Role of Social Media in Promoting Theatres for Social Development

1 Gayathri Krishna, 2 Sukanya Premraj, 3 Rekha K.P and 4 Dinesh Babu
1,2,3,4 Dept of Visual Media & Communication, Amrita School of Arts & Sciences, Kochi, Amrita VishwaVidyapeetham, India.
1 krishnasslk25@gmail.com
2 sukanyapremraj@gmail.com
3 padmarekha89@gmail.com

Abstract

This study focuses on how new media popularizes theatre art form which are a part of social development. Theatre has always been an effective method of expression which plays a potential role in causing self-realization and creating social transition. Actors turn out to be ‘indirect activists’, addressing individual and social issues. The audience relates and resonates to better outcomes. With the emergence of new media specifically social media, Theatres have been given a new perspective in terms of popularizing this art and keeping up this culture. Today, theatres embrace new media to reach up to a larger audience. This paper analyses various theatre group pages on Facebook which promotes theatre culture. Facebook has been particularly taken because Facebook has more than 400 million users, precisely to form the third largest country in the world. The main intention of this research is to study the role, new media plays in promoting theatres which disseminate social development.

Key Words: Social Development, Social Media, theatres.
1. Introduction

Traditional medium forms its root from the beginning of a cultural era. This functioned as a medium to inform, educate as well as to entertain. It played a major role in changing the traditional Indian ideologies into the waves of modernization. This research takes a traditional medium into consideration due to the fact that traditional medium has always created an impact on the Indian minds and has made them think apart from the usual conventional route. These art forms depict human culture, a pathway to know about the attitude of a society. Theatre, one of the oldest forms of traditional medium, survives even today withstanding technological advancement. While the radio, television and films gave rise to a global entertainment industry, theatres remain to be a lively and resourceful art form. Sri. Ramakrishna, the renowned social reformer, followed the concept of theatre and described it to be a vehicle for public education or ‘Lokshihya’. Earlier, theatres imbibed myths and epics which gave its audience an aesthetic pleasure. After centuries, Bharatha Muni gave birth to the Sanskrit text attributed for performing arts, ‘Natyashastra’. This piece of literature composed in the 4th and 5th century, consists of four elements-recitations, songs, gestures and sentiments from the Rig-Veda, Sama-Veda, Yajur-Veda and the Atharva-Veda. Bharatha Muni mentions theatre to be imparting knowledge to the people as well as a form of entertainment. Today, theatre along with new media has led to a new wave of mass communication. A notion exists that theatres lose importance nowadays, but still there are a few forms of mediums that develops strategies to keep up the popularity of this art form. The attitude of the young generation towards theatre today depends upon the exposure these theatres portray through new media. While the main theme remains the same in these theatres, latest technologies give life to the old subjects. This research closely examines the role of social media especially Facebook in popularizing theatres which propagate social development.

