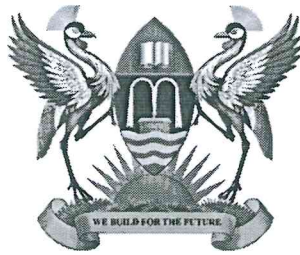


MAKERERE



UNIVERSITY

**FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOW AUDIENCE TURN UP FOR LIVE THEATRE
IN KAMPALA, A CASE STUDY OF UGANDA NATIONAL THEATRE AND
BATVALLYTHEATRE**

BY

BATAZE DEO

22/U/5876

2200705876

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PERFORMING ARTS
AND FILM IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
BACHELARS OF ARTS IN DRAMA AND FILM OF MAKERERE UNIVERSITY**

JULY 2025

Declaration

I, BATAZE DEO, declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted to any other university or institution for any academic award.

Signature:  Date: 28th / JULY / 2025

Name: BATAZE DEO

Approval

This is to certify that this dissertation presented by Bataze Deo was written under my supervision in partial fulfillment of his requirement for the award of the degree of drama and film of Makerere University.

Supervisor's Name.

.....MERCY MIREMBE NTANGARE.....

Signature.

.....mmwlangane.....

Date.

.....29 July 2025.....

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my father BAZZE STEVIN and Aunt BABIRYE ROSE who have supported me tirelessly in my academic journey. May the Almighty God bless you. I also dedicate it to all who walk the path of inquiry, may you never lose your curiosity.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this dissertation would not have been possible without the support and guidance of many individuals and institutions, to whom I owe my deepest gratitude.

First and foremost, I take this opportunity to thank the Almighty God who has enabled me to successfully complete this research/desertation.

Secondly, I extend my sincerest thanks to my dissertation supervisor, Prof. Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, for her invaluable mentorship, guidance and feedback, and unwavering encouragement throughout this research. May the Almighty God bless you abundantly.

My appreciation extends to the department and staff of the Department Performing Arts and Film at Makerere University, whose instruction and administrative support provided a fertile ground for my academic growth.

I extend my gratitude to my colleagues and fellow students in the Drama and Film Class, especially Waiswa Tonny, Nasasira Kevin, Tusiime Mika, Kaddu Joseph and Nalwanga Madiinah, for their trust and friendship, stimulating discussions, and for making the journey less solitary.

On a personal note, I reserve my most heartfelt thanks for my family. To my parents, thank you for a lifetime of love and for teaching me the value of persistency. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

Table of Contents

Declaration.....	ii
Approval	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Acknowledgements	v
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1. Introduction	1
1.1. Definition of Terms.....	1
1.2. Background of the Study	2
1.3. Problem Statement.....	3
1.4.1. Main Objective	4
1.4.2. Specific Objectives	4
1.5. Research Questions.....	4
1.5.1. Main question	4
1.5.2. Specific questions	4
1.6. Importance of this research.....	5
1.7. Scope of the Study	5
1.8. Limitations of the Study	5
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	10
CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION.	12
4.1 Introduction.	12
4.2 The following are the factors identified.....	12
4.2.1The competition from social media.	12
4.2.2 Marketing and audience engagement.	13
4.2.3 The cultural and social perceptions.	14

4.2.4 The impact of covid 19.....	15
4.2.5 Influence of celebrities versus the starting theatre practitioners.	16
4.3 What National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre can do to attract audience back for live Theatre since they share the same problems.	16
4.3.1 Promotion and marketing.	16
4.3.2 School competition.	17
4.3.3 Partnership.	18
4.3.4 Upgrading theatres.....	18
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	19
5.1 Conclusion.....	19
5.2 Recommendations.	19
REFERENCES	21

ABSTRACT

This dissertation presents the factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theater in Kampala, with a case study of Uganda National theatre and Bat Valley theatre. The dissertation further presents the possible solutions which can be done by these theatres to attract back the audiences for live theatre productions.

Aqualitative research methodology was used to collect and analyze data, the research tools which were used include, interviews, direct observation and library.

