images, animations and motion videos in a way that provides the performer high-level control and interaction and leaves audiences desirous of more of such techno-performances. This investigation uses the Qualitative Approach to explore the effect of multimedia infusions (of screen to stage) in select experimental productions - Ifure Ufford-Azorbo's *Beyond my Scars*, staged in the Model Theatre Studio (MTS) University of Uyo, Dan Kpodoh's interpretation of Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to Blame* presented at The Arena in Port Harcourt and VickyBon Uzuazor's *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* staged in Akwa Ibom State University Pinnacle Theatre. This study is underpinned by Post-postmodernism (Metamodernism), the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) and Diffusion of Innovations Model (DIM) propounded by Everett Rogers. In its findings, the integration of multimedia to stage productions enhances the aesthetic and communicative value of theatrical presentations, therefore capable of satisfying new audiences for wider reception in the Nigerian theatre milieu. This paper recommends the creative and consistent use of multimedia as standard of practice for the reinvigoration of theatre productions in Nigeria.

Keywords: Audience Engineering, Multimedia, Nigerian Theatre Milieu, Technology

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, global theatre practice is taking account of technological discoveries in the digital age and examines how theatre can deploy such innovations to improve its art-making processes and products, thereby winning more patronage for the theatre. According to Duro Oni, “In the twenty first century, theatre is merely surviving extinction - owing to the influx of an assortment of electronic sources of entertainment” (19). The integration of technological inventions to human life positively, makes life easier and more interesting. Owing to the prevalent global digital revolution, theatres around the world have now become more than ever before saddled with the onerous responsibility of deploying technology to rewrite bodies of artistic works, which will update audiences’ perspectives, understanding and appreciation of artistic productions in the era of postmodernism.

The Nigerian theatre continues to struggle to maintain patronage as theatre halls become deserted due to low patronage, just as more contemporary sources of entertainment compete for attention via emerging screen technologies. Although advances in technology have been viewed by many as posing a threat to the patronage of live theatre and the twenty first century performance ontology, this paper interrogates the value of multimedia digital infusions and its role in engineering contemporary audiences to patronise live theatrical performances through the integration of multimedia elements in live theatre performances. The merging of technology and performance (termed techno-performance) has evolved into a staging convention and is noted to hold a unique position in contemporary theatre milieu. It has become a central thrust in the twenty-first century theatre praxis, especially for its perceived usefulness in engineering audiences for theatre performances. For this reason, creative undertakings, such as theatre productions demand the

consistent discovery and deployment of instruments and devices that will enhance their output and move in tandem with developmental trends present in society at a given time. According to Jacques Derrida, “The use of multimedia system demands for the contemporary use of technology to improve the art making process. Multimedia incorporates the use of movies, slides, animation, music and lighting, in a combination normally, for the purposes of education or entertainment” (21). As an organised venture that intends to court the attention of digi-visual audiences, the use of multimedia is endorsed by some practitioners to possess the potential to provide information and entertainment in a refreshing dimension to theatrical expressions in a way that communicates value for the advancement of human society culturally, economically and socially. Okon Jacob corroborates this stance holistically thus; “technology is a viable tool that increases human efficiency by maximizing the capacity to the expected result at minimal expenditure of resources - human and material” (52). In his view, “the fusion of technology with theatre has become imperative and should be deployed to aid the various designers and artists of the theatre” (66). Theatrical performances also take into consideration the use of language for communication either through verbal or nonverbal cues (Utin, 2016, Utin, 2023).

In Philip Auslander’s view, “the mediatisation of live theatre brings more privilege to live theatre merged with the electronic media” (35). In Chris Nwamuo’s opinion, “the technical upsurge is not only anticipated by scholars and practitioners but is also appreciated by potential new generation audiences, who remain a critical component in every theatre experience” (38). This corroborates the school of thought that, “the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been periods of great industrial and scientific developments, an age of innovation, creative originality and interdependence between the arts and sciences” (Esekong Andrew-Essien 32). There is evidently

interdependence between technology and other disciplines across all strata of human endeavour, be it medicine, sports, banking, education, commerce, aviation and other sectors. In the performative arts, there is a rising alliance and reliance on technology in the areas of lighting, scenery, video, text, audio, still images and animation. The use of multimedia elements converts live theatre to a standardised digital hub with audio and audiovisual aesthetic possibilities in creating an appealing performance environment capable of satisfying contemporary audiences with fresh dimensions of theatrical productions.

