



# Spatial Dynamics of Theatrical Success: Unveiling the Impact of Performance Venues on Audience Turnout in Lagos State of Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

*In the realm of performing arts, the theatre transcends mere physicality, evolving into a sacred space where shared experiences unfold between thespians and their discerning audience. The sanctity of this exchange is rooted in the symbiotic relationship between the performance and the spectator. This study explores the revered intersection of performance spaces and audience turnout, focusing on Lagos State's vibrant cultural landscape. Despite numerous factors influencing audience attendance, scant scholarly attention has addressed the profound impact of the performance venue itself. This research remedies this gap by applying Alfred Weber's Location Theory and Jerome McCarthy's Four Ps (Product, Place, Promotion, and Price) to unravel the complex variables dictating venue selection. The National Arts Theatre, the MUSON Centre, and Terra Culture serve as distinct performance spaces for our investigation. Through rigorous literature review and astute venue observations, this research unveils nuanced determinants shaping venue selection. It posits that a venue's geographical location and architectural aesthetics are intrinsic determinants in realizing a production's objectives. Findings illuminate a compelling narrative: the performance venue is not a mere backdrop but a protagonist in the drama of audience patronage. Every spatial configuration becomes choreography, orchestrating the audience's journey toward pleasure and satisfaction. The judicious allocation of time, diligence, and resources in this research reflects a commitment to unravelling the intricate tapestry of spatial dynamics, ensuring each theatrical presentation is a magnum opus of artistic resonance and audience delight. This study is a clarion call for a paradigm shift in the discourse on theatrical success, heralding an era where the venue itself emerges as a pivotal player in the grand symphony of performance art.*

**Keyword:** Audience turnout, Lagos State, Performance venues, Spatial dynamics, Theatrical success.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term "theatre" encompasses both the physical venue for entertainment and the performance itself. While the theatre holds significance as a space and a spectacle, equal importance is placed on audience reception, aligning with the fundamental purpose of productions tailored for an audience. As underscored by Brockett, the performer's essence comes to life in the presence of an audience, as their primary objective is to evoke recognition and wonder in the observer (Brockett 8). This underscores the pivotal role of the audience in theatrical productions, necessitating an exploration of audience patronage and its correlation with the production venue.

In contemplating the existence of theatre without an audience, Bennett posits that a minimum of one spectator is imperative to qualify an event as a performance (Bennett 32). The significance of the audience is further underscored by their role as consumers of the theatrical product. Dissatisfaction with a production's delivery relative to audience expectations can result in a decline in patronage and overall audience engagement. This underscores the pivotal role played by the audience as consumers within the theatrical landscape.

However, it has come to attention that certain productions are launched with insufficient consideration for audience concerns. These concerns encompass various aspects, including the venue's location in relation to the audience's

residential demographics, accessibility, standard facilities, power supply, and other determinants that typically influence the pricing structure of theatrical productions.

This paper is structured in two parts: the first section aims to underscore the theatre's instrumental role in cultivating an audience for a production, while the second section seeks to affirm the indispensable nature of the audience in the context of a theatrical performance

## **2. EXAMINING LAGOS THEATRE VENUES**

Wilson and Alvin posit that "Theatre is either (1) the place of performance or (2) the performance of a dramatic work" (14). The initial definition, (1), denotes a theatre as the physical space where performances unfold. Cohen, delving into the essence of the term, elucidates that the word "theatre" originates from the Greek term "Theatron," signifying the seeing place—a locale where something is observed. He elaborates that it is not only the venue where plays are enacted but encompasses the architecture, structure, and space dedicated to dramatic performances, encapsulating the very essence of visibility (Cohen 7).

