

New Media Publicity: Marketing Experience of the Stage Production of Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead*

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Abstract

A theatre production, like every other product meant for the market, becomes useless if it does not get to the consumer (audience). Publicity within this context is the means of passing information concerning a theatre production to the target audience through the means available to the producer. In the Twenty-First Century, it has become necessary to be careful in the choice of publicity channel to reach the desired demography. The new media publicity has become normal publicity because of its mobility and malleability. This paper recounts the choice and positive effects of new media publicity on the stage production of Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead*. It is anchored on McCarthy's theory of the 4Ps amongst others as the framework. Findings have shown that most theatre productions have failed as a result of wrong publicity choices even when they have been properly packaged with great artistic content. It, therefore, recommended that producers must be mindful of the fact that the audience is as important as the theatre product. As a result, there has to be a concerted effort to seek publicity strategies that can reach the right kind of audience.

Keywords: theatre, production, publicity, audience

Introduction

A theatre product cannot be said to be good if it does not get to the end-user, which in this case is the audience. The only way to justify the hard work of the Director, Actors and all other collaborators in the theatre who have spent weeks and months from play selection through audition, casting and rehearsals is proper marketing of the product to ensure it gets to the right kind of audience. There are various kinds of publicity strategies that will be outlined in the course of this paper. However, studies have shown that new media publicity has become the most popular publicity and marketing platform with a far-reaching impact both on the visibility of the production and the target audience.

New media marketing is the use of social media platforms to connect with your audience to build your brand, increase sales, and drive website traffic. This involves publishing great content on your social media profiles, listening to and engaging your followers, analyzing your results, and running social media advertisements.

The production of Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* was staged at the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre (The CRAB) from the 17th to 20th July 2018. The four nights of this production witnessed a great turnout and patronage as a result of the use of social media publicity through sponsored adverts. Although the researcher also made use of fliers and banners, our statistics showed that over 80% of the audience came from the outskirts of the university community as a result of the social media publicity.

An Overview of Social Media Marketing

Social media marketing first started with publishing. Businesses were sharing their content on social media to generate traffic to their websites and, hopefully, sales. But social media has matured far beyond being just a place to broadcast content.

Nowadays, businesses use social media in a myriad of different ways. For example, a business that is concerned about what people are saying about its brand would monitor social media conversations and response to relevant mentions (social media listening and engagement). A business that wants to understand

how it's performing on social media would analyze its reach, engagement, and sales on social media with an analytics tool (social media analytics). A business that wants to reach a specific set of audience at scale would run highly-targeted social media ads (social media advertising). As a whole, these are often also known as social media management.

The Five Core Pillars of Social Media Marketing

1. Strategy

Before one decides to make publications on social media, it is important to look at the bigger picture. The first step is to think about your social media strategy. What are your goals? How can social media help you achieve your business goals? Some businesses use social media for increasing their brand awareness, others use it for driving website traffic and sales. Social media can also help you generate engagement around your brand, create a community, and serve as a customer support channel for your customers.

Which social media platforms do you want to focus on? The major social media platforms available to us are; Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, YouTube, and Snapchat. There are also smaller and up-and-coming platforms, such as Tumblr, Tik Tok, and Anchor, and social messaging platforms, such as Messenger, WhatsApp, and WeChat. When starting, it's better to pick a few platforms that you think your target audience is on than to be on all platforms.

What type of content do you want to share? What type of content will attract your target audience best? Is it images, videos, or links? Is it educational or entertaining content? A good place to start is to create a marketing persona, which will help you answer these questions. And this doesn't have to be fixed forever; you can always change your strategy according to how your social media posts perform.

To help you create a great social media strategy, here are our long-form, step-by-step guides on creating a social media strategy and social media marketing plan.

2. Planning and Publishing

Social media marketing for small businesses usually starts with having a consistent presence on social media. Close to three billion people (3,000,000,000!) use social media. By being present on social media platforms, you allow your brand to be discovered by your future customers.

