

Research Article

# The Performing Team in a Theatrical Performance and Their Tourism Value: Atilogwu Dancers a Case Study

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## Abstract

In relation to tourism theatre or theatrical performances has become one of the media through which tourists especially heritage tourists have personal encounter with traditions, history and culture. This is because the heritage tourists wants an authentic experience which theatre or theatrical performances to a great extent is sure to communicate to the tourists. To this end theatrical performances or theatre has components which has been noted by scholars in tourism studies. These components include storytelling, market positioning/strategy, performing team and outdoor/indoor venues. Each of these components have their tourism value. However, for the purpose of this article, the tourism value of the performing team in a theatrical performance is x-rayed and how it relates to Atilogwu dancers is examined. The tourism value of a performing team lies in the performers abilities and these includes: professionalism, good coordination and expression of emotion. These abilities combined together gives satisfaction to the tourist(s). In essence when a tourist(s) is watching an Atilogwu dancer perform, the expectation is not just about entertainment but about professionalism, good coordination and expression of emotion. The Atilogwu dancer is expected to embody these skills in his or her performance thereby giving the tourist reasons to look out for a repeat performance. This is what this article is about.

## Keywords

Tourism, Theatrical Performance, Performing Team, Atilogwu Dance

## 1. Introduction

Theatre from a broad perspective includes plays, dance, opera, musical theatre [1]. Osipovich David [2] states that theatrical performances are a particular kind of interaction between performers and observers in a shared physical space. He argues further that a theatrical performance is not just a communication of a play to an audience in the most direct way, it can be that as it is believed by other scholars such as Saltz, but it does not have to be just that. Osipovich David explains further that theatrical performance has its own aesthetic

identity, separate from the play, "plays can be the focus of a theatre event, but they can be used to merely facilitate a theatrical performance [2].

In relation to tourism theatre or theatrical performances has become one of the media through which tourists especially heritage tourists have personal encounter with traditions, history and culture. This is because the heritage tourists wants an authentic experience which theatre or theatrical performances to a great extent is sure to communicate to the tourists.

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To buttress this point further Obasi states that tourism orientation has changed with time, in that tourism serves other needs apart from entertainment just like theatre, such needs include, social, heritage, and economic needs [3]. For instance in Georgia United States. "Swamp Gravy" Georgia's official folk life play an original blend of comedy, drama and music which is based on real-life stories celebrating South Georgia Culture. This grew out of a meeting between a Colquitt resident and a doctoral student in Performance Studies who was researching performance as a community building tool. This eventually evolved into a collaborative play based upon stories of the lives of local residents which was used to bring the community together and also attract tourists [4]. Also the "2017/2018 China Tourism Performing Arts Development Research Report as written by Li and Liu [5] pointed out that the consumer group of the tourism performing arts industry has increased by 21% in the past year and the box office has increased by 20% to 5.1 billion RMB. Also it has been revealed that theatre plays very important role in China's tourism industry, the *romance of the Song Dynasty* is one of such theatrical performances that has boosted China's tourism industry [6]. Susan Bennett [7] in her article "Theatre and Tourism" argues that the presence of a flourishing theatre contributes to a city's significations urbanity, arich cultural capital, a public life of art and pleasure and an economics that spreads easily beyond the literal box office to encompass other activities such as post-theatre dining and drinking, bookstores and other retail outlets. Also for tourism theatre's importance may not be the artistic product perse but what it contributes literally and symbolically to the contextual commercial environment. The importance of theatre to tourism is further seen in the following ways, it helps to reinforce cultural brand of destination and also a driver of national tourism and visitor repetition, and also offers solution to tourism seasonality [8].

To this end theatrical performances or theatre has components which has been noted by Song and Cheung [9]. These components include storytelling, market positioning/strategy, performing team and outdoor/indoor venues. Each of these components has their tourism value. For storytelling, Mossberg [10] highlighted the use of storytelling as a component of theatrical performance to attract tourists in the Nordic region. Mitchell [11] rightly notes that theatre artists are not trained to be solely self expressive but to tell stories better. However, for the purpose of this article, the tourism value of the performing team in a theatrical performance is xrayed and how it relates to Atilogwu dancers is the main focus of this article.

## 2. The Performing Team and Their Tourism Value

Theoretically the research on the performing arts and tourism has been looked at from two perspectives: social and management. For the social, the authenticity characteristics of

the theatrical performance as it is presented to the tourists is examined [12]. For the management segment a threefold classification emerges as proposed by Pearce [13]. These are: The Power Brokers, The Performers and The Audience. Performance research is believed to have evolved from the criticism of the paramount focus on the visual aspects of tourism which is the tourist gaze and the passivity involved with the concept. [14] Tourism has been highlighted by scholars such as [15] as a multi-sensory experience in which theatrical performances captures these aspects. In essence, applying the performance approach to tourism transforms tourists from passive gazers to participants in the creation of destinations. [16, 17].

The performers, are the talented, that enact and embody the themes and presentations which the power brokers come up with to present to the tourists. The performers are also examined in two ways: authenticity and management. In authenticity the performers are looked at as been able to show case the culture they are displaying authentically by tourists. In terms of management; the performers are considered an important internal factor contributing to the success of the theatrical performance. Cheung and Song [7] noted that in a theatrical performance hundreds of performers are engaged and they are grouped into professional and amateur performers. For some cultural and historical performance the skill and professionalism of the performers can affect the quality of what is presented to the tourists.