Building upon this perspective, Burns posits that "theatre is an arena in which it is possible to study the manifestation of the social values, forms, and conventions of the society, as well as the images of social reality which people of various kinds have constructed for themselves at times" (15). This perspective underscores that theatre, in its broader sense, encompasses not only the performance aspect but also serves as a canvas for the portrayal and exploration of societal values and constructs. Therefore, theatre is not merely confined to the enactment of a dramatic work; it equally extends to the physical structure, location, and designated building where these dramatic activities unfold. This recognition emphasizes that the spatial dimension of theatrical activities is intrinsic and holds comparable significance to the performance itself

### **2.1 Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON)**

Established in 1983, the Musical Society of Nigeria (MUSON) finds its home at 8/9 Marina, Onikan, Lagos Island, positioned opposite the National Museum and in close proximity to Tafawa Belewa Square (TBS). Originally recognized as the Love Garden, MUSON was founded through the shared passion for classical music among a group of committed friends. Oni reports that the MUSON Center, sprawling across 1.166 hectares in Onikan, Lagos, encompasses a conference hall, recital hall, music school, residential blocks, offices, and a restaurant (117). Notable elements within the MUSON Centre complex include Shell Nigeria Hall, the School of Music, the Agip Recital Hall, and the Mobil Block—a four-story structure housing offices and La Scala Restaurants (28).

While MUSON is renowned for organizing regular concerts featuring both Western and Nigerian art music in Lagos (Sadoh 12), the MUSON Centre stands out as a remarkable venue, boasting an inspiring location, captivating structure, and tourism appeal. Despite its primary focus on classical music, the MUSON Centre serves as a versatile space, accommodating a spectrum of events such as seminars, workshops, lectures, birthday parties, banquets, stand-up comedy, wedding receptions, symposiums, conferences, and other social gatherings. Notably, the venue extends its versatility to include theatrical activities, establishing itself as a multifaceted space that transcends a singular artistic discipline.

### **2.2 Terra Kulture**

Opened on March 18th and 19th, 2017, Terra Kulture stands as a testament to the vision of its private owner, Mrs. Bolanle Austen-Peters. This contemporary venue is equipped with an ultra-modern 350-seater theatre, complemented by 200 banquet plans. Its facilities include a relaxation lounge, a front-facing restaurant, a bookshop, a standby generator, and parking space—although the latter is deemed insufficient for the venue's guest capacity. Notably, Terra Kulture's theatre, a recent addition to the cultural landscape, is outfitted with essential equipment required for comprehensive theatre production.

Distinguishing itself from other venues, Terra Kulture eliminates the need for external equipment hires or repairs, offering an inclusive environment for theatrical endeavors. This sets it apart from establishments like MUSON, where additional arrangements are necessary for optimal lighting effects. In contrast to the National Arts Theatre, which, as

Oni observes, experiences challenges with damaged or inadequately maintained lighting equipment due to management issues (116), Terra Kulture emerges as a contemporary and well-equipped hub for theatrical productions.

### **2.3 National Arts Theatre**

The National Arts Theatre, situated in the Iganmu Surulere neighborhood of Lagos, was erected in 1976 in anticipation of the 2nd World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC), held in 1977. Boasting seven floors and twenty-five lifts, the facility encompasses 250 toilet rooms, 300 urinals, and a 10-room public toilet building (Nwanaju 25). Its extensive amenities include a Main Hall (5,000 seats), Conference/Banquet hall (2,000 seats), main exhibition halls (1839 Sq. meters each with 2,000 seats), Cinema Halls (700 seats each), VIP lounge (500 seats), Press Conference hall (300 seats), massive lobbies (500 seats each), and a roof garden surrounding the theatre building (Nwanaju 26).

Covering an expansive 1.2 square kilometers, the National Arts Theatre, as detailed by Oni, features a main hall with a seating capacity ranging from 3,500 to 5,000, dependent on the staging arrangement in either a 'proscenium' or 'in the round' format. Additional components of the complex include a conference/banquet hall, two cinema halls, a press conference room, restaurants, a bookshop, and a clinic (114). Notably, a section of the building houses the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Nigerian Art, inaugurated by former President General Olusegun Obasanjo.

Despite its grandeur, the National Arts Theatre faces challenges, as Oni observes, with limited facilities despite having the largest stage in Nigeria, measuring 177'-5" (54.0m) in width and 41'-6" (12.6m) in depth (115). The venue accommodates a diverse array of events, from indoor sports to seminars, workshops, and conventions. Awodiya praises its versatility, labeling it as one of the premier events venues and tourist attractions in the country (137).

