

Seismology of Theatre Publicity: Mapping the Shockwaves of Audience Engagement in Nigerian Theatre Performances

Dr. Lucy Michael Iseyen



Department of Performing Arts, Akwa Ibom State University- Nigeria.

Abstract

In this paper, the Nigerian theater publicity space is analyzed through the lens of seismology in that all performances are viewed as epicentres of cultural vibrations while all publicity acts are seen as movements or tremors through social space. Adopting the theory of seismology of theatre publicity by Chris Nwamuo which posits that publicity is not just off-the-train events from a show, but an active process that influences expectation, emotion and communal engagement. The paper reviews the archival documents, digital campaigns, programs in festivals and narratives of audiences and leading Nigerian performance practitioner festivals like NAFEST, AKSUFEST, and Lagos International Theatre Festival – LITF. The paper uses qualitative and interpretive research techniques which are derived from hermeneutical approach. Through an in-depth examination it identifies three main dimensions of theatrical vibration which include dissemination of artistic intention by use of publicity; passing of messages through traditional and digital media as well as the consequent aftershocks that come in form of memory, discourse and continuity of the culture. The results indicate that publicity is both a cultural “ecosystem” in which the people and the group seek to co-create a pace for engagement, and the speed of engagement is somewhat managed. It also revealed that, while the National festivals generate bigger waves of symbolic identity; the performances of the University produce smaller, but powerful ones and the community theatres also create smaller waves of cultural expression; albeit at times, on a regular basis. Once these shows are done, there are digital afterimages and collective memories that play on, that extend the afterlife of the shows. Paper concludes that publicity in Nigerian theatre should be viewed as a living and self-sustaining system, the effectiveness of which is conditional upon the continuity of ethics and its preservation as well as the integration of the aesthetics of indigenous communication with modern media technology..

Keywords: Theatre Publicity, Nigerian Theatre, Seismology, LITF, NAFEST, AKSUFEST, Performance Communication.

Introduction

Theatre in Nigeria does not solely exist, it vibrates and beneath every performance lies a pool of unstated cultural memory, some pulse, traversing the social and emotional space. That rhythm, that movement, resonance, and impact is what inspires the metaphoric structure of this study. Like seismology, which portrays the tremors and aftershock of the geological nature, this paper outlines the vibrant waves that are created by theatre publicity; how consciousness release of performance advertorials creates audience responses that traverses across communities. Theatre in Nigeria is art, advocacy, pedagogy and cultural memory and therefore promotion of a performance can be as distinct and influential as performance in itself. Chris

Nwamuo’s concept of the “seismology of theatre publicity and Temple Hauptflieschs Seismology of Theatre gives the basis to this work. According to them, performance is like energy disseminating upwards and outwards beyond the immediate environment which means that publicity is not a peripheral practice, but a kinaesthetic response of the performance, a communicative shudder between artistic presentations and public consciousness. The richness of Nigerian theatre in terms of masquerade practices and university festivals, and the modern urban scenes, provides a good platform over which it is possible to trace these tremors. Radio jingles, posters, electronic campaign, parades, and word of mouth announcements; all of this

becomes seismic events radiating within public consciousness.

The metaphor also resonates with communication theory. Diffusion of Innovations by Everett Rogers describes the process through which ideas spread out in a cyclic fashion; awareness, interest, evaluation and adoption (5-10). So is it in the case of theatre publicity, the performance event is the so-called innovation; the adopters are the audiences who have decided to be involved and later propagate the message. The communication theory developed by Denis McQuail also underscores the role of the feedback loop created by the messages of media that has an influence on social response (148-172). Publicity thus is itself a sort of performance; a symbolic theatricalised anticipation and group involvement. The network of theater-publicity in Nigeria is as multi-ethnic as the culture itself. Publicity no longer goes through traveling theater companies, but to government arts councils, commercial companies, and the bustling campuses of educational institutions such as the University of Calabar and Akwa Ibom State University. In the article, Exploring Nwamuus Seismic Theory of Audience Engineering, by Lucy Iseyen, the definition of publicity is reconsidered as the directed flow of creative energy (25). Her work is based on the significant contribution of Chris Nwamuo in his article Theatre Audience Engineering in Nigeria (2006), where he relates publicity with psychological engagement (9-14). Collectively, these scholars regard publicity as an aesthetic approach and a means of assisting individuals, mentally, in a manner that

considers the emotional and intellectual implications of a performance.

This conversation is more interesting when you apply performance theory. The ritualistic aspect of advertising is encapsulated in the idea of Richard Schechner, the restored behavior characterized as planned actions that remain alive and repeated actions that remain significant. A trailer, poster or even press release, all serve the same purpose; they make people excited about the event. His concept of twice-behaved behavior is applicable to publicity rules since campaigns create anticipation and motivate individuals to participate in the event prior to it. This way, publicity is symbolic form of activity, which reflects rhythm of performance within the cultural environment.

This paper uses a hermeneutical-based approach that is qualitative and interpretative. The approach understands the message by reading the language, tone and symbolism in publicity materials to decode the meaning and cultural value as opposed to counting audiences on seats or the number of people looking at the advertorials. Primary sources include festival programmes, posters, university newsletters and digital campaigns, read through performance, communication and audience development scholarship. Publicity is not given as a data but as discourse: a living text, telling how the Nigerian world is discussing art, identity and being perceived.

These three axes of interpretation lead to the investigation. One is Textual resonance: how cultural, aesthetic or ideological identity is encoded in the publicity materials. The

second is contextual vibration: the process through which publicity links to social worlds that causes emotional and community response. Third is temporal echo; the life-after of publicity in the memory and discourse. These axes metaphorically coincide with seismological marks like the epicenter, wave and aftershock. It is through this structure that the study builds vocabulary of reading publicity in movement and an energy that commences at the point of creation and extends a long time after performance. The theoretical scope of this work is based on various fields. Hauptfleisch suggests the ontological metaphor; Rogers and McQuail offer communicative mechanics; Schechner elaborates on performative logic; Nwamuo and Iseyen represent the conversation with the references to the Nigerian cultural and psychological context. The role of African theatre as an instrument of development and conscientisation as Patrick Ebewo claims (18) only supports the idea that one should read publicity not only as a source of information but also as the energy of affection which builds the consciousness of the population.