2. Review of Literature

Malyaban Chattopadhyay (2013) says about the evolution of theatres in India and how theatre was an important medium of mass communication. Natyasastra, penned by Bharata Muni is a text which tried to unfold the mind of the performers for the first time in the history of Indian drama. "Theatre in India started as a narrative form, i.e., reciting, singing and dancing becoming integral elements of the theatre. This emphasis on narrative elements made our theatre essentially theatrical right from the beginning. That is why the theatre in India has encompassed all the other forms of literature and fine arts into its physical presentation: Literature, Mime, Music, Dance, Movement, Painting, Sculpture and Architecture - all mixed into one and being called ‘Natyam’ or Theatre in English." quotes Devendra Raj Ankur in his feature, INDIAN THEATRE: INHERITANCE, TRANSITIONS AND FUTURE OPTIONS. He also points out how the new media have attracted the maximum number of people because of money, glamour and market opportunities and how theatres have
experienced a setback in the last 15 years. Dr. C. M. Vinay Kumar (2013) discusses the idea of how theatre can be converged with new media which will provide greater opportunities for the development of both the sectors. He observed that theatre as a performing art since ages has a notion of gathering people together at one venue, the convergence of theatre and new media will not only help theatres gain back the popularity, but it will also help in the audience viewer relationships. He also examines how theatre has survived every technological change and has adapted the technology in them like incorporating amplified music and electrical light. "The transformation of the production-reception dynamic is central to Axel Bruns’ notion of Prod usage: the complete convergence of producer and receiver, artist and spectator, facilitated by accessible digital tools and the internet as a means of creation, distribution and consumption. Bruns describes the shift from artistic products created by individual artists, to creativity as an unfinished, evolving and participatory process, giving examples of web-based media sharing. Tools such as Flicker and YouTube (2008, p. 235)." The study focused on the new media viewing experience of youth. Many factors like liveliness, resourcefulness, attitude, the distribution of performers and its situation in cyberspace distinguish theatre viewing experience from other art forms. The content, technology and other factors also are included. The study finally concludes that theatre gets wider possibility to prove themselves with the help of new media. Angela Mitchell (2017) in her article says, In today's world, social media is a must - a powerful tool for expanding your audience base. So get comfortable with Social Media - and don't be afraid to be creative in your promotion efforts. Launch a Facebook page for your organization, and heavily promote it on your website, in your e-mails, and with frequent updates on events or performances. Post regular updates in 420 characters or less.' Rothschild (2009) mentions that performing art centers started adopting social media marketing due to the changing lifestyle of people and technological progress of Internet, thus helping them to connect their target audience. The change in lifestyle of the customers and the technological developments makes the traditional marketing becomes less effective. Natalia V. Ryzhkova (2010) 'Social media marketing experts underscore the advantages of using social media for marketing as the ability to reach a wide audience, two-ways communication, accessibility and viral effect. Social media marketing promises to improve promotional efforts significantly. One of the major advantages of social media marketing is the ability to reach a wide audience breaking down geographic boundaries.' MacBridge and Abel in their research say that Traditional Media can be used as a medium in the process of change and development in India. Even in the inner places of India, where modern media did not mark its place yet, the older forms plays a very important role in influencing the attitudes, behaviors and promote change in the people. History shows that these traditional forms are an effective way in removing many negatives prevailing in the society like superstitions and many unscientific attitudes that people have carried on through ages and which have been hard to change. Traditional media use a simple form of persuasion by presenting the required message in locally popular artistic forms. This cannot be
imitated by any other means of communication.

Kidd (1984) observed that the plays were a result of the situations and problems that the villagers faced. The villagers, who themselves were actors, analysed the situations and created dramas which showcased all the evils they were facing. Thus, making it a general expression of people. Sheelita Das (2013) states that Folk Theatre forms in India are traditional way of Communication and enriched cultural heritage. It constitutes a potential source for conveying messages for Social, Economic and Cultural Development which ultimately helps in overall National Development. Shailendra Kumar (2012) stated that the folk media in India can be used as an effective way of communication to the majority of the India's population who live in the villages. The mass media and the new media have been limited to the urban population itself. In this context, traditional media can be used as a medium to reach a majority of rural population. He also states that the traditional media have been surviving for centuries and it will do so in the future without any doubt. Ghosh (2006) stated that the families, social groups and community gatherings served as the main form of communication and feedback for the folk performers. The folk forms propagate the values, attitudes, beliefs and culture of the people. The social evils in the society are depicted in a satirical way through these folk forms. Reaves (1995) puts forth a question that Theatres have always been a mix of all arts like music, dance, painting, sculpture etc. so why not converge traditional media with the new media and call it digital convergence as well? and why not claim every interactive art the name theatre? The new media with theatres and call it a Digital revolution? Dixon (2007) states that Cyberformance is a form of digital performance, in that computer technologies play a key role in technique, delivery, and frequently aesthetic as well.

3. Methodology

This research study uses the qualitative as well as quantitative research approach. It covers the research design and the data collection methods. Focus groups consisted of specialists who were interviewed and respondents who were surveyed randomly at the Theatre Festival of Kerala.

4. Theoretical Framework

Medium Theory

The theory says that medium is the message and thus McLuhan stated that in regard to how they awaken and alter thoughts and senses. Thus, we can analyze how theatre as a mass medium carries in itself a message and how it can help in social awakening of the society.

We can also infer that there forms a symbiotic relationship between the medium and the message, in which specifically how the message is perceived depends upon the influence of the medium.
5. **Conceptual Framework**

**Research Problem**

Theatres play a great role in promoting social development. The research aims at analyzing how new media helps in promoting theatre among the public in social development.

6. **Research Questions**

- How theatres help in social development?
- Why are theatres losing its importance in present scenario?
- How new media helps in promoting theatres?

7. **Hypothesis**

- **H1**: Theatres become a tool of giving awareness to the people in the society with values and thoughts.
- **H2**: Theatres are losing its importance in the society because new mediums of entertainment emerged in the society
- **H3**: New media becomes a great platform for the theatre groups to promote and display their talents

8. **Research Design**

Data from Facebook pages should be examined and analyzed to analyze the degree of promotion, social media gives to various theatre groups. The data collected from various references at the theatre festival assist in finding out how theatres help in spreading the ideas of social development.