Publishing to social media is as simple as sharing a blog post, an image, or a video on a social media platform. It's just like how you would share on your personal Facebook profile. But you will want to plan your content ahead of time instead of creating and publishing content spontaneously. Also, to ensure that you are maximizing your reach on social media, you need to publish great content that your audience likes, at the right timing and frequency. There are now a variety of social media scheduling tools, such as Buffer Publish, that can help you publish your content automatically at your preferred time. This saves you time and allows you to reach your audience when they are most likely to engage with your content.

3. Listening and Engagement

As your business and social media following grows, conversations about your brand will also increase. People will comment on your social media posts, tag you in their social media posts, or message you directly.

People might even talk about your brand on social media without letting you know. So you will want to monitor social media conversations about your brand. If it's a positive comment, you get a chance to surprise and delight them. Otherwise, you can offer support and correct a situation before it gets worse.

You can manually check all your notifications across all the social media platforms but this isn't efficient and you won't see posts that didn't tag your business's social media profile. You can instead use a social media listening and engagement tool that aggregates all your social media mentions and messages, including posts that didn't tag your business's social media profile.

4. Analytics

Along the way, whether you are publishing content or engaging on social media, you will want to know how your social media marketing is performing. Are you reaching more people on social media than last month? How many positive mentions do you get a month? How many people used your brand's hashtag on their social media posts? The social media platforms themselves provide a basic level of such information. To get more in-depth analytics information or to easily compare across social media platforms, you can use the wide range of social media analytics tools available, such as Buffer Analyze.

5. Advertising

When you have more funds to grow your social media marketing, an area that you can consider is social media advertising. Social media ads allow you to reach a wider audience than those who are following you. Social media advertising platforms are so powerful nowadays that you can specify exactly whom to display your ads to. You can create target audiences based on their demographics, interests, behaviours, and more. When you are running many social media advertising campaigns at once, you can consider using a social media advertising tool to make bulk changes, automate processes, and optimize your ads.

The Evolution of 4Ps Marketing Mix

Gundlach and Wilkie (2009, p. 259) defines marketing as "the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large". Selden, (1997, p. 23) also defines marketing from a sales process engineering viewpoint, "as a set of processes that are interconnected and interdependent with other functions of a business aimed at achieving customer interest and satisfaction". In the words of Kotler (1980, p.1) as published in University of York; *Introduction to Marketing* (2002), he defines marketing as "Satisfying needs and wants through an exchange process". A comparable conception is the "value-based marketing which states

Volume 1, Issue 2, 2022

Journal of Creative Arts, Communication and Media Studies
the role of marketing to contribute to increasing shareholder value”
(Paliwoda and Ryans, (2008, p.25).

In simple terms, according to CE Entrepreneurship’s Article;
Marketing Introduction (2002) marketing is:

Much more than advertising; is much more than selling; can be applied to products, services and ideas; applies in the private as well as public sectors; applies to profit and non-profit making organizations and is proactive rather than reactive. (2002).

They equally describe marketing as a “management process”. Essentially, marketing entails all the common management activities including planning, market analysis, resource allocation, control, implementation, evaluation and appraisal that bring increase in revenue. Consequently, “the marketing process can be carried out effectively and successfully or poorly resulting in failure.” Hence, “marketing fulfills customer requirements efficiently and profitably.”(CE Entrepreneurship, 2002).

Briefly, the marketing mix, popularly called the McCarthy’s 4Ps is a base module for businesses, defined by Kotler, (2000, p.9) as "set of marketing tools that the firm uses to pursue its marketing objectives in the target market". McCarthy’s 4Ps are “product, price, place, and promotion” (McCarthy, 1964).

The extant 4Ps of marketing mix “which has become the leading framework for marketing management decisions, was first published in 1960” (Gronroos, 1994, pp. 4-20). Occasionally, service marketers will refer to 8Ps, “comprising these 7Ps plus performance” (Kotler, 2012, p. 25)

Historically, the business community has witnessed many changes from the time Neil Borden first muted the word marketing mix “there are other records of its originality, even before marketing management began as a school of thought in the 1960’s to replace the traditional approaches to marketing “(Bartels, 1988, pp.73-76; Sheth et al., 1988, p.64; Shaw and Jones, 2005, pp.230-

241). A few isolated concepts were developed in the 1950's literatures that form the basis of modern marketing strategy. These prominent concepts include: Borden's (1957, 1964) expression of the "marketing mix," Smith's (1956) development of "product differentiation" and "market segmentation" as alternative marketing strategies, Dean's (1951) conception of "skimming" and "penetration" as alternative pricing stratagem, and Forrester's (1959) portrayal of the "product life cycle (PLC)."