Seismology under this interpretive approach is a thing even more than a metaphor, it is a critical method that requires the consideration of the unseen echoes of anticipation, curiosity and conversation surrounding events in the theatre. Seismological mapping of publicity consists of tracing the lines of artistic energy taking it out of the source to its readers. Beyond just keeping track of names; to understand how publicity translates to being engaged and how engagement translates to cultural continuation.

This introduction therefore sets the context for this research on the Seismology of Theatre Publicity as a study of movement: ideas, emotions and audiences, theatre in perpetuity as conversation between the art and society, signal and response. By so doing, it encourages scholars to listen otherwise, to tune their critical instruments to other tunes of attention and involvement that bring life to the living theatre of Nigeria.

Beneath The Surface: The Vibrations of Nigerian Theatre

Beneath the shiny surfaces of the Nigerian theatre; the costume, songs and dance is an under-current that shivers with cultural memory. The body of the theatre moves, the soul vibrates. And these undulations are the invisible words of people talking to themselves, the little tremors that go with every attempt at staging, at making announcement and at assembling. In this landscape, publicity does not stand out of performance; it is made of the same substance of the ground shaking beneath it. To mention seismology in connection with theatre publicity is to admit that there is energy in all plays, festivals, or on-campus productions, which, like a shockwave in the social body, seeks to be felt. The following points will be considered in this section.

Influences of Vibrational Roots of Nigerian Theatre:

The theatre professionals of early Nigeria knew that drama did not originate on stage, but it reverberated miles away. The mobile troupe of Hubert Ogunde of the 1940s

and 1950s created publicity through performance like parades, songs, and public pronouncements made advertising spectacle. This was a strategy that reverberated the practices of native masquerades where announcements were made by sound, rhythm and rumour. According to Ogunbiyi, the plays of Ogunbiyi attracted the audience with the drama of their appearance (149). His touring appearances were social shocks, and his publicity was practising the vitality of the performance which it promised.

This vibrational reason extended to post-colonial festivals. The 1977 Festival of Black and African Arts and Culture (FESTAC 77) is one of the landmark events of publicity as national seismology. The posters, jingles, and televised rehearsals created a fever of the festival which spread all over the country. Here we can see the statement by Temple Hauptfleisch that performance is like radiating energy that causes ripples upwards and outwards of its immediate context (253). The waves of FESTAC confirmed cultural identity and national presence, as well as served as an artistic and political reverberation.

Theatre Publicity as Cultural Pulse

This rhythmic tradition is expanded in modern Nigerian publicity. University festivals like AKSUFEST promote street processions and online teasers that make campus and the surrounding areas a vibrant place. The Lagos International Theatre Festival (LITF) and the National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST) are the epicentre of Nigeria in the cultural seismograph. These spaces then concentrate its vitality of

numerous and diversely executed performances and release new waves of discourse into social and media spaces.

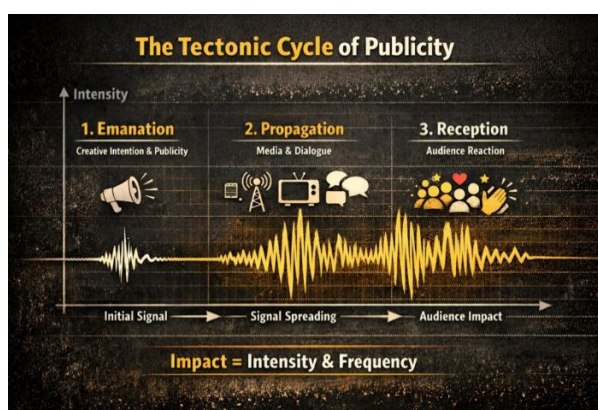
Lucy Iseyen asserts that publicity “prolongs the aesthetic life of a performance into the public domain through anticipation and emotional pre-engagement” (27). Her submissions support the Audience - Engineering theory of Nwamuo which says that it is the audience and not the playwright that co-produces what is enacted on stage. Publicity therefore acts as a drumroll before the dance, generating awareness, establishing expectations and participation. The message and medium share a common symbolic space in most Nigerian communities, in which both the theatre publicity and the drum are at the same level as the message. Conversely, Patrick Ebewo puts theatre within a developmental context as performance communication, a participatory conversation, in which the audience become instruments of social change (18). That renewal forms part of the publicity cycle. When a local troupe is promoting a play about gender justice or when a university is distributing festival flyers at schools, they are not just promoting an event, they are creating event consciousness.

The Dynamics of Performance Energy

Performance energy refers to the energy and intensity which a performer exudes and communicates with an audience. It is not simply that one has to be loud or move around. It is a combination of presence and attention, emotional charge and physical preparedness that ensures that the audience is hearing something happening. Consequently, in the

performance energy interactions, publicity, too, participates in its negotiation as does performance. Conventional methods of publicity were based on oral communication and mobilisation of the collective, but the contemporary theatre is based on the digital transmission, marketing, and corporate support. Whatever the case, they both operate by vibration and by the capacity to pass on emotional and symbolic energy.

The restated behavior as presented by Richard Schechner says more on this as well. He submits that publicity is a practice of anticipating in which every poster or trailer is a shaping of the upcoming event referred to as the so-called twice-behaved behaviour designed to prepare the audience to experience a theatrical immersion. Apparently, a poster titled “The struggle” or “The Trapped” by Dan Kpodoh or Lucy Iseyen is not just informative, it is visualized pre-performance which must not be overlooked. These dynamics make publicity a constituent of the performance, not its antecedent.



