

THE COMMUNICATION ECOLOGY OF THEATRE PUBLICITY: PROPAGATION, AUDIENCE EXPERIENCE AND PERFORMANCE RESONANCE

Abstract

Theatre publicity is often treated as the practical work of announcing a production and persuading people to attend. That description is necessary but incomplete. It does not explain how information moves through overlapping interpersonal, institutional and digital networks; why the same campaign produces strong responses in one group and indifference in another; or how publicity, venue experience and post-performance discussion become connected. This conceptual article develops a communication-ecology model of theatre publicity. It brings the communicative-ecology perspective into conversation with Chris Nwamuo's audience engineering, Temple Hauptfleisch's seismology of theatre, audience-development scholarship and the author's developing Performance Resonance Theory. The paper distinguishes the event proposition, coordinating centre, communicative energy, publicity forms, conductors, propagation, attenuation, audience interpretation, magnitude, intensity, conversion, experience alignment, aftershocks and resonance. It argues that publicity cannot be evaluated by visibility or attendance alone. Its effects depend on the credibility of the message, the social relations through which it circulates, the practical conditions surrounding attendance, the quality of the theatrical encounter and the opportunities through which audiences continue to interpret the event. Performance Resonance Theory is positioned as an account of the enduring cognitive, affective, social and behavioural consequences that may follow this process. The resulting model clarifies the relationship among publicity, audience experience and longer-term patronage while generating propositions for empirical testing in institutional, commercial, festival, community and digital theatre settings.

Keywords: theatre publicity; communication ecology; audience engineering; audience experience; performance resonance; arts management.

30 Introduction

31 Theatre is an encounter. A production may be well rehearsed, socially relevant and aesthetically
32 sound, but not publicly relevant because of the absence of reliable information for the audience
33 who may be interested in it, and because they may not be able to see its relevance or may not
34 trust the circumstances under which it will be shown. The role of publicity is therefore between
35 the preparation of the art and the participation of the public. It does not make the artistic event,
36 but it can help to determine the parameters in which the event can be made visible, imaginable
37 and discussable.

38 Recent scholarship on audiences has cast doubt on the primacy of attendance as a measure of the
39 theatrical success. The process of arts participation is a process they see as being impacted by a
40 prior disposition, the opportunities for practical involvement, and the experience after
41 participation (23–29). Brown and Ratzkin also use engagement as a time continuum that includes
42 things happening before, during and after an event (5–8, 15–21). In addition to showing how to
43 distinguish between emotional, intellectual, social and experiential motives for going to theatre,
44 Walmsley also illuminates the role of these motives in shaping attendance (335–51). Publicity
45 should not, therefore, be regarded as a single campaign but as a part of a wider and ongoing
46 partnership between theatre and audiences.

47 In the context of the Nigerian theatre administration, Chris Nwamuo's idea of the audience
48 engineering serves as the starting point for the understanding of the development of an audience
49 as an ongoing relationship between the theatre organisation and its publics. The idea goes beyond
50 just bringing people to a show to the managerial duty of ensuring a comfortable “happy”
51 environment that will lead to repeated audience patronage (Nwamuo 18, 34–43). The relational
52 approach is further reinforced by his seismic theory of theatre publicity which highlights the
53 continuous flow of publicity messages across various channels, keeping the theatrical event
54 visible and alive in public consciousness (23).

55 Temple Hauptfleisch provides the broader theatrical genealogy. He considers a theatrical event to
56 be a potential social shock and one that has impacts that spread across a number of interacting
57 theatrical and social systems (253–54). It isn't just about promotion; it's about promotion and
58 what it says and implies and brings to life through performance. Nwamuo's attention is directed
59 toward the inward trajectory of the audience's mobilization, which is part of the game, while

Hauptfleisch's is directed toward the outward trajectory of the theatre's theatrical consequence. The present article is based on the two traditions, but focuses on communication ecology.

The positive elements of communication ecology are that it highlights the interdependence of media, messages, relationship and place. Foth and Hearn, speaking about communicative ecology, speak of technical, discursive and social aspects (749–72), while Scolari speaks about the environment of shifting and interacting environments, that is, media ecology. Applied to theatre, it is the question of what happens when messages, people, institutions, technologies and cultural expectations and conditions converge around an event.