The controversy of the root of the expression marketing mix was resolved in the expose by Neil Borden. Borden (1964) recognizes James Culliton in 1948 by labelling the marketing executive as a "Decider" and a "Mixer of ingredients". This led Borden, in the early 1950's to the understanding that what this mixer of ingredients was deciding upon was a "marketing mix". McCarthy (1960, p. 52) accepts Frey (1956), the Effective Marketing Mix, by creating the first marketing mix checklist containing of more than a dozen stuffs. Subsequently, in an unclear and unpublished working paper, Borden (1957) produced a "marketing mix checklist with 12 sections". With dozens of items, the marketing mix would have as well remained in an obscure concept, but rather started when McCarthy (1960) reduced Frey and Borden's lists to the current "4Ps" (making the concept ease enough for business managers and scholars to recall).

Gandolfo Dominici, in his specific remarks concerning McCarthy (1964), describes the 4P's marketing mix as "a combination of all the factors which managers may leverage to satisfy market needs". There are two schools of thoughts called "the conservatives" and "the revisionists" that sees limitations in the McCarthy's 4Ps marketing mix as captured by Dominic and it states:

There are two different approaches among researchers regards (sic) the way to change the traditional marketing mix. Part of the researchers (which we call "conservatives") assert that the 4Ps may continue to be the dominant paradigm of marketing mix in digital contexts, since it is sufficient to change the sub-mixes within each P

adding and /or deleting some factors in order to adapt to the new scenario. Other authors (which we call “revisionists”) suggest that the 4Ps’ framework is now obsolete and propose to add other elements and / or to change the elements of the mix. Both approaches give significant motivations to support their conclusions” (2009, pp.17-18).

The argument by Lauterborn (1990 p.26.) gave rise to the 4C’s classification which should follow in this order by “converting product into customer solution, price into cost to the customer, place into convenience, and promotion into communication” (as cited by Kotler, and Keller, 2006). This replacement of 4P’s is a more consumer-focused concept that attempts to improve the movement from mass marketing to niche marketing. The 4C’s by Robert F. Lauterborn are “consumer, cost, communication and convenience”. Meanwhile Koichi Shimizu advanced another 4C’s of “commodity, cost, communication and channel”, which was later expanded to 7Cs.

In conclusion on Evolution of 4Ps Marketing Mix, the 4C’s of Robert F. Lauterborn and Koichi Shimizu is in no match for 4Ps marketing mix and, as the 4C’s of Lauterborn is consolidating the scopes of McCarthy’s 4Ps marketing mix.

The 4Ps Marketing Mix Components Analysis

In as much as this marketing mix has been criticized by so many scholars, McCarthy’s 4Ps remains one of the most established and generally accepted frameworks in marketing and it is a base model for business ventures worldwide. Nwokoye and Ahiauzu (1984, p. 178) describes marketing mix as “controllable variables...which spells out the marketer’s strategy”. Meanwhile, Kotler, (2000, p. 9) says it is a "set of marketing tools that the firm uses to pursue its marketing objectives in the target market”. These thoughts set the perimeter of our discourse since it is both “controllable variables” and “tools” of marketing.

Product: alludes to what the filmmaker (for instance a movie) is offering for sale/viewing pleasure. Product decisions

comprise the “quality, features, benefits, style, design, branding, packaging, services, warranties, guarantees, life cycles, investments and returns” (Blythe, (2009, pp.20-21). If the film is produced and offered for sale and the audience did not enjoy it, they in turn may not buy it or recommend it for others to view.

Price: Blythe (2009, pp.20-21), says that price refers to “...the total cost to customer to acquire the product, and may involve both monetary and psychological costs such as the time and effort spent in acquisition”. Any firm having the right product still has the duty of tagging price on that product. Interestingly, Ashe-Edmunds, (2019) writing on price setting, alluded price is the lone variable that has direct bearing for revenue. Therefore, the film price should be moderate and should be made in other to break-even.