Pix 1: Seismological reading illustrating the three related phases of Vibration Process

Source: Researchers fieldwork

The seismological reading illustrates three related phases of this vibration process: the first stage is emanation, which is the

discharge of creative intention through publicity; the second is propagation, which is the transmission of that signal in media and dialogue; the third is reception, which is the embodied audience reaction. It is this three that constitutes the tectonic cycle of publicity. Similar to earthquakes, the impact of a performance on the population does not solely rely on its quality, but also on the intensity and frequency of the vibrations.

The Publicist as Seismographer

In this metaphor, the publicist is the seismographer of the theatre.; one reads vibration and foresees the response of the audience. Iseyen refers to this as the conscious transformation of artistic impulse into social consciousness (30). The publicist is a listener who picks up the cultural frequencies that are familiar to a community where messages are adjusted to meet collective memory and modern desire. In the case of NAFEST, it can be the appeal to cultural nostalgia and in the case of AKSUFEST, it is the combination of youthful vitality and institutional identification. Both strategies vary the seismic reach of publicity. The feedback model by McQuail supports the responsive role of the publicist where communication is a two-way process (148-172). It is reflected in the reactions observed in the audience in terms of attendance, responses left in the comment box, applause and loudness which are aftershocks that influence future decisions on publicity. With this, the trace that determines the vitality of the theatre is audience feedback.

Continuities of Cultural Vibration

Since the touring productions of Ogunde to the digital age festivals, Nigerian theatre has never stopped talking vibration; using sound, gesture, and affect. A masquerade's drumbeat continues to announce performance in village squares and in urban areas, the identical impulse is discovered in jingles, posters, and social media. The surface varies; the pulse remains.

Here, the cycle of conscientization that Ebewo (19) describes is being played out by publicity- a stirring of consciousness that recreates theatres in the social memory of the society. Every performance is a reenactment of the vibration, creating a layer of cultural ground of Nigeria with the protest, celebration, and reflection memories.

Toward a Living Pulse

The study of these vibrations means to perceive Nigerian theatre as a living ecology, but not a sequence of discrete events. Every publicity gesture becomes one long cultural seismograph documenting the creative energies of the nation. Publicity, consequently, should not be pushed aside to the periphery of theatre discourse. It is symptom and sign of artistic life. Below the veil of any production, there exists an unseen choreography of attention, which is kept by the rhythm of publicity, maintained by the rhythm of expectation, maintained in the tremors of memory.

Tremors of Meaning and The Seismic Logic of Publicity

Should the vibration of Nigerian theatre lie below the surface, then in those

vibrations will be the vibrations of meaning, the symbolic shocks which pass along words, images, and collective expectation. Theatre publicity is not an announcement of permanence, but a communicative quake that spreads emotion, information, and anticipation through the social terrain. Every flyer, broadcast or tweet contains coded meaning that elicits response, recognition or resistance. To comprehend these tremors, one must track the logic of publicity: the cultural and communicative systems which define how the energy of a performance circulates between its epicenter and its audiences.

The Logic of Seismic Communication

Communication theory provides a lead to this submission. In *Diffusion of Innovations*, Everett Rogers notes that ideas in societies are diffused in waves of awareness, persuasion and adoption (5-10). Each stage is energy transfer an echo of the initial signal. This law of propagation applies to theatre publicity. The first wave is the announcement of a play or festival, the secondary waves are the repetition of the announcement through radio, social media, and personal networks, and the common buzz, which results in attendance; thus, becoming the aftershock. In this regard, publicity is like seismic vibration: it is strong by depth (meaningfulness of the message) and reach (extent to which it is transmitted).

The Mass Communication Theory of McQuail supports this analogy. He refers to media systems as feedback loops of meaning, which concurrently exist at cognitive and emotional levels (McQuail 150). Publicity

therefore, is not only informative but also persuasive, exciting and aligning the audiences with the values that lie in the performance. An example is a publicity poster of AKSUFEST 2025, which does not merely show the dates and venues, but reinstates cultural pride through the visual encoding of identity markers, like costume, dance, and ethnic elements. These symbols act as cultural shocks that bring to life awareness. As these messages spread, they create a sense of awareness and belonging, which has been referred to by Hauptfleisch as outward ripple of energy that theatre creates, resonating long after the actual event (256).

Publicity as Meaning-Making

Lucy Iseyen expands this argument through her reading of Nwamuos Seismic Theory of Audience Engineering. She also clarifies the publicity process as a pre-performance interpretation whereby the publicist controls how the audience is going to interpret them before the event (Iseyen 26). This means that publicity equates to a pre-performance; a performance before performance. It shapes the audience's expectation, sentiment and social structure to define what audiences think the play is about before going to the play. This is a psychologically accurate argument in the model of audience engineering by Nwamuo. He states that the Nigerian theatre has to establish some kind of psychological connection to the audience (13), making a breach between the familiar and the unfamiliar. This demands such a subtle use of information in the publicity industry that it

should not only capture the attention of the audience, but also confront it. Publicity is therefore not the bland communication, but negotiated revivification and disruption and in between this dance of resonance and disruption, it is the crepidoma that lies in the beautiful irony of this fine strangeness.

This interpretation is in line with performance theory. Richard Schechner describes performance as the restored behaviour - actions that are practiced, remembered and repeated (Schechner, ch. 2). The meaning is also restored through the publicity, which premediates the use of the symbolic code in the theatre. The aesthetics of rebellion, ritual or irony of the play "once upon a time four robbers or The King must Dance Naked" by Femi Osofisan is recovered in a video trailer. Thus, it is presented as a meta-performance, a performance promoting a performance, which is a cultural code. The ease with which Schechner makes performance twice-behaved behaviour is equaled: publicity is twice-told meaning.

The Tremor as the Cultural Semiotic

It is important that semiotics of publicity helps in comprehending its seismic logic. All the outward words, visual and verbal announcements are signs. This could be called the mythology of the theatre poster as described by Roland Barthes. In the Nigerian tradition, these signs are layered: the talking drum is a sound and a symbol; the costume as presented on the billboard is a genre and identity marker; the actor's posture is a signifier for tone. The Marketing of Culture and the Arts, by Francois Colbert, calls it the

symbolic interface with the audience (33). There are many of such interfaces in Nigerian theatre promotion. For instance, taking the NAFEST 2025 logo, we have intertwined drums and dancers; the symbol of unity in diversity; a literal call for national unity. Similarly, culture-academia hybridity also sees the use of university crests and colourful images of performers at such festivals as AKSUFEST. The iconography are tremors of meaning: they create ideological tremors that enhance national, ethnic and institutional identities.