However, despite its venerable conception, the National Arts Theatre appears to have suffered a decline in its potency, with reported infrastructural problems ranging from the deteriorating condition of the halls to security constraints. The government's inclination towards privatization has also influenced the venue's trajectory, contributing to a state of neglect and potentially impacting theatre patronage despite its affordability. This underscores the intricate relationship between the maintenance culture, infrastructure, and the overall appeal of a venue for theatrical performances.

The examination of these venues illuminates a multitude of distinctions encompassing their foundational ideas, creation concepts, geographical locations, spatial configurations, auditoriums and stage arrangements, perseverance in creation, available facilities, infrastructure, and their respective historical and current conditions. It is crucial to acknowledge that these theatres not only represent unique artistic spaces but also serve as instructive models for understanding the dynamics of audience reception within diverse contexts.

### **3. EXPLORING THE THEATRICAL LANDSCAPE: UNRAVELING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PLACE.**

The concept of "Place" in the context of theatre refers to the distribution channels or, more specifically, the physical venues where theatrical activities take place. This paper delves into the examination of structures designated for theatrical purposes, focusing on theatres as primary locations. Various theatre spaces, including site-specific, promenade, and environmental theatre, are acknowledged, but the paper concentrates on scrutinizing edifices designated as theatres for a comprehensive analysis.

Bennett's examination of production and reception elements, such as availability, economics, geography, and marketing, serves as a foundational framework (124). Notably, geography, or the locale, is emphasized as a key factor influencing the attraction of audiences to stage plays (120). The emotional significance of Place for fans is affirmed by Couldry, and Sandvoss contributes a valuable review on the role of place in the formation of fan communities. The term "fans" is used here to describe the crucial audience. Morley's perspective on production being realized in the spheres of circulation and exchange underscores the necessity of studying consumption for a holistic understanding of production (29).

An audience is defined as a group of listeners or spectators anticipating interaction with an event, irrespective of its size (Mackellar 2). The paper underscores the indispensability of an audience for a performance to be deemed successful. Consequently, the angle of the performance venue is explored; encompassing aspects like event planning, ticket purchase, travel logistics, venue type, architecture, and interior design. Noteworthy is the comparison between privately-owned venues like MUSON, originally not built for theatre productions but effectively housing them with good management, and government-owned venues like the National Arts Theatre, known for lacking proper management and adversely affecting productions. Terra Kulture is presented as a venue exclusively intended for theatrical performances.

The choice of location is discussed in relation to the type of product and its intended audience. For instance, a venue near hotels is recommended when the target audience is flying in for convenience. The importance of supplementary amenities at the location, such as bistros and recreational spaces, is highlighted to keep the audience engaged and prevent boredom. Terra Kulture serves as an example, providing an African restaurant, art gallery, bookshop, and other facilities for audience relaxation. Additionally, proximity to national landmarks like Tafawa Balewa Square and cultural sites contributes to the overall appeal of a venue. The National Theatre's location is critiqued for having less audience-friendly surroundings due to the absence of restrictions on access.

This essay therefore underscores the multifaceted role of the theatre venue's location, considering factors like audience convenience, supplementary amenities, and the impact of management. The diverse examples provided illustrate the varying degrees of success in managing theatres based on ownership, emphasizing the need for strategic considerations in choosing and optimizing performance venues.

### **3.1 Strategic Insights: The Interplay of Location, Marketing Mix, and Audience Dynamics in Theatre Productions**

This paper employs Alfred Weber's Location theory and Jerome McCarthy's four Ps concepts to establish a robust framework for its direction. The choice of these frameworks is aimed at providing a solid contextual foundation. Alfred Weber's location theory delves into the intricacies of where and why economic activities are situated. These activities can span broad scales like regions or metropolitan areas, or narrow down to specific zones, neighborhoods, city blocks, or individual sites. Weber's assertion that the individual manufacturer's response to location inquiries often combines general and specific reasons underscores the significance of location in product selling decisions. He emphasizes, "When an economic activity occurs at one point rather than the other, the primary question is: are there any general causes of location that concern every industry?" (Weber 4).