Theoretical Framework

From primordial times, the theories and principles which undergird theatre practice constantly upgrade by the discoveries from experimentations with technology. Since theatre is a slice of life, contemporary theories and theorists have kept momentum in a constant flow of creative energy, surfing the technological turf towards garnering better output, with the aim to gain increased patronage for the artistic venture. Underpinned by the nuances of Post Modernism and its sequel, Meta-Modernism; this study reveals an evident revolt against the modesties of modernism and tilts towards a more daring approach to theatre practice.

Post-Postmodern Theory (Meta-Modernism)

The Post- Postmodern Theory is not just an artistic reaction, but an intentional action, marking a departure from the precepts of Postmodernism, to a new post. In the work, *Flexible Theories, Dynamic Practice: Extensions and Converges of the Performing Arts in the Third Millennium*, Esekong Andrew-Essien submits that, “there is a tendency to become arbitrary; to deconstruct traditional conventions and recreate new forms of expression, which do not adhere to rational order” (4). The notion of Deconstruction is inspired by Bertolt Brecht, the major proponent of

Postmodernism and Erwin Piscator a foremost multimedia theorist who experimented with technology. Piscator developed his theatrical techniques against a background of immense political and ideological change in Europe and with the emerging fervour of the Expressionists, Dadaists and Surrealists; bringing with them unique ideologies and a whole new style and form – departing from conventions and intricately woven into their artistic expressions. Inspired by Erwin Piscator's multimedia innovation of using film projections, newsreels, sound, and mechanical technologies in the theatre space, Brecht experimented with multimedia in the theatre space by including photographic slide projections, film, and slides presenting figures and statistical information all together in the theatre space.

Fred Davis' Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) underscores the rate of acceptability of the infusion of multimedia elements to artistic practice, as applicable in the Nigerian theatre milieu. This notion authenticates Blunt Jerry's position that, "new junctures of performances have emerged between virtual characters and live actors on stage and provides for the theatre, performative interactions with simultaneous display of narratives which contemporary audiences appreciate" (20). The main stay of post-postmodernism is to move art and art-making process to go in tandem with the mindset and realities of the society or era in which it is domiciled. Thus, the need for post-postmodernism to swing its artistic and technical pendulum for proper oscillation between the real (life) and the reflection of life, through the integration of multimedia to live productions.

The ability of drama to continuously draw from life, in reflecting the realities of the nuances of the society it is imitating situates such artistic expression in context with the times of the production. Otherwise, it may suggest that the drama is historical due to the kind of props, costumes, makeup, lighting, sound and other forms of spectacles used to tell the story in terms of epoch or era of the presentation. Multimedia, in this sense, when accepted for use (in this case in theatre

performances) can be useful in depicting the present or represent a previous era. The Technology Acceptance Model is a theory that assesses the use of any given technology and the pace of acceptance within a given society. “In the performative arts, technology has the power to glamorise productions and improve the quality and delivery of messages” (Esekong Andrew-Essien 399). The key feature of this model is its emphasis on the perceptions of the potential user. That is, while the creator of a given technology product may believe the product is useful and user-friendly, it will not be accepted by its potential users unless the users share those beliefs. This position draws largely from Stelarc’s Evolutionary Futurism, “which focuses attention on the human-machine interface; extending conversations from the robotic to the actor-interactive work which incorporates the web, sound, music, text, videos and other computer generated assistance through the concept of “Absent Bodies” where the actor is allowed to interface with his environment” (59), and is supported by the theory Diffusion of Innovations, propounded by Everett Rogers.