Globally, the same semiotic process would be at work. The Hamilton trademark created by Broadway with the simple figure of a two-legged man on top of a star is a cultural tremor enjoyed by worldwide audiences. The posters produced in the anti-apartheid era at the Market Theatre in South Africa were done in black and white to induce a sense of urgency and defiance. Hauptfleisch (2007) sees this semiotic intensity as the social tremor of theatre, when the aesthetic force is merged with political awareness (259). The examples reveal that although there are differences in publicity styles, the role of communicating the emotion and the ideology, which is an earthquake, will always remain the same across geographies.

Publicity, Emotion, and the Audience's Sensorium

Publicity quakes are felt through emotion. Emotional appeals, whether funny, sentimental, optimistic or indignant, dominate Nigerian publicity practices. Kawashima's analysis of audience-building in Britain

highlights that "emotional engagement converts attendance into attachment" (62). Similarly, Firych argues that effective marketing of the arts "balances persuasion with participation" (176). In Nigeria this is achieved when publicity demands emotional involvement: call-in jingles on radio where audience members yell; pre-performance parades on campuses where students dance and distribute posters; livestream announcements where actors address audiences. Each of these activities lives publicity. As Patrick Ebewo observes, "Theatre in Africa has never been an isolated aesthetic but a social instrument of participation" (Ebewo 17). So, it is publicity that is the first call to action, it establishes an emotional connection between the artwork and the audience. For example, in the lead up to AKSUFEST held at Akwa Ibom State University there are song, competitions and costume parades all across campus. Not only do they publicise the event, but they create excitement and happiness and ownership. The publicity is, as Schechner says, a rehearsal of feeling.

The Seismic Ecology of Media

Theatre publicity quakes are faster and more remote in the digital era. Social media is the most seismically active cultural communication zone. Mbede et al. report, "Nigerian theatre practitioners are "utilising WhatsApp, Instagram and TikTok as apparatuses of audience engineering, amplifying participation beyond the immediate theatre community" (97). Online promotion eliminates distance, enabling

audiences to participate in the promotional process. A viral rehearsal video is like an earthquake, short but intense, and it generates a tsunami of interest. This is backed up by international examples. During the pandemic, many theatres (such as the National Theatre Live at London's National Theatre or online streaming on Broadway) discovered that digital publicity could be globally broadcast. These trials demonstrated what Brown and Ratzkin describe as "participatory engagement" of publicity as co-authorship (12). Nigerian theatres are now adopting similar models, with livestream show previews, virtual behind-the-scenes interviews and countdown graphics making the pre-performance publicity as theatrical as the show itself. In this seismic digital world, each like, share and comment is an earthquake on the cultural Richter scale.

Publicity as Aesthetic Feedback

McQuail's model of communication gives us the theoretic terms for what practitioners already knew, that publicity is feedback, and that publicity needs to function in a complex feedback loop (McQuail 160). Audiences react, not just in attendance but in conversation, analysis and even imitation, for instance after NAFEST experiences, local theatre groups will take songs or sketches that have been publicised and rework them, turning publicity into a new performance. These are secondary quakes of meaning, -secondary aftershocks that prolong the existence of the event. This is what Lucy Iseyen calls "the recursivity of artistic attention" (30). Once attention is drawn by publicity, it is rarely

squandered; it is memorialised and verbalised. The poster becomes a memory; the website becomes a record. Publicity is thus theatre's first archive, the record of events prior to their production. Thus, its seismographic meanings are ephemeral and unending, if momentary in the present, it becomes permanent in collective memory,

Toward a Seismic Theory of Publicity

Drawing on local and global examples, this section suggests that the seismic logic of publicity is a universal artistic pattern. It operates on vibration: audio, visual, digital. And it works through engagement: psychological, emotional, social. For Nigeria, the cultural hybridity, the oral, print and digital publicities add to the thickness of this vibration, so that each publicity act vibrates on multiple frequencies. It is the multivalence that gives rise to the tremor in Nigerian theatre, a communication rhythm that is both traditional and modern. Temple Hauptfleisch thus explains the metaphor of the "social earthquake of performance" (267). It notes that publicity is the precursor and the tremors of the earthquake; it is the context for perception, and the record of response. In the seismology of theatre publicity, meaning is not static, it vibrates, it re-forms. To study these tremors is to study the conversation between art and society, which starts in imagination and develops in publicity, and reaches its peak in resonance.

Epicenters And Fault Lines: Mapping the Nigerian Performance Terrain

Nigeria's live theatres give physical expression to the tremors mapped out in previous sections. In urban and campus spaces, publicity does not just signal events - it re-territorialises cultural spaces, creating visible and invisible shifts in attention. Each festival is an epicentre, a hub of creative force from which publicity reverberates, informing audiences, attention and memory. But between epicenters are fault lines, areas of division, funding stress and communicative blockade that shape the extent of the waves. So, to map Nigeria's theatrical seismology, it is necessary to track both eruptions and fractures.