This understanding of location's pivotal role is exemplified in the theater industry. MUSON and Terra Kulture, situated on the island, hold an advantage over the National Arts Theatre on the mainland. An illustrative case is Ifeoma Fafunwa's 'Hear Word,' which enjoyed a full house with a 5000naira gate fee at MUSON but experienced significantly lower attendance at the National Arts Theatre with a reduced 500naira gate fee. Even adjusting the price failed to compensate for the venue's impact on audience traffic, highlighting the crucial connection between location and audience engagement.

The importance of comprehending the target audience and selecting a venue strategically is evident in Bolanle Austin-Peters' productions. 'Saro the Musical,' initially staged at the Oriental Hotel for a specific target audience, later moved to MUSON to broaden its reach. However, a subsequent shift to Terra Culture, a smaller venue than MUSON's Shell hall, occurred due to the specific nature of the show she intended to run concurrently. This strategic decision-making process based on audience type and desired production atmosphere underscores the profound impact venue selection can have on a theatrical production's success.

Recognizing theatre as a business necessitates the application of sound marketing principles to effectively meet customer needs. McCarthy's four Ps—Product, Place, Price, and Promotion—formulate the Marketing mix, representing the comprehensive factors at a marketing manager's disposal to cater to the target market (McCarthy 3). By adeptly combining these variables, marketers can craft robust marketing plans and visibly enhance operational

outcomes. This framework is equally applicable to theatre, wherein the play/performance corresponds to the product, the performance's gate fee represents the price, methods to attract the audience constitute promotion, and the designated venue serves as the place.

Despite the integral role of the venue (place) in this marketing mix, some theatre practitioners tend to prioritize the other three Ps (product, promotion, and price) while overlooking the significance of the performance location. Ostrow's perspective on the channel of distribution provides a fitting analogy to theatre's dynamics, where goods and services (performances) traverse a route from producer/manufacturer (play production creator) through marketing intermediaries (promoters) to the final user (audience). Like any distribution chain, ensuring the accessibility of the product to the audience becomes crucial.

Hence, careful consideration of various factors becomes imperative when selecting a performance location. Much like the seamless flow of goods and services to end-users in a distribution channel, theatre practitioners must strategically position their performances in venues where the target audience can readily engage with the product. This nuanced deliberation on the place within the marketing mix plays a pivotal role in determining the success of theatrical endeavors, recognizing the intricate connections among each element in shaping the overall audience experience.

Primarily, the accessibility of performances to consumers in a convenient location where they can easily make a purchase is crucial. The success of a product is intricately tied to the location where it is made available for consumers to buy, especially if the objective is to reach a broad consumer base. The choice of theatre location significantly influences audience traffic. To underscore this point, Vilet contends, "Shopping centers are places where commerce is dominant" (37), a principle applicable to theatre; performances should be staged in locations that guarantee robust attendance. Notably, Lagos Islands hold more popularity than the mainland, with some theatregoers opting to drive to the island for a play due to the unique ambiance it offers. Governor Ambode's plan to establish new theatres in various areas across Lagos further underscores the undeniable importance of the environment, aligning with the assertion that the location is an unavoidable factor (Broadbent et al 7).

Analyzing specific venues, Terra Kulture and MUSON emerge as more favored choices for play productions among audiences, surpassing other mainland locations irrespective of pricing. This preference is rooted in the audience's desire for comfort, atmosphere, and security. The significance and inevitability of a theatre building's location are vividly demonstrated in this preference. Water's observation that "an audience not only goes to the theatre but also to the specific part of town where the theatre is located, and the memories and associations of the part of town help to provide reception context for any performance seen there" (2) further emphasizes the importance of location. Knowles adds weight to this argument by asserting that "the geographical location of the space in the city elsewhere is, therefore, significant for the understanding of the theatrical production and the reception alike" (6), highlighting a lack of support for mainland venues in this context.