Diffusion of Innovation Model (DIM)

The media theory, Diffusion of Innovations Model (DIM) propounded by Everett Rogers explains the how, why and at what rate, new ideas and technology spread through communities. Interrogating the spread in the use of multimedia in the Nigerian Theatre Milieu, the rate of decline in the patronage of theatre has since been blamed on the slow pace of integrating emerging and changing technologies to live theatre, as the advent of radio and television, cable network programmes and the internet, make for multiple format entertainment seem to endear prospective audiences away from the theatre. However, through the use of multimedia infusion to contemporary performance structure, there is hope to retain theatre’s unique actor-audience symbiosis, while injecting multimedia elements as part of technological innovations that keep theatre evolving in tandem with relevant technologies, present in the society.

According to Everett Rogers,

There are identifiable characteristics that predict whether and how quickly an innovation will spread through a community, which include: Relative Advantage: people are more likely to adopt an innovation if they perceive it as having some advantage over their current situation. Compatibility: people are more likely to adopt an innovation that fits with their cultural norms, and beliefs (55).

Therefore, the creative inventiveness rests on the use of technology by practitioners, as a tool to advance the course of theatre practice in their age and time and create magical presentations. The application of technology to theatre improves the aesthetic and communicative value of live theatre productions, thereby engineering contemporary audiences towards patronising the dramatic arts.

Application of Multimedia to Productions

The application of multimedia to production processes reflects in the three basic steps of play production, which consist of the following conventional procedures. They include: Pre-production activities, the Production and Post-production activities. However, the use of multimedia in each presentation is unique and follows the demands of the respective script, the creative inventiveness of the director to heighten the communicative value of the overall presentation in each of the tiers of production. The unconventionality of the applied medium leans on the post-postmodernism theory, which oscillates between pastiche, flexibility and an intentional departure from linear production rules in the use of text, audio, video, images and animation (as highlighted in each of the preparation block) to improve the communication value of the multimedia experiments under review.

Multimedia Productions: Information and Synopsis

Multimedia productions require the basic raw material, which is the script (or description of scenarios) for the artistic interpretation and technical implementation of the performance idea by the

director. This study documents the use of multimedia elements in Ifure Ufford-Azorbo's experimentation in *Beyond my Scars*, staged in the Model Theatre Studio (MTS) University of Uyo, Dan Kpodoh's multimedia interpretation of Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to Blame* presented at The Arena in Port Harcourt and VickyBon Uzuazor's *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* experimented by Aniebiet Mbede in Akwa Ibom State University Pinnacle Theatre, Obio Akpa Campus, all in South-South Nigeria. These productions provide practical ways which theatre can adapt emerging technologies through the use of compelling scripts, creative directors, 'tech-savvy' actors and multimedia adept directors to create a more stimulating theatre environment and bring to fore the innovativeness of digital theatre conventions. This exploration of multimedia theatre constructs a new paradigm that embraces digital presentational styles in productions.

Synopsis of *Beyond My Scars*

Beyond my Scars is a striking and classic dramatic piece from the imaginative oven of a theatre academic, Ifure Ufford-Azorbo, artistic and scholarly concerns to give further visibility and perspectives to ritualized abuse of the African fragile angel, the girl child, the feminist question in Nigeria and the global arena. The play voices concern against female genital mutilation and challenges the control of female sexuality and fertility through infibulation perfected and masterminded by the patriarchy. The story parades diversity of stimulating and mind driving angles to the phenomenon of female circumcision. According to Effiong Johnson, "Ifure Ufford-Azorbo's piece is a moral flame that burns passionately, and an intellectual spark that pumps the divine fuel of strong enlightenment on this fundamental subject matter around eleven (11) subdivisions of the drama christened situations (3)". It deploys a total theatre canon of presentation in a compelling use of the multimedia narrative technique.