National Epicenters – The Case of NAFEST

The National Festival of Arts and Culture (NAFEST), first conceived by the National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC) in 1970, is Nigeria's longest-running publicity machine. Every edition converts its host city into a cultural epicentre where contingents from the states compete with plays, dances, masquerades and exhibitions. Months before the event, publicity starts with radio jingles, press releases, billboards and TV broadcasts of rehearsals, building anticipation across the country. Hauptfleisch's claim that theatre creates "waves of social energy beyond its immediate locality" (254) is evident here. NAFEST publicity occurs in three circuits:

- i. Institutional - NCAC news bulletins and endorsements
- ii. Local - local journalists, theatre, artisans
- iii. Digital - hashtags, live streams, influencer commentaries

However, these waves are not necessarily smooth. According to Akpodiete, "Advertising in the context of national festival celebrations is often defined by a disconnect between the intent and perception of what is actually the most artistic (6)". Artistic vision gets clouded over by delays in funding, political cooptation and ritual pageantry. The earthquake is felt but the meaning is lost. Nevertheless, the size of NAFEST is still unprecedented. This publication, which took place in Ekiti in 2025 and was carried out under the theme of Celebrating Nigeria's Unity in Diversity, demonstrated the essence of publicity leading to identity play. Billboards and television proclaimed unity among all races and discussion on social media parroted the symbolism of the festival. Only part of McQuail's definition of mass communication as being "successful when 'symbolic sharing' supersedes 'informational transmission'": (162) applies. Now NAFEST advertising is an appeal to the emotions.

Academic Epicenters - AKSUFEST and Campus as Cultural Seismograph

AKSUFEST is a micro-stratospherical quake compared to NAFEST which is the national epicentre. Since 2022, Akwa Ibom State University Festival (AKSUFEST) has been a resurgence of creativities involving students and lecturers as well as the community. Here public relations have a dual aspect—promotional and educational. AKSUFEST is unlike the NAFEST "style" that has been funded by the government. Students make posters, arrange parades, make online teasers and do an experiment in

psychology. Iseyen would refer to this model as an "academic re-imagining of Nwamuo's audience engineering model" (29). Thus, publicity becomes a learning exercise: pupils get trained for media diffusion, grassroots organizing and symbolic communication.

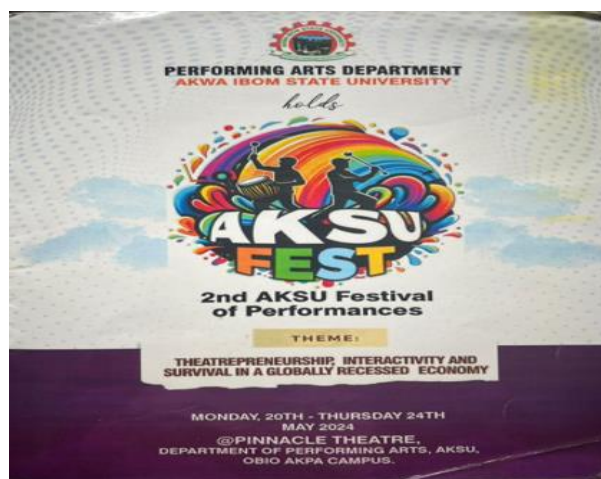
AKSUFEST publicity operates on three wavelengths:

- i. Physical - parades, drumming, street theatre
- ii. Virtual - countdown posts, trailers, #AKSUFEST2025 hashtags
- iii. Dialogic - classroom discussion and word-of-mouth, dept campaigns.

These frequencies are similar to seismic frequencies seen in earthquakes, which give rise to vibrations of certain interest in their interaction with a physical and virtual environment. Mbede et al. go on to say that the social media users "radically extend the social reach of theatre, rendering the virtual users as real users" (98). A significant fault is, however, the lack of continuity. Promotion platforms are usually left idle after each promotion. Rogers' theory of diffusion thus proposes that the innovation must be tended so that it doesn't end up losing its qualities (14). If the AKSUFEST quake in politics does not permeate into institutional memory, then it will have a limited impact. If AKSUFEST is not sustainable, it will have a limited impact, will not trickle down into institutional memory. The festival, however, has established that the university is a 'seismograph' of Nigerian theatre since it is where young generations learn to translate the creative power into an engaging audience.



Pics 2: 1st AKSUFEST Programme



Pics 3: 2nd AKSUFEST Programme



Pic 4: 3rd AKSUFEST (AKSUFEST 2025) Programme
Source: Researcher's Fieldwork

Urban Epicenters- Lagos International Theatre Festival (LITF).

Nigeria's cultural hub Lagos continues to be an epicentre. The Lagos International

Theatre Festival (LITF) of 2013 is a blend of marketing strategies and innovation. Festivals are promoted with Press Conferences and via Press Offices; there are influencers and sponsors and the events are live streamed. Colbert calls this a "fusion of symbolic value with economic sustainability" (44). LITF campaigns are active. Corporate Partners boost exposure; independent companies organise Guerrilla Marketing – such as Flash Mobs, Pop-Up Theatre, Posters with scannable info. Powerful dynamics go toward the top, there's bottom up dynamics, creating a publicity ecology. However, there are tensions in Lagos' hyperactivity and inequality, which restrict access – so, argues many audiences, LITF is elite or Western. The violence disproportionately targeted at women and girls by men stems from a "branding gap between intention and inclusion" (8), Akpodiete points out, and Iseyen cautions, "A vibration that does not reach its local ground is merely an echo" (31). Here, publicity risks highlighting sophistication at the expense of accessibility. Despite this, LITF's digital vibrancy is innovative. In 2024, *Fractured Realities* portrayed cracks in a cityscape, reflecting Lagos's dynamism and tension. Publicity here is self-reflective, staging the social tensions presented on stage.

Grassroots Fault Lines -Community and Travelling Theatres

In addition to major festivals, there are many community theatre groups that keep Nigeria's subterranean performance streams alive. Such groups work on the cultural fault lines, where low-level but continuous temblors

sustain localised theatre activity. Publicity takes place through word-of-mouth: church bulletins, town criers, marketplaces and WhatsApp messages.