This article is part of a series of investigations the author has worked on. In 2020, Iseyen went back to Nwamuo's theory and its connection with the patronage of art (23–32). The now-published article “Seismology of Theatre Publicity” mapped textual resonance, contextual vibration and temporal echo across Nigerian theatre and festival settings (Iseyen, “Seismology of Theatre Publicity” 30–32, 42–46). Performance Resonance Theory was then proposed in an unpublished conference paper presented at the 2026 African Theatre Association Conference in Pretoria (Iseyen, “Dance, Music and Resistance”). The present article does not repeat those studies; it explains the mechanisms that connect publicity circulation, audience appraisal, theatrical experience and enduring resonance.

The first is that theatre publicity is a communication ecology, with information being created around the event, fed through a chain of communicators, heard by specific audiences/readers, acted upon by other audiences/readers, and remembered/remediated by feedback and memory. Publicity may generate awareness without action, attendance without engagement, or engagement without lasting resonance. So, the gap between the two is fundamental to a meaningful model and should not be mistaken for one. The article adds to the making of those distinctions explicit, and to display what's going on the screen following the first publicity and the performance, in accordance with the Performance Resonance Theory.

Conceptual Approach and Scope

This is a conceptual article not a report of a new empirical investigation. It aims to connect and relate, in a coherent and critical way, the theoretical frameworks which are often addressed separately: theatre publicity, communicative ecology, audience development, audience

engineering, audience experience, performance resonance. Conceptual articles, Jaakkola argues, should not just be based on tacit design of research, but also on a description of the relationship between the focal theory and the supporting theories (26–33). So, the present study is carried out by the method of differentiation, integration and the construction of models.

Differentiation involves splitting up concepts that are often collapsed, such as publicity and marketing; reach and influence; attendance and engagement; aftershock and resonance. Integration, however, combines the study of African theatre management and broader communication, participation and audience experience research. For this, model construction defines the central components, connections and restrictions of the suggested ecology. The resulting framework is presented as a package of plausible propositions that are open for empirical evaluation, rather than as a general causal law.

The Nigerian institutional theatre is the immediate field of study because Nwamuo's scholarship, the author's doctoral research, and earlier seismic-publicity studies, emerged from this environment. Theatres at universities tend to have irregular scheduling, poor audience lists, little money, limited facilities and a high level of competition from screen-based entertainment. However, the model is not confined to the university. It can be studied in commercial theatre, festivals, community performance, and/or via digital and/or hybrid platforms, as long as local histories and communication practices are created and visible.

Explicating the Conceptual Field

Theatre publicity and arts marketing

Publicity and marketing are linked together but not the same. Publicity refers to the systematic dissemination of information which makes a product visible and understandable; also, marketing involves research and segmentation, programming, pricing, distribution and relationship management. Colbert and St-James discuss the shift in arts marketing towards a permanent relation between arts products, cultural missions and audience experience (566–75). Publicity is thus not an end in itself but one tool in a multi-faceted organisational strategy.

This distinction prevents publicity from being blamed for failures that belong to programming, facilities, pricing or governance. Performing-arts patronage relies on the value and quality of the complete service encounter, and not just the initial promotion (Hume, Mort, and Winzar 135–48). While posters and handbills are still important, publicity also involves previews, interviews, community visits, performer advocacy, direct messaging, reviews, and post-performance

circulation. The model proposed here is not an isolated collection of tools but interacting forms and conductors.

Audience Development

Audience development is not all about numbers; it's about human relationship and development. However, Lindelof warns that institutional discourses instrumentalise audiences, where participation is seen as a solution to organisational issues (200–18). Chung, on the other hand, defines the cognitive, affective, ethical and behavioural aspects of audience development (345–66). These views demonstrate that reach is just one of the four criteria: publicity can help to increase knowledge without altering attitude, stimulate curiosity without overcoming practical constraints or get people to attend without providing the experience they need.

Audience Engineering

Audience engineering is the orchestration of conditions which attract, organise, satisfy and retain audiences. Nwamuo's postulation involves audience research, communication, safety, comfort and satisfaction; noting that the audience does not just march into the auditorium but the theatre organisation is greatly responsible for making this encounter possible (18, 34–43). His seven models of audience engineering identify seismic publicity as part of an overall administrative mechanism, and not just as a standalone promotional tool (35–39), thus, audience engineering should, therefore, be viewed as organisational architecture.