Pearce [13] buttresses this point by stating that skilled performers are particularly significant to theatrical performances this is because in recent times many tourists have many chances to see, listen to and appreciate world class performance/performers. Also many aspects of performers abilities affect tourists satisfaction, such abilities include;

- a) Professionalism
- b) Good Coordination
- c) Expression of Emotions

*The Romance of Song Dynasty and The Song Of Eternal Sorrow* in China Tourism Sector became famous because of the professionalism of the performers. The professional performers included actors, models and acrobats, these express and demonstrate the cultural and philosophical background to the show. Song and Cheung [9] noted that some of the performers are recruited from overseas. On the other hand, as noted by the authors not all theatrical performances use professional performers. Theatrical performances such as *The Impression of Lijiang and The Impression of Liusanjie*, recruit local residents to present the original lifestyle of ethnic minorities. Two thirds of the participants in the above cited theatrical performances as indicated by the authors were selected from local community and given training before coming on stage.

### 2.1. Atilogwu Dance

Okafor [18] in his book titled "Ezeagu Atilogwu The

Legendary Igbo Troupe" wrote a vivid description of the origin of Atilogwu dance. According to him the dance originated from Ezeagu a town in Southwest region of Enugu State Nigeria. He stated that the dance is an amalgamation or combination of five dances which are: Ogwulogwu, Anaku, Ochanja, Anam and Adunjanja. The dance according to him dominated every other dance in Ezeagu because of its alluring rhythms and energetic acrobatic displays which were formed from the above mentioned dances. The dance earned its name from spectators who wondered if the dance involved the use of charm because of the energetic displays involved in the dance. Hence it was given the name "A tighala ogwu"? Is it with the aid of charm?

## 2.2. Professionalism

As noted earlier that the performers in a theatrical performance are the talented that enact and embody the themes and presentations which the power brokers come up with to present to the tourists. Also, that many of the aspects of the performers abilities affect tourists satisfaction and such abilities include: professionalism, good coordination and expression of emotion.

With respect to Atilogwu dancers who are the talented in the performance their professionalism is meant to be depicted in the following musical roles as pointed out by Okafor [18]. First the star dancer in an Atilogwu dance who is known as "Nekwu Uno" (Big House) [16] must perform professionally putting a charming and good personality. During the performance the star dancer is to be accompanied by the flautist round the stage as the star dancer performs a solo dramatic dance round the stage greeting the audience and spectators. The "Nnekwu Uno" (Big House) is also expected to do what is called "iti mbali" which involves witty statements, proverbs, leaping, swirling and swaying of the body in an energetic rhythmic pattern. He/She does this with the flautist by his side urging him on. Tian and Bao [19] supports the fact that professionalism of performers in a theatrical performance is key to tourists satisfaction.

## 2.3. Good Coordination

For the tourist to be satisfied watching an Atilogwu dance there must be good coordination and this role is played by the "Otu Ugo" (Wearer of the Eagle Feather) [18]. The "Otu Ugo" is also the "Obu Uzo egwu" (the dance leader) as a result he/she is usually the first in the row of dancers and the second best dancer after the "Nnekwu Uno" (Big House). For there to be good coordination the wearer of the Eagle feather must bring in dance variations known as "igha egwu aka" [18] and which in turn is imitated by other dancers. The good coordination must go with the following dance commands.

"Iru nuo" (forward movement)

"Azu nuo" (backward movement)

"O su kwenu" (it has started happening)

When all this is done rhythmically by the dancers it brings satisfaction to the tourists.

## 2.4. Expression of Emotion

Expression of emotions is a key factor in any theatrical performance it goes a long way in talking about the skill of the performers and the authenticity of the performance. In an Atilogwu dance for the tourists to be satisfied expression of emotion by the performing team is vital. The "Nnekwu Uno" (Big House) brings this to bear, because he/she must perform with a smiling face as he swirls energetically round the stage. In exchange the audience showers him/her with gifts and hand shakes, which is a show of satisfaction by the tourists. Also the third best dancer in an Atilogwu dance brings expression of emotion to bear in the performance as he/she is addressed as the "Ochi Oha" [18]. The dancer is expected to hold the tourists/spectators in wild admiration because he is usually the last dancer to leave the stage.

## 3. Conclusion

The inter relationship between theatre and tourism noted by Bennett [7] is seen in the following ways: in terms of impact, theatre has become an important aspect of tourism destinations round the world such as London, Nashville (Tennessee, USA), Branson (Missouri, USA), Edinburgh Scotland [6]. On the other hand tourism impacts on theatre in such ways as the tourist audience is a substantial one for contemporary theatre, since such an audience brings the much needed financial viability to independent theatres. Tourists (domestic and international) are the majority of audiences in Broadway (New York) and West End (London) theatres and as such are an important source of revenue enabling theatres to rereferences.

To this end, the performing team in a theatrical performance is one that should not be toyed with seeing that the majority of their audience are tourists who brings the much needed financial viability. Theatrical performances which includes plays, dance, operas are an ubiquitous medium of communication across the globe and especially in African cultures. "By its nature, a Nigerian dance or music engages all the senses in a performer and spectator alike. It is the pattering of the human body in time and space in order to give expression to ideas and emotions" [16]. Summarily the Atilogwu dancer is not just an entertainer for the tourist view but someone who carries a lot of tourism values that is both beneficial to the tourists and to the theatrical performance.

## Author Contributions

Chinwe Chimezie Uwaoma is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares there are no conflict of interest.

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