Ebewo calls such public performance practices of these communities "communication theatre" (18), where publicity is message. In such a theatre, publicity act as an invitation; it is the pulse of the performance. There are challenges such as:

- i. Limited funding
- ii. Sparse documentation
- iii. Minimal media access
- iv. Low digital literacy

Dandaura notes that these theatres are "high in creativity and low in amplification" (68); but their seismicity builds to a wave. McQuail on the other hand submits that NANTAP outreach programs sometimes use interpersonal rather than mass media for their publicity, and they achieve a "high emotional saturation through low-technology communication" (164). It is thus popular publicity that keeps a cultural micro-seismology going. On a Global Parallels, Nigeria's publicity dynamics resonate with global performance terrains. The Market Theatre in South Africa played the role of a seismic centre throughout the apartheid in which posters were used as visual earthquakes to challenge power (Hauptfleisch 268). The Ghana Chale Wote Street Art Festival is a type of event that combines the use of parades and online campaigns to generate transnational tremors. These similarities confirm the fact that though local socio-political realities guide publicity in Nigeria, the reasoning behind the cultural vibration is universal.

This cartography of epicentres and fault lines shows that Nigerian theatre publicity is vibrant but not resilient. Cultural earthquakes are unleashed by each festival or community play, but without channels, the energy is lost. This earthquake analogy illustrates size, without connectivity, equals low energy. Iseyen suggests, "the future of theatre publicity depends on its ability to turn vibration into connection" (31). Successful publicity involves connection of organisations, audiences and media. When this happens, the tremors turn into rhythm, and publicity turns from noise to beat.

Measuring The Quakes – Methods in The Rhythm of Publicity

While the preceding sections of this research mapped the places where Nigerian theatre publicity quakes, this section outlines the methods of observing and analysing the tremors. Seismology (in its literal sense) is an auditory discipline: it perceives movements that are invisible but become audible through instruments and their surroundings. For this study, the approach is metaphoric. To listen to theatre publicity seismologically is to listen for the pulses of attention, interest and discussion that circulate around theatre events and to consider how those pulses are significant for audiences and theatres.

Seismology as an Operational Method

Hauptfleisch's proposal for theatre studies to adopt seismological metaphors offers a way to use metaphor in analytical work. Three terms are borrowed and defined:

a. Epicentre is the source of publicity

energy: For this research, the epicentre could be a festival, a theatre company, a university department or an individual artist. At this level, analysis is more focused on the purpose, tone, and consciousness involved in publicity; what organisers think they are doing with messages and images.

b. Wave propagation refers to the flow of publicity through media and social networks:

Here, the focus is on channels and frequencies: media channels (print, electronic, interpersonal), frequency of publicity, language and tone shifts that occur as messages are communicated from one person to another.

c. Aftershock refers to the reactions that continue after the campaign including reviews, comments, passing references and changes in reputation or attendance that are attributable to previous publicity. Aftershocks reveal how publicity has permeated public knowledge and its long-term impacts.

Rather than tabulating these factors, the study uses them as lenses to interpret cases. Each case of a festival or performance is examined according to the epicentre of the event, the waves it produces and the aftershocks that are visible.

Four theories inform the interpretative work within the seismological framework:

a. Diffusion of innovations: The stages of awareness, persuasion, decision and adoption in Rogers's model of diffusion of innovations map onto the stages of a publicity campaign, from initial announcement to eventual audience acceptance or rejection.

b. Performance Studies: Schechner's notion of "restored behaviour" implies that publicity stages the performance; trailers, posters, and parades simulate the vibe of the performance and offer audiences a preliminary experience of the event.

c. Cultural Marketing: Colbert's research on cultural and artistic marketing highlights that publicity not only promotes ticket sales but creates symbolic value and branding, particularly for festivals in an eclectic cultural market.

d. African Theatre Hermeneutics: Nwamuo's theory of theatre audience engineering and Iseyen's later contributions on seismic audience engagement situate the analysis within Nigerian interpretive traditions, in which publicity is a psychological and cultural strategy rather than a commercial one.

Put together, these perspectives offer a complex framework that is able to look at the dynamics of movement, meaning and mediation simultaneously. Lastly, the study offers three qualitative indicators to "measure" the quake of theatre publicity without transforming it into simple numbers:

i. Amplitude (reach): To what extent do publicity messages seem to circulate across social and geographic spaces? For instance, the national television coverage of NAFEST's awards ceremonies indicate reach, although not necessarily with the same emotional response across different audiences.

ii. Frequency (repetition): How often and in what diversity of forms do publicity messages recur in the pre-event, event and post-event periods? On-campus festivals such as

AKSUFEST may use repetition of visual media (posters and rehearsals in public spaces, announcements in classes) to keep the event in mind in a small space.

iii. Resonance (affective depth): To what extent do messages appear to matter to the people who see them, as measured by the language people use to comment, the level of engagement in debate and the duration of memory? A campus parade, for example, might not reach as many people as a network broadcast, but it might evoke deeper affective responses among those who engage with it.

These measures are applied interpretatively, in accordance with Patton's argument that qualitative research is focused on the weight of meaning, not that of numbers. The objective is to describe the dynamics of publicity in communities, rather than its volume. So, in this sense, "measuring the quakes" of theatre publicity becomes a form of listening attentively to the ways in which Nigerian theatre enters, disrupts and endures in public life.

Aftershocks And Echoes: Towards A Living Theatre Publicity

Each quake leaves its mark. After each performance at Nigerian theatre, after the drums have stopped and people have left, something remains. Past publicity that started with vibration persists as echo, reverberation and memory. These reverberations show that theatre publicity is not a passing message, but a pulse and to listen for them is to hear the legacy of art in society after its performance.

The Persistence of the Wave

Temple Hauptfleisch tells us that “the theatre event is never finished; its energy diffuses long after the curtain call” (269). This is the aftershock, aftershock that resonates anew with memory. When fans tweet reviews or share quotes from plays, or post pics from NAFEST or AKSUFEST, they extend publicity. What started as an invitation becomes extension. These resonances are often collective as a Uyo production becomes a topic of discussion on radio in Calabar; a university play becomes meme on WhatsApp among former students. McQuail’s “media feedback loops” (165) describe this circularity: media messages are returned in parodied, twisted or affectionate ways. The earthquake has subsided, but the land continues to tremble.