Publicity then, is the first step in establishing and expanding this relationship between the theatre organisation and the audience, but the promised experience of care, satisfaction, comfort and satisfaction is realised only through access, on-time arrival, welcoming, technical precision, the behavior of staff and post-event communication. Hume, et al submits that studies in repurchase in the performing arts support the concept of perceived value and service experience (135–48). In this study, the term "publicity" is presented as seismic if it generates consequential movement in the system, and the term "Audience Engineering" is when it facilitates the making of that movement meaningful for credible experience and retention.

Audience Engagement and Performance Resonance

Engagement is the strength of the relationship between the audience and an artistic work, event or organisation. Brown and Ratzkin conceptualise engagement in terms of preparation, artistic exchange and post-event meaning construction (15–21), whereas Rubin, Mohr and Kumar differentiate between engagement's affective, cognitive and behavioral components and outcome measures in the box office (473–88). It's also significant in theatre, where one might purchase a ticket and not become lost in the show, and another might see the show indirectly, but still be profoundly moved by the show's public debate.

Performance resonance is defined as the ongoing meaning after the immediate experience. The idea was first explicitly expressed as Performance Resonance Theory in an unpaginated

conference paper written by the author at Pretoria (Iseyen, “Dance, Music and Resistance”). Resonance here is more specifically formulated as a prolonged cognitive, affective, social or behavioural effect of the relationship between the publicity framing, the audience's expectedness, the experience of the performative act and the ensuing circulation. Brown and Novak's account of intrinsic impact is captured through the following elements: captivation, intellectual stimulation, emotional response, aesthetic growth and social bonding (42-59).

From Theatre Seismology to Communication Ecology

The seismic metaphor remains useful because it links an originating event to movement, mediation, distance and uneven effect; however, its value is analytical not physical. The cultural messages are not bound by the laws of geology; rather, they are interpreted, resisted, redirected, and sometimes ignored. The metaphor is then most fruitful when applied to an ecological description of communication, in which force is just one of a range of factors, including credibility, relationships, access, institutional history and audience agency.

The systemic starting point is given by Hauptfleisch's “The Seismology of Theatre”. As described by him, Theatre is surrounded by other social forms and a theatrical event can have an aftermath that goes beyond the actors (253-71). This insight brings focus to the issue of movement across levels such as performance impacting on spectators, organisations, wider public discourse and in turn, extending to cultural activity later; this then is a caution against seeing an auditorium as the end of theatre.

Nwamuo translates this systemic knowledge into arts administration. The idea of publicity is embedded in his models of audience engineering, which deal with research, audience attraction, reception and retention (18, 34–43). The seismic formulation requires continuous communication via multiple conductors, not relying on a single medium (23). The theory has thereby the beginnings of an ecological approach, but its variables and relationships still need to be made more specific.

That specification is provided by the communicative-ecology scholarship. In contrast, Foth and Hearn focus on the interactions between communication technology, content and social networks; and Scolari considers media ecology as a description of interacting environments. These views address the channel-centred notion of publicity. A poster, radio interview, WhatsApp message, rehearsal video or street procession alone has no effect. It is dependent on the source, the social context when it is received, the credibility of the carrier, messages that are also circulating and possibilities available to the recipient.

Positioning the Present Article within the Author's Earlier Work

The positioning is important as the present article is part of a program of research that is still developing. The study of 2020, which brought Nwamuo's seismic tradition into a broader conversation in arts-management (Iseyen, “Exploring Nwamuo's Seismic Theory” 23-32),

explored its implications for patronage. The published 2026 article then proceeded to read Nigeria's theatre and festival publicity by means of resonance of the text, vibration of the context and echo of time (Iseyen, "Seismology of Theatre Publicity" 30-32, 42-46).

The Pretoria conference paper made the leap from publicity to the consequence of performance with the introduction of Performance Resonance Theory, a synthesis of Audience Engineering and the Seismology of Theatre Publicity. It mapped symbolic shockwaves to cultural aftershocks of identity reclamation, resistance and collective memory, heritage preservation and social mobilisation (Iseyen, "Dance, Music and Resistance" 2026). The conference paper does not have a page locator since it is not paginated. The present article expands upon, but does not repeat, those arguments. It poses a more narrowly framed explanatory question: How can publicity become tied to experience and resonance for audiences in the longer term through what communication mechanisms? The solution is a communication-ecology model that outlines the shift from event definition to message circulation to audience appraisal to attendance to experience to feedback and following consequence.