Secondly, the paramount concerns of comfort, safety, and security wield significant influence in the realm of theatre, impacting the audience not just physically but also psychologically. Audience members rightfully anticipate an environment that ensures their well-being and tranquility. Given the confined nature of theatres, caution must be exercised to create spaces that are neither uncomfortably tight nor pose potential hazards. Blackburn et al define a confined space as one with restricted means of entry, inadequate ventilation, oxygen deficiency, or contamination, emphasizing the need to separate theatre venues from such spaces to prevent discomfort (50).

Beyond spatial considerations, the facilities within the theatre merit close scrutiny. Social amenities, air conditioning, restroom facilities, and reliable power supply are essential elements that contribute to the audience's overall experience. The National Arts Theatre, for instance, has faced criticism for lacking in these aspects, with malfunctioning amenities and unsatisfactory restroom conditions dissuading potential attendees. Consequently, audiences are disinclined to attend shows at this venue due to concerns about their safety and well-being.

Moreover, the size and availability of parking spaces emerge as crucial factors in enhancing audience comfort. Attendees seek a seamless and stress-free experience, and spending an excessive amount of time searching for parking



or worrying about the security of their vehicles can detract from their enjoyment. For productions anticipating a substantial audience, opting for larger venues to prevent congestion is advisable. Concurrently extending the production can also alleviate congestion concerns. Past experiences of audiences at specific venues can significantly impact their decision to attend future shows. Therefore, addressing any historical issues or negative records associated with a chosen venue is imperative to prevent audience deficiency.

Terra Kulture and MUSON exemplify venues that prioritize audience comfort with ample and convenient parking spaces. The National Arts Theatre, while possessing sufficient parking, must also address concerns related to the safety of parked vehicles to enhance the overall production experience. In essence, a meticulous consideration of comfort, safety, and security factors not only fosters an inviting atmosphere for the audience but also contributes to the overall success of theatrical productions.

Another critical factor to consider is the accessibility of the location to the audience. It is essential to ensure that attendees, having invested in the performance, can reach the venue without facing difficulties, preventing disruptions to the timing of the event. To illustrate, the Main Auditorium at the University of Lagos, while architecturally impressive, may present challenges due to its association primarily with the student community. If a performance is not specifically catered to students, the audience turnout may be affected. Additionally, limited parking space and a narrow access road can hinder the overall experience, impacting the timing of the event. In contrast, venues like Terra Kulture and MUSON are easily accessible, contributing to a smoother audience experience.

While some may argue that the design of the theatre space is equally crucial, it is the audience's journey to the venue that brings this realization to light. As Water emphasizes, "The process of their journey to the theatre may, therefore, have a distinct impact on the audience experience of the performance" (80). Carlson reinforces this notion, stating that a performance space's significance lies not only in its design but also in the area where it is situated (200).

Moreover, the four Ps—Product, Place, Price, and Promotion—operate in tandem and significantly influence the choice of location. The type of product, tailored for a specific gender, age group, occupation, religion, or ethnic background, plays a pivotal role in determining the suitable location for a production. Likewise, pricing considerations are intertwined with location, as urban and rural settings may warrant different pricing strategies, exemplified by the varied gate fees for 'Hear Word' in urban and rural areas. The venue's environment, such as a university setting, must align with the intended audience, unless explicitly designed for a different demographic. In terms of promotion, less-known locations may necessitate more extensive publicity efforts compared to well-known venues. This is not to dissuade the use of new locations but underscores the importance of tailored promotional efforts for each venue. Ultimately, the right product, promoted at the right price, must be made available in the right place to be effectively embraced by the audience.

#### **4.CONCLUSION**

The significance of the location in theatre should neither be exaggerated nor minimized; it holds equal importance and exerts a substantial impact on the success of any performance. This aspect demands meticulous consideration. While some theatre practitioners may predominantly focus on the performers, profitability, and visibility—all of which are undeniably vital—the presentation space, encompassing the venue's location and structure, is a crucial and integral component in realizing the production's objectives. After all, the ultimate aim is to secure audience patronage, making the choice of location a pivotal factor in achieving this goal.

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