Memory as Aftershock:

Memory is the aftershock of publicity. Iseyen notes that “publicity lives on as cultural memory, impacting on community recollection of performance” (31). When spectators remember not only the plot of a play but also the poster in which they were interested or the slogan that was memorable, then publicity has entered the memory structure of the performance. Colbert explains that, “the more affective the pre-performance message, the more sustained the post-performance attachment” (40). The drums, dances, colour and other imagery of Nigerian theatre publicity which are its affective produce sustained memory. Indeed, many audience members recite how they heard about a show before recounting its plot. In this case, the tremor is prior to and after the spectacle.

Digital Reverberations

In the 21st century, aftershocks tend to be digital. Micro-tremors (small but ongoing vibrations) are captured on social media. Mbede et al. point out that practitioners “extend publicity into digital afterlife through audience-generated content” (100). For example, TikTok videos following up the 2025 NAFEST closing ceremony generated thousands of views, and secondary waves of publicity. These were not official campaigns, however, but organic aftershocks, enacting Rogers’s concept of “re-invention” (18), in which users modify innovations for their needs. In these aftershocks, publicity becomes a folk memory. The quake becomes chorus.

Living Publicity as Ecosystem

Living publicity is not a campaign, but ecosystem of vibration. Theatres, audiences, sponsors, media provide energy for the ecology. To borrow Schechner’s term, publicity is a “restored behaviour of attention” (3); something done until it becomes culturally normalised. NAFEST’s year-to-year cycle enables each host town to receive the earlier aftershocks, along with creating new ones. The AKSUFEST campus networks, similarly, transmit creative vibration from year to year, ensuring institutional life. In this ecosystem, aftershocks prepare for future events by sustaining attention. The Lagos International Theatre Festival (LITF) has a digital repository that serves as constant pre-publicity. Here Colbert’s notion of symbolic capital is apt: attention becomes the capital of future art (43).

Ethics of Continuity and Fault Lines

It's true that there are fault lines. Dandaure cautions that "the disjuncture between creative production and documentation undermines continuity of Nigerian theatre memory" (72). Online material disappears; hyperlinks are broken; institutional archives are patchy. If not preserved, echoes are lost. Moral continuity demands that cultural institutions preserve their echoes. Promotion too must be vibrant and virtuous. Viral publicity might encourage dramatic hyperbole. As Hauptfleisch points out, "theatre's energy is double-edged; its shock can enlighten or distort" (267). Living publicity must therefore be true vibration -a pulse of truth.

Toward Future Vibrations

The future of Nigeria's theatre publicity is to vibrate tradition and technology. The talking drum and the digital post are different frequencies on the same wavelength. As Iseyen proposes, change needs to "preserve the ancestral vibration that once gathered villages beneath the moonlight" (32). International examples, from the Market Theatre's protest campaigns in Johannesburg to Ghana's Chale Wote digital parades, demonstrate that publicity that lasts is fostered by art in dialogue with the community. Finally, publicity is theatre's pulse between shows, its aftershocks show that art is alive. Every poster, festival, or social media reverberation, speaks to the resilience of Nigerian theatre. Like the drumbeat at night, it fades from the senses but wakes the soul at dawn; its tremors go on, shaping the national psyche. To move towards a vital theatre publicity is to listen; to feel the

importance of the slightest vibration. In each tremor of consciousness, we have the promise of another performance, another assembly, another earthquake.

Conclusion

The use of the metaphor of seismology in this study has shown theatre publicity in Nigeria to be a space of vibration, motion and resonance. Whether the national quakes at NAFEST, the youthful vibration of AKSUFEST and the cosmopolitan beats of the Lagos International Theatre Festival, publicity is not a secondary process but a critical factor in audience engagement. It is the "first show before the show", a symbolic force that sets the stage for artistic engagement, and a source of long-lasting resonances. Using a qualitative-interpretative approach grounded in communication theory, African performance hermeneutics and cultural marketing studies, this study has demonstrated that publicity is a dynamic and vibrational activity that moves in waves of meaning, identity and emotion. These waves unmask Nigeria's artistic epicentres, but they also highlight the enduring cracks of lack of funding and sustainability, access and documentation. Nevertheless, Nigerian theatre is vibrant with a regenerative life. The publicity surrounding it, through traditional soundscapes and electronic media, still connects the community, promotes culture and builds an organic repository of national creativity. Lastly, the study shows that theatre publicity is not just a marketing strategy, but a pulse. Its earthquakes remind us that performance is never an individual but a collective rhythm, and one that helps us

remember, participate and sustain the pulse of Nigerian theatre.

Works Cited:

- Akpodiete, Hannah M. "Challenges Facing Publicity and Marketing of Nigeria Commercial Theatre in a Depressed Economy." Dept. of Theatre Arts, Delta State University, Abraka, 2021, 5–10.
- Akwa Ibom State University. "3rd AKSUFEST Festival of Performances." *Official News Release*, Apr. 2025.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. Seuil, 1957, 115–128.
- Bassey, Bassey Ekpenyong and Edet Essien. "Leadership, Betrayal and the Fragility of Nationhood in Ahmed Yerima's Heart of Stone." *Literary Expressions of Nationhood: Culture, History and Representation*. Ed. Nnanake Ekeke and Shaleen Kr. Singh. QTanalytics Publication (Books), 2026. 16-29.
- Bassey, Bassey Ekpenyong and Israel Meriomame Wekpe. "Ecological Imperative in the Drama of Niger Delta." *Nature Narratives: Environmental and Contemporary Discourse in Literature*. Ed. Ramesh Chandra, Shaleen Kr. Singh and Shalini Sharma. QTanalytics Publication (Books), 2025. 12-23.
- Bassey, Bassey Ekpenyong and Nnanake Emmanuel Ekeke. "Functionalism and Traditional Leadership Powerplay: Conceptualizing the Interface in Bakare Rasaki's Rogbodiyan." *Integral Research* 2.10 (2025): 116-125.
- Bassey, Bassey Ekpenyong. "Indigenous Knowledge System and the Decolonization of the Nigerian Filmic Space." *Indigenous Knowledge, Decolonial Turn & Social Development in the Global South*. Ed. Shaleen Kr. Singh, Shalini Sharma and Daisy Verma. QTanalytics Publication (Books), 2025. 109-117.
- . "Popular Culture and the Nigerian Filmic Space: The Efficacy-Entertainment Braid." *Creative Saplings* 4.8 (2025): 48-70.
- Bassey, Bassey Ekpenyong, Nnanak Emmanuel Ekeke and Lucy Michael Iseyen. "Solidarity or Selective Sympathy: Nigerians' Social Media Reaction to the Russian-Ukraine War." *Journal of Arts, African Aesthetics and Dogotal Media* 1.1 (2026): 79-99.
- Brown, Alan S. and Rebecca Ratzkin. "Making Sense of Audience Engagement." WolfBrown, 2011, 9–14.
- Colbert, François. *Marketing Culture and the Arts*. 5th ed., Presses HEC Montréal, 2007, 1–45.
- Dandaura, S. Emmanuel. "Navigating Landmines and Pathways: Interrogating New Approaches to Theatre Making in Nigeria." *Nigerian Theatre Journal*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2019, 57–77.
- Ebewo, Patrick J. "Applied Theatre as an Alternative Communication Approach for the Development of Rural Communities in Africa." *Communitas*, 2017, 15–19.
- Ekeke, Dora Nnanake and Nnanake Ekeke. "Artistic Appearance and Make-Believe through Computer-Generated Make-Up Designs in Coheren Hardy's The Nun (2018)." *Knowledgeable Research* 4.12 (2025): 110-118.
- Ekeke, Nnanake and Dora Nnanake Ekeke. "Contextualizing the Trado-Afro Cultural Contents in Gloria Ernest-Samuel's The Beautiful Masquerade." *Creative Saplings* 4.12 (2025): 32-41.
- Ekeke, Nnanake and Dora Nnanake Ekeke. "Reflection of Traditional African Music

- in Theatrical Performance.” *Indigenous Knowledge, Decolonial Turn & Social Development in the Global South*. Ed. Shaleen Kr. Singh, Shalini Sharma and Daisy Verma. QTanalytics Publication (Books), 2025. 124-134.
- Ekeke, Nnanake Emmanuel, Bassey Ekpenyong Bassey and Dora Nnanake Ekeke. “The Playwright as Cultural Archivist: Reflecting and Preserving Communal Identity in Ofonime Inyang’s After the War.” *Literary Expressions of Nationhood: Culture, History and Representation*. Ed. Nnanake Ekeke and Shaleen Kr. Singh. QTanalytics Publication (Books), 2026. 1-15.
- Ekeke, Nnanake. “Nigerian Film and Mirroring the Politico-Historical Perspective of the African Culture in King of Justice and Suicide King.” *AKSU Journal of History and Global Studies (AJHGS)* 5.1 (2025): 58-68.
- Ekeke, Nnanake. “The Betrayal: Steven Inegbe’s Quota to Socio-Tudinal Change in Nigerian Campuses.” *Theorising the Nigerian Stage*. Ed. Chukwuma Anyanwu and Ruth Etuwe Epochi-Olise. Ibadan: BWright Integrated Publishers Ltd., 2025. 221-228.
- Ekpe, Bassey Nsa. “Frames of Individualism and Collectivism in Stephen Inegbe’s Things Men Do.” *Theorising the Nigerian Stage*. Ed. Chukwuma Anyanwu and Ruth Epochi-Olisa. Ibadan: BWright Integrated Publishers Ltd., 2025. 193-207.
- Firych, Piotr. “The Concept of Audience Development vs. Arts Marketing: A Critical Analysis.” *Journal of Cultural Management and Cultural Policy*, 2024, 165–179.
- Hauptfleisch, Temple. “The Seismology of Theatre: Tracing the Shock Waves of a Theatrical Event in Society.” *South African Theatre Journal*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2007, 253–271.
- Iseyen, Lucy M. “Exploring Nwamuo’s Seismic Theory of Audience Engineering for Improved Artistic Patronage.” *Sankofa: Journal of the Humanities*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2020, 23–32.
- Iseyen, Lucy Michael. “Beyond the Empty Seats: Reimagining Theatre Patronage and Administrative Strategies in Contemporary West African Performance.” *Knowledgeable Research* 5.1 (2026): 16-28.
- . “Rethinking Patronage: Audience Investment Models and the Future of Cultural Funding in Nigeria.” *Integral Research* 2.12 (2025): 75-96.
- . “The Development and Impact of Digital Theatre on Contemporary Performance Arts.” *Creative Saplings* 5.4 (2026): 43-57.
- Iyorza, Stanislaus and Lucy Michael Iseyen. “Media Artists’ Reflections on Nigerian Politicians: Analysis of Select Cartoonists’ Frames.” *Jos Journal of Theatre, Arts and Films* 5.1 (2022): 39-54.
- Kawashima, Nobuko. “Audience Development and Social Inclusion in Britain.” *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2006, 55–72.
- Lagos International Theatre Festival. “About LITF.” Official Site, 2025. Accessed 11th December, 2025.
- Mbede, Aniebiet U., Jacob O. Udofot, Esekong H. Andrew-Essien, and Edenowo T. Enang. “Exploring Social Media as an Apparatus for Audience Engineering in the Nigerian Theatre Milieu.” *Integrity Journal of Arts*

- and Humanities*, vol. 5, no. 2, June 2024, 95–105.
- McQuail, Denis. *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. 6th ed., Sage Publications, 2010, 148–172.
- National Council for Arts and Culture. "NAFEST 2025 Programme Page." Official Website, 2025.
- Nwamuo, Chris. *Theatre Audience Engineering in Nigeria: Paradigm and Syntagm*. University of Calabar Press, 2006.
- Ogunbiyi, Yemi, ed. *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Nigeria Magazine, 1981.
- Patton, Michael Q. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*. 3rd ed., Sage Publications, 2002.
- Rogers, Everett M. *Diffusion of Innovations*. 5th ed., Free Press, 2003, 5–20.
- Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2017.