Defining the Communication Ecology of Theatre Publicity

The communication ecology of theatre publicity can be described as a system or ecology of interconnectedness in which information, expectation and interpretation is created around a theatrical event, communicated via social, institutional and media relations, received by differentiated audiences, tested by conditions of participation, and recirculated by experience, feedback and memory. The definition isn't confined to means of publication. It sees publicity as a "located" process that arises from a series of relationships between various elements.

Five commitments follow; firstly, the model is event-centred as communication is organised around a production or a festival, a season or an institution, it is relational in that people and organisations give trust and meaning to messages, it is also multimodal because the same modes of expression (i.e. text, image, sound, embodied display, interpersonal conversation) have different functions, it is experiential because the publicity promise is ultimately put to the test against access, hospitality and artistic experience and finally, it is recursive due to audience feedback going back to the organisation and affecting what happens next.

The framework keeps some seismic terms, such as epicentre, wave, attenuation and aftershock, because they carry the intellectual lineage of Hauptfleisch and Nwamuo. However, these terms aren't used as mechanisms, but as elements of communication ecology. The model refutes the assumption that more promotional force equals greater effect. The meaning can be negotiated, and mistrust and untenable conditions or an experience that fails to meet the promise of the strongest campaign can be counterproductive.

229 **Components of the Communication-Ecology Model**

230 ***The event proposition***

231 An event proposition is the event that is organized around a communication, such as a
232 production, festival, launch of a season, a tour, a workshop, a premiere or a hybrid event.
233 Hauptfleisch sees the theatrical event as a cause of a social disturbance, but the elements of
234 temporality, art and organisation are also important for communicability (253-54). The publicity
235 should start with a solid description of what is being provided, to whom and under which terms.
236 Inconsistency of dates, lack of access information or overly promising statements diminish
237 further trust.

238 ***The coordinating centre (epicentre)***

239 The epicentre is the site where an event originates. It is the centre is the hub that coordinates
240 authoritative information and campaign decisions. For inherited vocabulary, it's the epicenter,
241 which can be a festival secretariat, a university department, a touring office or a digital
242 production team, not a building. Its job is to confirm facts and find partners, attend to enquiries
243 and maintain a coherent public record of the event.

244 ***Communicative energy***

245 Communicative energy is the energy that makes the message of publicity noticeable,
246 understandable and worth repeating. It's based on relevance, clarity, credibility, emotional appeal,
247 timing, novelty, endorsement, and usefulness. It is important to remember that energy does not
248 equal expenditure; that is, a simple, straight message from a trusted partner can have more
249 relational impact than an expensive but poorly targeted message (Rubin, Mohr, and Kumar 473–
250 88).

251 **Publicity Forms and Waves**

252 Publicity forms are texts, pictures, sound, personified “displays” and interpersonal
253 communications sharing information and expectations. They include handbills, posters,
254 conversations on radio, trailers, rehearsals, interviews, endorsements, parades, invitations,
255 reviews, hashtags and schedules. Different mixes of practical and symbolic elements are attached
256 to each form. A schedule can help to eliminate some of the uncertainty, a rehearsal video can set
257 the tone, and a personal invitation from a friend or someone else trusted can break a barrier that a
258 string of institutional postings might not have been able to do.

The term wave is used to signify circulation and not a physical characteristic. The messages sent out by the coordinating centre are called primary waves. Secondary waves are rephrasings by the performers, the partners, the journalists and the early receivers. Surface waves are “highly visible public circulations” like controversy, street display or widely shared digital material. The difference helps managers to identify where information is still officially held, and where it has become a social process of interpretation.

Conductors and Amplifiers

Conductors are individuals, organisations, technologies and places that carry messages: publicists, performers, alumni, journalists, student associations, community leaders, cultural agencies, radio stations, schools, sponsors and messaging groups, social platforms. Some simply relay; others amplify through the addition of trust, interpretation, or a new network. It relies on the idea of multiple publicity routes in Nwamuo's Seismic Theory (23, 35-39), the idea of communication channels in Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation (5-20), and the author's previous explanation of publicity conductors (Iseyen, “Exploring Nwamuo's Seismic Theory” 25-31).