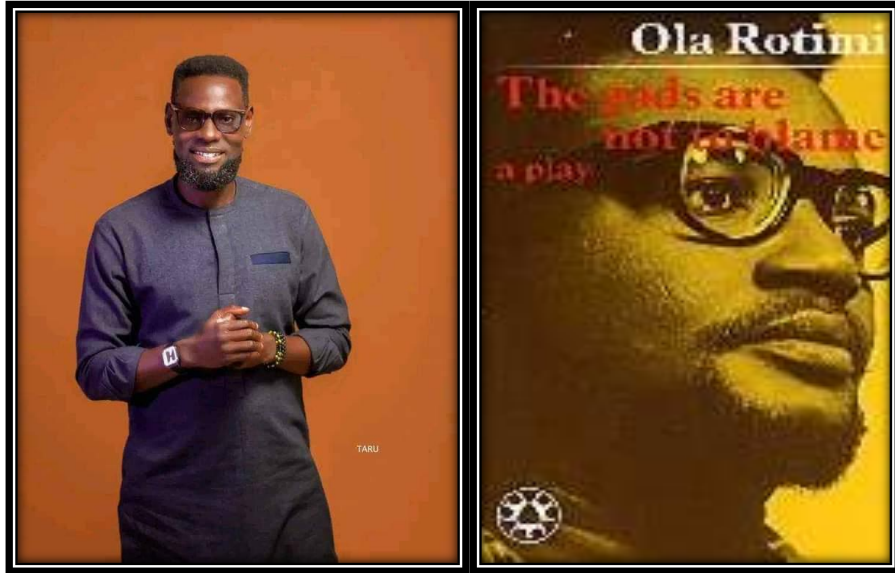
Figures 1 and 2: Writer and Director, *Beyond My Scars* - Ifure Ufford-Azorbo, PhD
Source: Director's Collection, University of Uyo Model Theatre Production, 2019.

Synopsis of *The gods are not to Blame*

The gods are not to Blame written by Ola Rotimi is an adaptation of the Greek classic Oedipus Rex. This reworking of Oedipus Rex was staged in 1968, was part of the African Arts (*Arts d'Afrique*) playwriting contest in 1969 and later published in 1971 by the Oxford University Press. The drama is about Odewale, a boy who was born and was fore seen that he will end up killing his father and will get married to his mother, but he was not aware of that fact, untill by a stroke of fate, he ended up killing his father in a bush path because of a land conflict and married his own mother.

The story unfolds with a mythological plot, the moral construct and oral traditions inherent in the production would instruct one to watch what we say, do, watch, portray and even man's anger and pride can determine his destiny. Dan Kpodoh uses multimedia technique to interpret Ola Rotimi's classic staged at The Arena, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria in 2021. Dan Kpodoh works with the Institute of Arts and Culture, University of Port Harcourt, he is a visiting lecturer to Federal University, Oye-Ekiti and University of Africa, Toru Orua. Dan is a prolific multimedia experimentalist, theatre maker, film maker, artistic director, choreographer, festival curator, content

developer, theatre consultant, dancer, pageant coach, the Founder/Director of Active Playhouse in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.



Figures 2 and 3: Dan Kpodo – Multimedia Director, *The gods are not to Blame* (Cover)
Source: Active House Collection, Port Harcourt, 2021.

Synopsis of *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*

Diary of a Pastor's Wife is a social commentary which borders on the credibility of some religious leaders, and their treatment of family as opposed to the façade of chanting, “*It is well*” to cover up for lifestyles that lack integrity to hold such divine assignment and leadership role in the society. A sense of familiarity resonates within the audience members when they find observable everyday patterns reflected in the story. Either as Pastor David, who was gullible to internal desires (to carry his own baby) and susceptible to external pressure (from his mother who needed a grandchild) and cowed in at the expense of his once loving and united family. The themes explored are: fidelity, forgiveness and fostering formidable families. *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* is written by VickyBon Uzuazor. VickyBon was born on 20th May, 1989 in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area

of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Vicky studied script writing at Royal Arts Academy Lagos and has written over sixty scripts.



Figures 3 and 4: VickyBon Uzuazor – Scriptwriter. *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* (Production Flier)

Source: Director's Collection, Pinnacle Theatre Production, 2023.