Place: Place is the “direct or indirect channels to market, geographical distribution, territorial coverage, retail outlet, market location, catalogues, inventory, logistics and order fulfillment” (Blythe, (2009, p.20). Place implies either to the physical setting where business transactions are carried out or the distribution outlets used to reach out to markets or end users.

Promotion: These include all shades of publicity, individual selling, direct selling, displays, media hips and civic relations. More importantly, promotion is “...manipulative and from the seller, communication is cooperative and from the buyer” (Lauterborn, 1990, p.26) “...with the aim to create a dialogue with the potential customers based on their needs and lifestyles” (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterborn, 1993, p.42).

Consequently, it is only when all the 4Ps are rightly and correctly balanced that the customer can receive full dose of satisfaction he seeks. Therefore, the 4Ps must be in the right proportion for a business concern to meet its targets. Accordingly, a high-quality product will usually carry a steep price, distributed through marketing or retail outlets having a quality appearance and the advertising will be through suitable media that could display its best features. Hence, Product represents Commodity; Price represents Cost; Place represents Channel and Promotion represents Communication.

PESTLE Analysis Framework

This theory in marketing strategy is very essential to this work due to influences external or environmental forces impact on Nollywood. PESTLE contains six sets of macro-environmental factors able to prevent sales of Nollywood product. These factors are not directly in control of the marketers. According to Besanko, Dranove, Shanley and Schaefer, (2009) the six segments of the general environment are “demographic, socio-cultural, political/legal, technological, economic, and global”. They emphasize that the six-segment analysis can assist business organizations to recognize potential opportunities and threats within the economy. Pradeep, (2013), says that “the external environment analysis consists of general environment, industry environment and competitor environment”. Therefore, the six elements of PESTLE are; “demographic, socio-cultural, political/legal, technological, economic, and global.”

On every occasion, business managers want to use PESTEL Framework to analyze business externalities (market and non-market environment) that could hinder operations. An article publicized by slideshare.net on “*Environment analysis*” lists some samples of macro-environmental trends and they are categorized according to the six elements in PESTEL framework, it is outlined below:

Natural: Sensitivity to the milieu; Growth of magnitude and pressure; Reduce pollution; Renewal of energy and Global warming.

Socio-cultural segment: Women in workplaces; Workforce diversity; Attitudes about value of work life; Concerns about environment; and shifts in work and career preferences.

Political/legal segment: Antitrust laws; Taxation laws; Deregulation philosophies; Labour training laws; Educational philosophies and policies.

Technological segment: Product innovations; Applications of knowledge; Focus of private and government-supported research and development (R&D) expenditures and new media.

Economic segment: Inflation rates; Interest rates; Trade deficits or surpluses; Budget deficits or surpluses; Personal savings rate; Business savings rates and GDP.

Global segment: Important political events; Critical global markets; Newly industrialized countries; Different cultural and institutional attributes (Retrieved 14/02/2015)

New Media Impact on *Hopes of the Living Dead*

The production of *Hopes of the Living Dead* was slated to run for four nights at the University of Port Harcourt Arts Theatre (CRAB) from the 17th to 20th of July 2018. Having rehearsed for over six weeks, the researcher needed to justify the efforts with a full house. The theatre, which is situated in the school campus, has a 200-seating capacity. One would ordinarily imagine that there shouldn't be any cause to worry about publicity. However, it must be noted that publicity serves two purposes for every work of art. First, it is geared towards attracting patronage and secondly, it helps to announce one's efforts to the general public for future references. This is where the new media played a major role since the world has become a global village. The usual practice as with previous productions would have been to design a banner and place at a strategic point in campus to attract student patronage but this had to take a different turn for the main reason that it was obvious that most students would not be able to afford the gate fee. To forestall the unfortunate experience of low patronage and an empty auditorium, the production team agreed to embark on a radical online marketing using the new media.