The conductor notion brings to the fore the issue of relational infrastructure. There can be several social-media accounts within an organisation, but they may not have any social connections with the publics the organisation wants. Brown and Ratzkin demonstrate that preferences for engagement differ among the social/solitary modes, active/receptive modes, peer-led/expert-led modes (22-29). Circulation, then, is dependent on the relation between form of message and the social context in which meaning is produced and the disposition of the audience.

Propagation

Propagation is the dissemination of publicity over time, media and social networks. It's not a single release. A campaign spreads when messages are received by initial recipients, passed through conductors, spread to conversations and back to the campaign – as enquiries, registrations, purchases or feedback. Timing is crucial: When communication is released too late, it can create awareness but without the opportunity to act, and when released too early, it is likely to be forgotten. This is a sequential movement that can be usefully compared to the stages of diffusion (Rogers 5–20).

288 Attenuation, interference and barriers

289 Overload, poorly designed message, language mismatch, limited connectivity, inaccessible
290 format, weak reputation or lack of repetition causes attenuation, which weakens a message.
291 Interference is when there are conflicting dates, unofficial price changes, rumours or other
292 competing events that interfere with the understanding. There're also practical and perceptual
293 barriers that limit the conversion. However, McCarthy and Jinnett point out that predisposition,
294 the possibility of doing and the actual experience of doing, do not necessarily imply indifference
295 (23-29, 54-58).

296 Audience interpreters and receptors

297 Audiences are basically receivers in the narrow sense of the word because they receive
298 messages, but they can also interpret, negotiate and conduct messages. Recognition, curiosity,
299 scepticism, emotional response, comparison, discussion, rejection or recirculation may be part of
300 the reception of a work. Audience agency must be at the very core of the process, for it is not
301 enough that institutions expose the audience to the text; they must also make it agree with them
302 or attend to it (Lindelof 200-18; Rubin, Mohr, and Kumar 473-88).

303 Magnitude and intensity

304 The magnitude is the overall spread and activation of a campaign in the system. Some of the
305 indicators may be channel diversity, geographical spread, media coverage, unique reach,
306 message frequency and participation of others. Not an engagement or conversion (Rubin, Mohr,
307 and Kumar 473-88) level property.

308 Intensity is the degree of effect that an element has at a particular point and/or at a particular
309 place or time: recall, relevance, emotional interest, enquiry, registering, buying, willingness to
310 recommend. A campaign can be large in size, but weak in intensity or it can be small in size, but
311 strong in intensity, and limited to a specific group of people in a specific community. This
312 separation is a corrective of the misinterpretation of the relationship between visibility and
313 effectiveness (Brown and Ratzkin 22-29).

314 Conversion and attendance

Conversion is when the reaction to a communicative event turns into an event with a target (e.g., seeking information, registration, reservation, purchase, attendance, donation, volunteering or invitation). Attendance is one thing that was one of the important conversions, but it isn't the only one. What action is to be taken needs to be described in terms of purpose of the organisation, and the role of the target group in the process of participation (McCarthy and Jinnett 23 – 29, 54 – 58).

Audience experience

The next phase of the publicity is a verification stage: audience corresponds with planned event and actual event. As a result, Radbourne, Johanson, Glow and White claim, that we experience the quality of the performing arts through personal and contextual ways, such as knowledge, risk, authenticity and collective engagement (16–29). Brown and Novak make a distinction between "pre-performance readiness" and "post-performance effects" such as "captivation, intellectual stimulation, emotional resonance and social bonding" (22-23, 42-59). Communication should be tied in with venue, service and performance management components of audience engineering.

Organisational delivery becomes a part of the communication ecology when publicity guarantees punctuality, safety, comfort or relevance. If a positive campaign is followed by a negative experience, lack of safety and/or negative management, there may be negative aftershocks. The findings of the situational conditions giving rise to intrinsic impact further accentuates the importance of alignment between the promise and delivery (Brown and Novak 42-45; Radbourne et al. 16-29).

Aftershocks, feedback and performance resonance.