Use of Audio in Multimedia Productions

The use of audio in multimedia productions transcends the usage of the actor's natural voice to communicate with the message of the story to audience members. It involves the use of devices that can project the actor's voice (microphones), pre-recorded music sequenced to pass information through rhythms and melody and also, the use sound effects (to evoke powerful emotional responses through mood creation) as an accompaniment to the live performance on stage. The integration of these elements improves the aesthetic value of the performance and effectively communicates the message of the production to audience members. In *Diary of a*

Pastor's Wife, the audio-inserts are also used at intervals to introduce and exit action. This serves as an engaging intermission in the production. The choice of music was across contemporary and popular music genres according to the suitability sequence of the production.

The musical sequence in the production *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* was as follows:

SEQUENCE	TITLE OF MUSIC	ARTIST	DESCRIPTION
Introduction	<i>Daddy Wey Dey Papmer</i>	Moses Bliss	Introduction (Opening Montage)
Movement 1	<i>Rush Buga</i>	Ayra Star Kizz Daniel	Nightmare Dance Beat
Movement 2	<i>How are You (My Friend)</i>	Johnny Drille	The Love Affair
Movement 3	<i>Akwa Ibom Ayaiya</i>	Mish	Landing Blows (Airport Scene)
Movement 4	<i>Believe Me</i>	Johnny Drille	The Return
Movement 5	<i>Anam Se Ebeke Eda Ese</i>	Live Chorus (Backstage)	The Unpleasant Surprise
Movement 6	<i>Firm Foundation (He Won't)</i>	Maverick City Music	Hospital Wahala
Movement 7	<i>Night Bride</i>	It's OK (Instrumentals)	The Boutique Meet-Up
Movement 8	<i>Unavailable</i>	DavidO	Sister's Counsel
Movement 9	<i>Terminator</i>	Asake	Ediomo's Mischief
Movement 10	<i>In Christ Alone Wonder</i>	Live Chorus (On Stage) Mercy Chinwo	Hills of Grace Church
Movement 11	<i>Wahala Dey</i>	P Square	House on Fire
Movement 12	<i>Peace (Jehovah Knows)</i>	Lionel Peterson	The Verdict (Elder's Council)
Movement 13	<i>This is Just What Heaven Means to me</i>	Gaither Vocal Band written by W. Elmo Mercer	Ediomo's Burial
Movement 14	<i>On a Hill Far Away</i>	Instrumentals	The Restoration
Movement 15	<i>Hallelujah Chorus</i>	Live Chorus & Dancers (On stage)	Angel's Story
Closing	<i>Daddy Wey Dey Papmer</i>	Moses Bliss	End Credits

Table 1: Showing Music Sequence, *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*

Source: Director's Note, 2023.

The aesthetic use of sound in the production *Beyond my Scars* were based on pre-recorded musicals and voicing, such as, the supernatural depiction of the voice of God with echo effects. The director revealed depth of panic (in the circumcision process) by capturing heavy breathing and projecting the audio during the performance.

The actors used *on mic* (closer to the microphone) to reflect proximity and *off mic* (distant from the microphone) positioning and express remoteness in the pre-recorded conversations. The main tool of acting for the audio medium was the actor's voice, so attention was given to the actor's tonal quality in expression and control of pitch, timbre texture and loudness.

In *The god's are not to Blame*, microphones were used on stage to amplify the actor's voices. Boom mics were also placed around the stage area of the Arena. These forces were merged for the best possible audio impression. In *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*, the recorded dialogue were purposely intended not take too long, so that audiences will not fall into boredom. The simulated 'Voice of God' in the closing sequence was audibly captured with sound effect accompaniments like echo and thunder. The audio inserts were produced in the Department of Mass Communication radio studio, Akwa Ibom State University as pre-recorded audio clips to extend the audio-scape of the presentation. Designing the audio scape for a multimedia production entails aesthetic detailing of aurally perceived dramatic enactments. This technique makes use of the creative inventiveness of the multimedia director's imagination, the power of storytelling and rhythmic impulses and dramatic elements in the use of Sound, Sound Effects, Silence and Music (SSSM).



Figure 5: Use of Microphones by Actors (Choristers) in *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*

Source: Pinnacle Theatre Productions, May 2023.