Theatres often portray the complexities existing in the society. From the beginning stages of mass communication, theatres have played a major role in influencing its audience against the social evils and morality structures forced upon the society. Theatres form as a vehicle for social development even today. Thus, the findings established in the study can be generalized.

Data is also collected by conducting in-depth interview. The focus group consists of theatre artists and specialists in this particular field. A survey conducted among 100 respondents from the International Theatre Festival, Thirissur can make a statement supporting the hypothesis of this study.

9. **Analysis**

Throughout the study, we could find theatre becoming a tool of giving awareness to the people in the society along with values and thoughts. It communicates to a large number of people about the relevant social issues in a personal way. While analyzing the survey results, 82% respondents strongly agrees that theatres play a major role in conveying socially relevant messages
more effectively than movies.

Theatres are losing its importance in the society because a new wave of entertainment emerged in the society and new mass mediums promote such a wave of entertainment. 73% of respondents agreed to the statement that theatres are nowadays losing importance due to the emergence of new mediums. New media becomes a great platform for the theatre groups to promote and display their talents. Majority of people today are vivid social media users, and social media becomes a platform for the theatre groups to promote themselves. Though 72% respondents supported of live streaming of drama through social media, 70% still prefers to watch it live rather than on a social media platform.

Table 1.1: Preference in Social Media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social Media Platforms</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whatsapp</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Source: Primary Data</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above Table 1.1 shows that Facebook has more preference than any other social media platforms, in terms of getting to know about dramas and theatre events.

Table 1.2: Facebook Pages Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the Facebook Page</th>
<th>No. of Followers</th>
<th>Average no. of Posts per day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delhi Theatre Circuit</td>
<td>22K Followers</td>
<td>2 Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalanjali Theatre, Mumbai</td>
<td>755 Followers</td>
<td>4 Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala Sangeetha Nadaka Akademi</td>
<td>16K Followers</td>
<td>4 Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khaskhine Ithhasam</td>
<td>7552 Followers</td>
<td>Occasional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCPA</td>
<td>100,061 Followers</td>
<td>2-3 Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPAC</td>
<td>2285 Followers</td>
<td>2 Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asmita Theatre Group</td>
<td>30,966 Followers</td>
<td>2 Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianostrum Theatre</td>
<td>3029 Followers</td>
<td>1 Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection India Theatre Group</td>
<td>1024 Followers</td>
<td>2 Posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rage Productions</td>
<td>3216 Followers</td>
<td>1 Post</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Delhi Theatre Circuit

This group is for all the aspects related to theatre. They promote dramas which are performed in and around Delhi. This page is a platform to advertise plays, popularize them among its followers. They also provide information about auditions which is conducted regularly to encourage new talents in this particular field. The group has 22k members and is a public group. Its members are free to post any opinion or feedback related to the dramas performed by the group. Average numbers of posts are 2 per day.

Kalanjali Theatres, Chembur, Mumbai

This is a public group with 755 members. This group belongs from Mumbai and the group produces dramas under its banner and promotes them effectively. Kalanjali also promotes other cultural programmes and theatre fests happening in and around Mumbai. The average number of posts per day is 4. Their dramas often depict the effects of globalization, improvising images of how the rural developed into urban regions.

Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Akademi

This is a registered government organized group located at the cultural capital of Kerala, Thrissur. Their Facebook page has 16k followers. KSNA organizes International Theatre festival every year giving immense popularity to this art in Kerala as well as inviting audience and performers from India and outside India. They conduct competitions all over India encouraging younger generations to opt this art form and appreciate them with various awards.

Khasakinte Ithihasam – Nadakam

This is a play directed by the renowned Malayalam theatre artist named DeepanSivaraman. While analyzing their Facebook page, we could infer that 80% of their promotions take place through Facebook. They have also uploaded a promo video and a trailer of this drama- Khasakinte Ithihasam as a YouTube link on Facebook. Audience response rates are high on this page. The page has 7532 likes and followers. The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari is also a drama directed by DeepanSivaraman. This drama is promoted widely through Facebook events. Their drama named ‘Khasakinte Ithihasam’ is an adaptation of O.V.Vijayan’s renowned novel ‘Khasakinte Ithihasam’ which depicts strong political and social issues existing in our society.

NCPA Mumbai

This group has 100,061 likes and followers. This group popularizes all performing arts events. NCPA is a government organization and organizes theatre plays which receive international accreditation. They provide information on theatres, artists and included details about upcoming workshops. They imbibe performances of popular drama artists at an international level.