Aftershocks refer to other communications that are created after the performance, such as reviews, images, audience discussion, online postings, criticism, and testimonials, classroom discussion and decisions to return. Brown and Ratzkin's Arc of Engagement demonstrates that the meaning-making and memory processes do not stop there, after the artistic exchange (19–21). The published study on publicity and the seismic (Iseyen, "Seismology of Theatre Publicity" 43-46) also suggests that the afterlife of publicity is reviews, comments and continuing memory.

Feedback is the information that is fed back to the coordinating centre and used for taking further action. It could help to uncover what spectators liked or disliked, what obstacles were

encountered, and how the space was used and how it changed their plans for similar activities in the future. This feedback provides a closed-loop between publicity and organisational learning, and between performance and organisational learning (McCarthy and Jinnett 23–29; Brown and Ratzkin 19–21).

Immediate aftershocks are less long lasting than performance resonance. It speaks of the ongoing importance after the initial outpour of reviews, photos and talk has died down. Resonances can happen individually (when a spectator still thinks and feels differently afterwards); relationally (when the work is part of a conversation in a group); organisationally (when the performance changes the way people trust in the theatre); or culturally (when the work's symbol or argument is taken up into public memory or into future creative practice). In terms of the relationship between artistic design, audience participation, communication and social circulation, these continuities can be understood as potential outcomes of the engineered but invariably uncontrolled relationship between these elements in accordance to Performance Resonance Theory (Iseyen, “Dance, Music and Resistance”).

Construct	Meaning within theatre publicity	Guiding question	Possible indicators
Event proposition	Performance or programme around which communication is organised	What is being offered, to whom and under what conditions?	Clarity; relevance; distinctiveness; accessibility
Coordinating centre	Point of authoritative information and campaign alignment	Who verifies facts and coordinates the public account of the event?	Accuracy; consistency; response time
Communicative energy	Attention generated by relevance, clarity, credibility and appeal	Why should this audience notice, trust or share the message?	Recall; trust; perceived relevance
Publicity forms	Texts, images, sounds, embodied displays and interpersonal invitations	Which form carries which practical or symbolic meaning?	Comprehension; format suitability; shareability

Construct	Meaning within theatre publicity	Guiding question	Possible indicators
Conductors and amplifiers	People, institutions, media and platforms that carry or strengthen messages	Which relationships can extend reach or confer trust?	Referrals; partner reach; earned media
Propagation	Sequenced movement across time, media and social networks	How does information become appraisal and possible action?	Timing; frequency; cross-channel movement
Attenuation and interference	Weakening or distortion through barriers, overload, mistrust or contradiction	Where does the message lose clarity, relevance or force?	Drop-off; objections; accessibility failures
Audience interpreters	Differentiated people and groups who receive, negotiate and recirculate messages	How do different publics understand and evaluate the event?	Enquiries; sentiment; objections; peer sharing
Magnitude	Total campaign-level reach and circulation	How extensive is the communication ecology?	Reach; media diversity; geographical spread
Intensity	Strength of response within a group or setting	How strongly did this public respond?	Recall; interest; conversion; advocacy
Experience alignment	Correspondence between publicity promise and the actual encounter	Did access, hospitality and artistic experience support the invitation?	Expectation gaps; comfort; relevance; trust

Construct	Meaning within theatre publicity	Guiding question	Possible indicators
Aftershocks	Immediate post-performance communication and secondary effects	What did the event generate after it ended?	Reviews; posts; discussion; criticism; referrals
Performance resonance	Durable cognitive, affective, social or behavioural significance	What remained and influenced later thought, relationship or action?	Memory; return; advocacy; participation; changed perception

Table 1. Operational Vocabulary for the Communication Ecology of Theatre Publicity

The Communication-Ecology Process

Table 1 provides a translation of the framework to managerial questions and observable indications. It is recursive rather than linear, with event definition, and message framing, proceeding through conductors, into audience appraisal, and attendance bringing information back to the organisation through the experience of access, hospitality and artistic experience, followed by post-performance responses (Brown and Ratzkin 15-21; McCarthy and Jinnett 23-29).

The process is summarized below:

1. Organizing an event and clarifying the audience.
2. Encoding of the message and framing the expectations.
3. Selection and coordination of conductors.
4. Propagation, amplification and repetition
5. The reception, appraisal and social negotiation of the audience.
6. Conversion, access and attendance
7. Performance & venue experience
8. Aftershocks, Feedback, Advocacy or rejection

9. Resonance, retention and future audience development

The order is recursive, as future communication builds on past experiences. An intelligent response from the audience can lead to an intensified presentation of the project; criticism can lead to a change in the organisation; and an unresolved access issue can lead to less trust in future announcements. Aftershocks may thus then serve as conditions for the following event, as well as be the effects of the preceding one. That's where the concepts of publicity, reputation and audience development are one and the same.