Use of Video Inserts in Multimedia Productions

Beyond my Scars used video inserts in sections of the script, selected by the director (Ifure Ufford-Azorbo, PhD), to be filmed as either a flashback, future projection or a link between scenes. In an interview, she revealed that,

This method was used to further the understanding of the plot in the production. I had to experiment with the use of multimedia because I had interactions with some theatre practitioners who were of the opinion that, the movies have taken over live theatre audiences and I thought to myself, 'what way can we bring the film and live audience together in a shared experience?' The answer came as Multimedia. So, I used the video medium in *Beyond my Scars* to bring to fore the psychological dimension of the actor's imagination and perspective – thought, perception and soul. With the video medium the abstract level it captured realms like the great beyond (the land of the dead), the closeup expression of the pain of Female Genital Mutilation as in the circumcision rites

or a fantasising of a beautiful world in the flash forward scene. With this medium, it is not just effective but aesthetically appealing to bring sublimity from the mind realm to the yearning audiences. (Oral Interview 24/11/2023).



Figures 6 and 7: Showing Female Genital Mutilation (Video Insert) *Beyond my Scars*.
Source: University of Uyo, Model Theatre Productions, 2019.

In *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*, pre-recorded footages were taken using two professional Canon 5D digital video cameras to capture selected scenes, created using video Luminance and Chrominance, colour depth, and diverse angles of shots on location. The recorded footages were stored on SD64GB SanDisk memory card. The picture quality of any visual production depends on the camera type and angle of the shots taken. Hence, the quality of cameras and other filming equipment contributed to the extent of aesthetic capturing which gave essence to the story. In *The gods are not to Blame* apart from securing (hiring) the cameras, the equipment were put to proper use in capturing the classic story.

The camera movements and capturing of shots in specific angles in the production included: Establishment shots, Extreme Close Up shots, Close Up shots, Long shots, Medium Shots, Wide Shots, Reaction Shots, Ariel shots. Furthermore, the use of camera movements like: Panning, Dolly in, Dolly Out, Zoom in, Zoom out were creatively used to achieve aesthetics in the recording four

(4) movements which served as video inserts for *The gods are not to Blame*. Art Direction of the actors on set using the basic principles of directing included proper composition, picturisation, movement, rhythm and pantomimic dramatisation, to give aesthetic depth to the pictorial fields captured.

As tape rolled to capture audio-visual signals, the cameras were manipulated in suitable angles and directions to suit the intentions of the production. In an after shot selection, the editor made professional treatment on the footages in a process of treatment known as editing. The editing process in *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* made use of Adobe Premier Pro (2022 Version), a digital program installed in the computer and manipulated for proper arrangement and synchronization of production elements. The shots as recorded on location were transferred to the computer editing suite with the shots laid, cut, cropped, overlaid with visual effects, merged, achromatised, rendered and transferred into a flash drive for transfer into the laptop computers. The two (2) laptops were connected and fed independently (for audio and visuals respectively) into projectors by the sides of the auditorium with three pin banana cables with the yellow chord for video port, the white chord for audio right port and the red Chord for audio left port. With the fusion of the stage actions with the animation, audio inserts, video projections, and live actors, the performance came out not only as an aesthetically-appealing production but had its message well communicated to the audience. The audience members could readily connect to the theme and story line. This was intentionally created to reflect the mood of the actors in each scene and to express personal and emotional feeling. Video brings multimedia productions closer to real life. The display of pictures on a screen, as a story telling machinery is used to view flash back experiences of Pastor (Mrs.) Ekomin America. Through pre-recorded video production of the off stage scenes, the well-structured video feeds are properly edited, and projected to the audience as a continuation of the

action on stage. The projected video scenes exploit special effects like aircraft take-off and landing, burial ceremony and furious ghosts pursuing Pastor (Mrs.) Ekom in her dream. These videos help in creating adjuncts of possibilities through the use of multimedia as it would not be achievable to bring an aircraft onstage except through such mediated channel.



Figure 8: Screen Shot of Airplane video insert, *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*

Figure 9: Screen Shot Showing Extreme Close-Up (ECU) of Dr. Lizzy in Distress
Source: Director's fieldwork, *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*, May 2023.