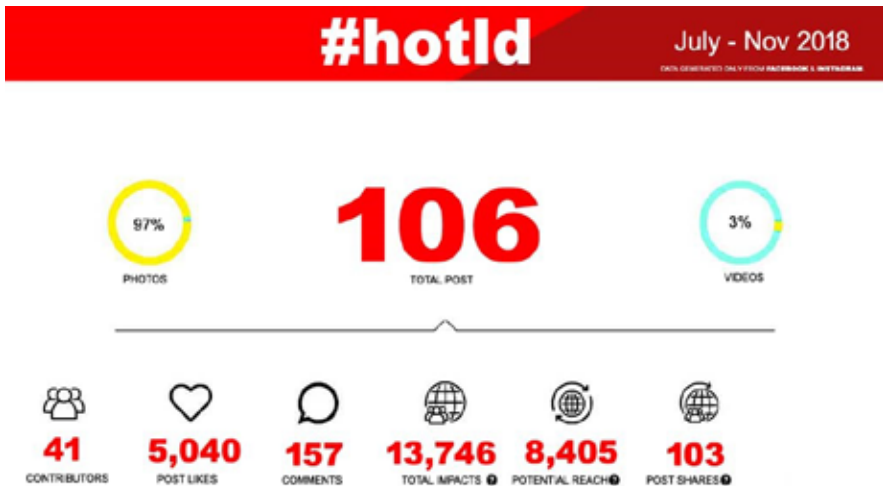
To drive the goal further, the production team came up with a hashtag (#HOTLD). According to Wikipedia:

A hashtag is a metadata tag that is prefaced by the hash symbol, #. Hashtags are widely used on microblogging and photo-sharing services such as Twitter and Instagram as a form of user-generated tagging that enables cross-referencing of content sharing a subject or theme. For example, a search _____ within Instagram for the hashtag #bluesky returns all _____

posts that have been tagged with that hashtag. After the initial hash symbol, a hashtag may include letters, digits, and underscores. The use of hashtags was first proposed by Chris Messina in a 2007 tweet. Messina made no attempt to patent the use because he felt "they were born of the internet, and owned by no one". Twitter initially decried hashtags as a "thing for nerds," but by the end of the decade, hashtags were entrenched in the culture of the platform, and they soon emerged across Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. In June 2014, 'hashtag' was added to the Oxford English Dictionary.

With the hashtag, everyone member of cast was given a task to join in the discussion using the hashtag and soon, it became a trending topic. Statistics show that the publicity campaign reached out to about 27, 000 (Twenty-Seven Thousand) persons across demographics with 106 (One Hundred and six) posts.

Pix 1.0: Statistics of Social Media publicity using the hashtag



The table above shows a breakdown of engagements through different avenues. The 106 posts are a combination of promotional fliers and videos. The record shows that 97% of the engagements were achieved by the fliers, leaving the videos with

3%. Results from the table has also shown that 41 persons made contributions to the posts; 5, 040 persons liked the posts; 157 persons posted comments; the posts had an impact on 13, 746 persons and reached another 8, 405 persons; the post was shared by 103 persons.

Another striking thing about the table above is that members of the target audience were satisfied with the content on the flier and didn't watching the video. With this information, the next production with lay more emphasis on different versions of a flier to reach more persons and either play down on the video or adopt another approach.



Pix 1.2: Shot of ongoing performance on the first night



Pix 1.3: Shot showing the hall in full capacity.

The tables above show the effect of a robust publicity using social media. The auditorium witnesses high patronage for the four nights of the production.



Pix 1.4: Promotional flier for the production.

It is important to note that even though the production held in July, the trend continued till November, 2018. Another important fact to note is that even though the seating capacity of the theatre is 200, which means 800 persons for four nights, the production still had to reach out to 27, 000 persons. Social media publicity campaigns such as this is not designed to pin the product only to the event date but is meant to put the production and crew in the shelf of performance in the media space. As result, it is possible for the producer to get better deals since such production has already shown in his portfolio.

Conclusion

Today's world has been taken over by the digital space. The era of relying on hard copy fliers, posters and banners to attract patronage for a theatre performance has lost relevance. It is possible to host successful shows with a filled hall using the new media publicity platform since a greater percentage of the potential members of the audience. Banners are now used for aesthetics at the venue of the show. Even that is phasing out as LED screens are taking over the space too.

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