There are three horizons of evaluation that follow. The near future is concerned with the recognition, comprehension, appraisal and action to be taken before the event. The experiential horizon refers to the encountering of publicity promise and the artistic and organisation horizon. Longitudinal horizon relates to memory, advocacy, return, participation and reputation. The distinction between readiness, experience and intrinsic impact that Brown and Novak draw between these layers offers empirical support.

Propagation, Diffusion and Audience Decision-Making

Focusing on diffusion of innovation theory, Rogers is able to explain how knowledge and adoption move through communication channels over time within a social system (5–20). If used judiciously, its awareness, persuasion, adoption process sheds some light on the theatre attendance. Prospective audiences are exposed to an event, develop an attitude, make a judgment on the possibility of participating or not, experience the event themselves and then confirm or adjust their attitude towards the organisations.

A theatrical event is not, however, a stable product; it is time-bound, partly unpredictable and dependent on live conditions. Attendance may require transportation, money companions, safety and schedule coordination and the same production maybe experienced differently on different nights. According to Walmsley on theatre as a social, situational and experiential phenomenon, the limit of treating diffusion as a complete template is reinforced (335-51).

Audience decision making is personal and participatory. Walmsley again suggests that emotional, intellectual, social and experiential are all complex motives (335-51), while McCarthy and Jinnett ideologyfocus on prior orientation, practical opportunity and feedback from previous

experience (23-29). Publicity becomes more persuasive when it addresses legitimate value propositions without making incompatible promises.

Performance Resonance Theory and the Afterlife of Publicity

Performance Resonance Theory was first presented in an unpublished conference paper in Pretoria, in 2026, to explain how African performance could move from cultural expression to cultural action. It synthesizes Audience Engineering and Seismology of Theatre Publicity; where the former explains the intentional organisation of attention and experience, while the latter explains the outward circulation of symbolic consequences (Iseyen, "Dance, Music and Resistance").

The present article takes that formulation up a notch to the relationship between publicity and the experience of the audience. There is no resonance in itself to publicity. Sets expectations, invites and interpretive frames. The frames can contribute to attendance but resonance is only possible in the presence of artistic form, bodily engagement, organisational care, and opportunities for subsequent reflection. An exposure-awareness campaign can thus produce an exposure with no awareness, an awareness with no interest, an interest with no attendance, no attendance with no engagement, or an engagement with no durable consequence.

There are four types of resonance that can be distinguished. The cognitive resonance is when there are questions, thoughts or changes in understanding; the affective resonance is when there is emotional recall, empathy, disturbance or pleasure; social resonance is when there is conversation, identification, or collective memory; and behavioural resonance is when there is return, advocacy, creative response, or civic action. These dimensions are in line with the conceptualization of differences between intellectual, emotional and social impact and the further extension of these into continuing action as recommended by Brown and Novak (42–59); Chung (345–66); and Radbourne et al. (16–29).

Managerial Application

The communication/ecology model provides a useful planning progression. The first step in the process is for the organisation to define the event, its intended publics, desired actions, likely barriers, and existing relationships. The content of audience research shouldn't only consist of

describing the demographic, but should also include an analysis of the audience's motivations, practical limitations and previous experience (McCarthy and Jinnett 54-58).

Second, a factual basis for the campaign must be stable, i.e. the title, date, time, venue, access conditions, price and contact point, as well as flexible value frames for various audiences. Third, the mapping of official, relational, institutional and media conductors – trusted intermediaries can be more effective than high message volume (Nwamuo 23, 35-39; Brown and Ratzkin 22-29).

Fourthly, propagation should be staggered. Initial communication sets up the event; Explanatory communication provides understanding; Social proof sets up performers, rehearsal moments, endorsement; Final communication provides access clarification. The order of the sequence should be planned not to assume that all of the recipients move through the same path (Rogers 5-20; Brown and Ratzkin 15-21).