Use of Text in Multimedia Productions

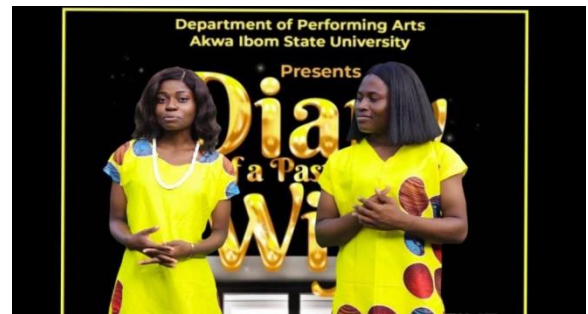
The use of text in a multimedia production heightens the aesthetic and communicative value of the production. The text (characters) are used to create words and sentences, which is basically a source of conveying information on the screen and can also be used as a medium to express the communicative aspect (the production script) and aesthetic bent (graphics) of the production in text style, size and colour. In *The gods are not to Blame* text was used as: Headlines, Subtitles, Menu, Content and Slogans in the video inserts used in the presentation. The evil prophecy that Odewale will kill his father and marry his mother was projected as text, to support the communication (Utin, 2016) of the seriousness of that message to the audience members.



Figure 10: Screen Shots - Use of Text in *The gods are not to Blame*
Source: Active Play House, May 2021.

Use of Chroma Key Text

The use of Chroma Key also known as Chroma keying or color keying, is an editing technique that can combine two video clips or images: an overlay and a background. The technique involved requires removing the green color from the around the subject in the overlay to allow the background text to show through. This special effect ushered in the actors for the first movement in *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*. The image used as background, text carries important production information such as: The title of the Production, the host department and the names of key players in the performance using the Chroma key technology. Figure 9: Chroma Effect for Background Text in *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*.



Use of Animation in Multimedia Productions

This captures the innovative processes and steps followed in using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to create animation for the opening scene in *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*. This was intentionally selected to capture audiences' attention and possibly sustain their interest in the production. From the select productions studied, it was only *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* that made use of animation as a story telling device and this recorded is a significant swing in the innovative performance space. The video was

produced using various web applications and editing software, resulting in a high-definition (HD) file suitable for playback at uncompressed, broadcast standard resolutions.

Step 1: To initiate the creation of the talking avatar, to make engaging videos from text in short time, the still image of the subject's photo was uploaded to a web application, *Movio.ia*.

Step 2: The image made into a talking video was submitted for rendering and prepared for the next stage. The avatar was rendered with the voiceover, accompanied by a plain green background, into a video format and imported it into CapCut, video editing software.

Step 3: In this step, we imported all the necessary assets, including the talking avatar with their green backgrounds and subtitles with green backgrounds, into InShot. The editor removed the green backgrounds, making them transparent layers for the next step.

Step 4: After the initial assembly, the entire video was further refined with transitions added between scenes to improve the overall flow of the animation.

Step 5: In the last stage, the final treatment of the animation from Vivacut as an HD file with a resolution of 1920 by 1080 pixels was achieved and a preview copy of the talking avatar.

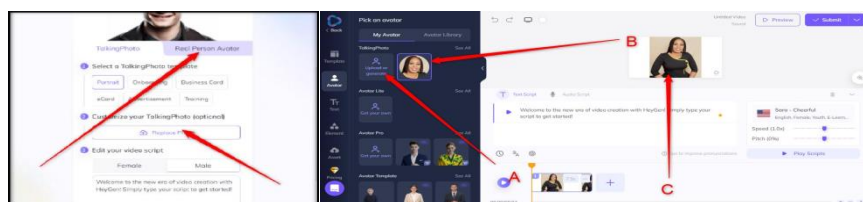


Figure 11: Showing Toolbox for uploading Photo for Talking Avatar, *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*.