KPAC

This is a theatre group which produces historically based dramas like
‘Ningalenne Communist aaki’ which marked an era in Malayalam theatre culture. This page has got 2287 likes and 2285 followers. This is used to advertise and publicize their dramas and to organize workshops for the beginners as well as performers to enhance their talent and use it to their fullest.

Asmita Theatre Group, New Delhi

One of the leading Hindi theatre groups in our country. It performs aesthetically improvised and socially relevant dramas. This group has produced 72 plays and has been performing for about 60 nights in a year. Through its Facebook page they show their approval of the ‘Street Theatre Movement’. They have given an in-depth idea about their group and its performances on their Facebook page.

Indianostrum Theatre

This theatre group is from Pondicherry and has produced dramas in a wide range. Their main method of promoting themselves is through Facebook. They create Facebook events far before their upcoming shows.

Reflection India Theatre Group, Mumbai

This is a theatre group from Mumbai. They produce shows and promote them through captivating posters and small promo videos as well as trailers. The group has a bunch of young talented artists from Mumbai who are active participants on this Facebook page.

Rage Productions

They produce dramas without aiming at a commercial gain or success but have gained critical acclamations. The company was formed in 1993 and has produced several significant plays. They are also encouraging young writers by enacting the best scripts written by students who are immensely talented in writing plays or drama.

Table 1.3: Which theatre groups do you follow on social media

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facebook Pages of Drama Groups</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KMK SmarakaSamithi</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KhasakinteIthihasam</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalanjali Theatres</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Following Any</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data

Above Table 1.3, clearly depicts that the Facebook page named ‘Khasakinte Ithihasam’ has more followers and is a popular drama page on social media.
Table 1.4: Social Media’s role in promoting theatres of social importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role of Theatre in Social Development</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theatres convey social messages effectively</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Medium losing its importance due to new media</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media can help in promoting Theatres</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 1.4, 84% of respondents do agree to the statement, theatres help in social development. While taking a glance into the interviews, it can be derived that theatres are livelier due to which effective communication of messages takes place. A kind of realization can be evoked among the audience which can lead to self development.

Majority agrees that traditional medium is losing its importance due to the emergence of new media. While 69% feels that it is the peoples’ mentality that is changing, 31% pointed out other factors such as lack of quality theatres, people not preferring theatre as a profession and deprival of income as well as fame.

Today, most of them are active on social media platforms; this is platform which connects a larger mass in a quicker and easiest way. 92% of respondents supported the statement that social media can help in promoting theatres. While 72% supported live streaming of drama through social media platforms, the rest prefers to watch it live.

Table 1.5: How do you get to know about the dramas?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisements</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouth Publicity</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Other Medium</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary Data

The above given survey result in Table 1.6, shows that most respondents get to know about dramas and theatre events through social media.
10. Discussion

Theatres, being an old art form, play a major role in the progression of a society and its overall development. Dramas performed in theatre, function as a tool to disseminate social awareness up to the audience along with thoughts, values and entertainment. 87% respondents points out that theatre can make a change in the coming years, which clearly depicts that theatres are important tool for social development.

The survey results showed that 74% of the respondents love to watch drama and are active social media users. They strongly agreed that theatres are not given much importance in present. The main reason put forth is the emergence of new media and the popularization of cinema. The survey respondents agreed to the statement that social media can help in the promotion of theatres. Though 72% support live streaming of drama though social media platforms, 70% still prefers to watch theatres live. This is because of the point that theatres are more effective and appealing when performed live. The merging of theatres into social media can open wider aspects for this traditional medium, as theatres would get more viewership and popularity when brought into social media scenario.

11. Limitations

- The Facebook pages selected for the analysis was limited to 10 theatre group pages.
- The sample size for the survey was limited to 100 respondents.

12. Conclusion

Theatres as an oldest art form and a method of mass communication, has served being a vehicle for social development and change. It has made a difference through its effective power of expression and simplicity in presentation. Jawaharlal Nehru had once said that he is greatly interested in the development of a people’s theatre in India. He says that there is a great room for theatres as long as it is based on people and their traditions and that it is the people’s approach. Nevertheless, an effort should be made in the direction. From ages, theatres have taken into concern political, economical and social issues of a society. They address the audience as ordinary people on stage, being indirect activists raise awareness about the realities. This study shows in what level new media promote theatres according to the viewers’ interests. The convergence culture can increase the popularization of theatre productions. Theatres being an interactive and collaborative art form can be potentially included into the new media scenario. On the whole, the contemporary idea of merging theatre and social media can lead to a new experience of theatre performance.
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