Fifth, publicists and front of house managers should go through all the promises that the campaign has made. If publicity promises punctuality, safety or accessibility, they must be reflected in the actions taken. Aligning experience is not a service matter; it's either a positive expectation or a negative after effect (Brown and Novak 42-45; Radbourne et al. 16-29).

Last but not least, measurement should cover three horizons. Reach, recall, enquiries and attendance source are immediate measures, access, welcome, comfort, relevance and intention to return are experiential measures and advocacy, repeat participation, memory and reputation are longitudinal measures. This sequence, according to McCarthy and Jinnett 23–29; Brown and Ratzkin 15–21; cannot be depicted by a single attendance number.

Resource-constrained university theatres could have unused conductors in departmental networks, student associations, alumni, community groups and performers' personal networks. One of their challenges is not always the absence of channels, it is that there is no coordination, continuity, and reliable audience information. Commercial theatres, festivals and community theatres can use the same model while defining different conversions and forms of resonance.

Ethical, Contextual and Analytical Limitations

There are definite boundaries to the inherited seismic vocabulary. Communication doesn't follow material laws, physical waves do. Audiences can ignore and deny, reinterpret or reverse messages, and effects cannot be predicted from source force. Hauptfleisch treats seismology as a metaphor for tracing social consequences rather than a deterministic law (253–71). The present model, then, is meant to be a partial vocabulary in a larger ecological account that employs seismic terms as a part of its vocabulary.

Ethical care is also necessary in the language of engineering. It is important for theatre organisations not to manipulate people into pre-determined actions. Audience-sensitive propagation should be based on respect for consent, privacy, cultural difference, accessibility and the right not to participate. It is here that the critique of instrumental audience development by Lindelof is particularly pertinent (200–18).

Without intensity and conversion, using Magnitude as a measure can lead to vanity metrics. High numbers of followers / impressions don't always mean relevance, trust or participation. Failing to be accessible can also mean that an organisation's target audiences are excluded. However, practical considerations and channel assumptions need to be addressed in addition to visibility (McCarthy and Jinnett 23-29, 54-58).

Performance resonance is difficult to attribute and measure over time. Memory changes, new experiences, and post-performance positivity are not necessarily meaningful. Researchers should be careful not to overstate causal statements, and should use campaign data in conjunction with interviews, audience diaries, repeat-attendance data, and longitudinal follow-up (Radbourne et al., 16-29; Brown and Novak, 42-59).

Conclusion

The Communication Ecology of Theatre provides a larger context for the movement of theatrical information from institutional intent to social experience. The model does not view publicity as a series of promotional practices that happen at the moment audiences sit in the auditorium, but rather as part of a publicity network made up of messages, media intermediaries, audiences, conditions of access, experience of performance and post-event response. Publicity thus is not only important because of the act of disseminating information, but also because of the process

of receiving, interpreting, negotiating and enacting information in specific social and cultural settings.

The framework builds on Hauptefleish's idea of the consequences of theatrical events that extend beyond the performance world (253-71) and extends Nwamuo's focus on audience engineering of attracting, satisfying and retaining an audience (18, 34-43). In this context, publicity and audience care are one and the same. Those aspirations raised by publicity are then put to the test when one actually goes to an event, and sees if it is accessible, welcoming, secure, and provides a good experience of both the technical aspects of the event and the artistic experience. If the experience is as suggested by the publicity, the trust, advocacy and return are developed; if it is not, the disappointment may have negative aftershocks that may diminish future audience relationships.

The last conceptual level of the mode is given by Performance Resonance Theory. It was first presented by the author in her conference paper in Pretoria and is an explanation of the effects that a performance may have continued beyond the immediate encounter in the cognitive, affective, social and behavioural domains (Iseyen "Dance, Music, and Resistance" 2026). In the current article, resonance is not just the sense of after effects, but the lasting meaning that can linger in mind, conversation, campaign, re-visits and transformed thinking or action.

The communication ecology model therefore restates the concept of publicity as part of the life of performance in an ongoing process. It also indicates that successful theatre publicity should be judged not just by the extent of visibility created and the number of people drawn to an event but rather by the nature of the relationship developed and maintained as a result of the publicity; the key questions for theatre managers are therefore not only what distance was covered and by whom but also how the message was received, what impediments affected participation, whether the event delivered on the promises of the publicity and what the audience took away from the event.

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