Use of Space in Multimedia Productions

The use of space in a multimedia productions transcend the physical dimensions of the stage configuration, to creating digital spaces (digi-spaces) as sections of the performance are presented

in pictures, audio and video inserts projected to audience members. This will help audiences follow the story before their eyes and seat comfortably to relish the performance. In *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*, the director created spectacle in the presentation in a simultaneous setting (simul-set). The simul-set makes use of the screen and stage mediums simultaneously, to enhance the theatricality of the performance with multiple narratives, creating a pastiche effect which is consistent with Meta Theatrical expression. In *The gods are not to Blame* the LED screen is used in multiple dimensions for fluid movement with highly interactive scenic effects, swift scene changes and with transformable frames, to create a suitable and believable locale for the performance.



Figures 14: Showing Simultaneous Setting (Simul-Set) in *Diary of a Pastor's Wife*

Source: Researcher's Fieldwork, Pinnacle Theatre Production, 2023.



Figure 12: LED Screen for Changeable Scenery in Ola Rotimi's *The gods are not to Blame*

Source: Active Playhouse directed by Dan Kpodoh, Port Harcourt, 2021.

Audience Response to Multimedia Productions

In every age and every culture, audiences come to the theatre with expectations to leave informed, educated and entertained. Audience response can be articulated through direct observation of the numerical strength of people who view the theatre production (in the auditorium), and online through, live streaming, digital photos of production, videos and comments on the designated social media platforms. The function of theatre is guiding audience members through education, information and enthusiastic entertainment can be heightened through the infusion of multimedia elements to theatre performance.

Audiences will return to see more performances due to various reasons, from curiosity to the aesthetic experience in the presentational format of the production. The relationship between theatre and its audience propels the use of various media (multimedia) in the case of *Beyond my Scars* the Model Theatre studio could barely hold the overflowing audience members. The convergence drew from a pool of curious younger generation of people mostly between ages eighteen (18) and thirty five (35), who seek for methods of theatrical presentations that are adept with the digital practices of the age. The spectators in *Diary of a Pastor's Wife* did not just turn up in good number, the over four hundred and ten 410 audience members (out of 360 seats available) requested for extra seats to be brought into the auditorium, so they can squeeze in for the experience from the screen to the stage. In *The god's are not to Blame*, the audience review showed that multimedia was used to 'ginger' audiences in pre-production publicity materials online and audience members turned up in good number to relish the experience.

The presence of clusters of people in virtual social circles especially on Facebook Live, WhatsApp links posted, X (formerly known as Twitter), Instagram, Snap chat and YouTube made it easy for publicly posted information to reach the target audience. This Social media facility also helped the virtual audience members to leave a comment as they followed the progress of the

hybrid multimedia productions live on Facebook from different locations around.

Conclusion

In the light of the forgoing, it is safe to submit that, the integration of multimedia to theatre productions improve the aesthetic and communicative value of theatre performances. This interrogation reveals that, the use of multimedia throws a lifeline to aid the survival of theatre as an art form in the age of new communication technology. Taking leverage of multimedia as a platform of creative expression, the aesthetic presentations and heightened communicative value of the theatrical expression explores the potential of multimedia to attract the patronage of contemporary audiences and is also helpful in discovering new junctures of theatre practice (like animations) that can be infused for better storytelling and visual aesthetics. The use of multimedia in theatre productions therefore presents itself as a veritable tool for audience engineering in the Nigerian theatre milieu

Recommendation

Having discovered that creative industries need not depend on analog and traditional tools of play production, there should be suitable infrastructural and structural transition in the infusion of digital art to ensure compatibility to international levels in terms of technical training and provision of equipment in the theatre, in a manner that brings the greatest benefits to the greatest number of people. The world has evolved in the use of technology and is in the twenty-first century, therefore, there should be a policy for theatre practitioners (Scriptwriters, Actors, Artistic Directors and Technical Directors) to learn and be acquainted with the use of multimedia technologies to intentionally create and disseminate artistic messages in the production of stage plays, in a way that appeals to digitally adept audiences. The structure of contemporary productions via the use of multimedia should be deployed by practitioners as creative tool in the

production processes to improve the aesthetic quality and communicative value of stage productions.

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