The researcher discovered that some of the most pressing reason is that the audiences are prioritising the digital media over theatre productions, poor marketing by the theatre practioners. The report ends with a general conclusion and recommendation made by the researcher basing on the findings.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

This research discusses the factors responsible low audience engagement for live theatre in Kampala with the focus on the Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre. The research acknowledges and believes that there is unstable and low audience for live theater in Kampala despite the vibrant theatrical performances staged in these spaces which really need to be addressed. The study explores the challenges which have led to low audience for live theatre and also discusses the different strategies which the theatre practitioners at Bat Valley Theatre and Uganda National Theater can deploy to attract and bring back the hearts and love of audiences in live theatre so that our cultural landscape can thrive. I selected the Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley because of their long-time history number and in nature of audience attendance that is to say, at Bat Valley, most of the performances staged are in Luganda language while at Uganda National Theatre they welcome both English and Luganda plays but to a larger extent English plays are performed.

1.1. Definition of Terms

To provide clarity and context for this study, key terms are defined as follows.

Live Theatre. Refers to the performance where actors perform in front of the live audience. This happens in real time where by the audiences lively watching the performance. This can be a play, music or dance.

Audience turnout. Refers to the number of people who come to watch live theatre performances or music shows.

Socio-economic factors. Refers to how people vary in community basing on their economic statuses.

Cultural factors refer to societal values, traditions, and generational shifts that shape audience preferences and engagement with Theatre, including the influence of education and exposure to the arts.

Technological factors. This refers to how social media platforms like Television, You Tube, Tik Tok how they have impacted or influenced the audience for live theatre.

Marketing strategies. This analyses different ways or avenues in which the productions can be known by the audiences like social media platforms, banners, posters among others.

These definitions provide a foundation for analyzing the factors contributing to low audience turn up for live Theatre attendance in Kampala.

1.2. Background of the Study

The Uganda national theater was the first theater to be built in Uganda under colonial rule to promote Uganda's culture, promote talents, to act as a milestone in creating employment for youth through performing arts and also to develop the arts and cultural sector for socioeconomic development creating a platform for wide range of theatrical performances like music performances, dance and drama plays, comedy and cultural and other different festivals. Bat valley theatre on the other hand has also a long-time history of its theatrical performances in comedies, popular plays especially performed in Luganda language, having groups like Afri talent or the Bakayimbira drama actors staging relevant plays over the years which made it to be given a much recognition in promoting of Uganda's culture and promotion people's talents.

In the context of performing arts and entertainment, Theatre is defined as a collaborative performing art where live prefers tell a story or convey an experience to a live audience through a combination of music, dance, speech and movement. It combines storytelling with visual elements like scenery and lighting all within a dedicated performance space. While audience refers to assembled spectators or listeners to a performance.

(Kaiza 2013) says that "during the 1960s and early 1970s, theater worked as a medium for political and social commentary, with plays addressing the issues of independence and identity. However, the political disturbance of the 1970s particularly under the reign president Idi amin disrupted the development with artists facing censorship and persecution as evidenced by the arrest of director Byron Kawadwa in 1977. The post 1980s saw a revival with productions like Ndiwulira attracting a large number of audiences back to the live theater performances due to their cultural resonance and entertainment". However, people who love theater have noticed that few people are coming for live performances. Bukirwa Fatuma Ssendi makerere in her dissertation 2021 focusing specifically on Uganda national theater said that audience numbers have significantly declined compared to that 80s and 90s.

There are many reasons why there is low audience turn for live theater which include the poor quality of some theater productions. This has contributed to the low audience engagement since some productions are performed by amateur groups who lack more knowledge of performance since we don't have amateur theater in Kampala to nurture these upcoming groups, they end up getting spaces in Uganda national theater and bat valley theater. There is also inadequacy of good marketing and promotion which limits the awareness of these productions to the people who would come and attend these shows.

There is also much competition from other forms of entertainment like social media, movies, Netflix, television, comedy among others which are seen as easier and cheaper to afford rather than traveling to theaters and pay for the tickets. Infrastructure issues like old or worn-out theater buildings, limited seating capacity and uncomfortable or poorly maintained facilities yet in this era the artists demand large spaces like national theater which was built in 1950s with 377 seats and since then there is improvement on seating capacity. the cost of space booking is too high to the organizers for instance a survey I carried out at Uganda national theater shows that the booking fee is 1.5 million to 2million which scare away the theater practitioners from staging shows and also this influences the price tickets to be at a high rate and this eventually limits the large number of audience from attending live theatrical performances since it's not relating with peoples income and this makes theater lees affordable.

1.3. Problem Statement

The decline in audience engagement for live Theatre performances at Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre shows a significant challenge in preservation and promotion of Uganda's cultural heritage. Despite the good historical aspects of these two venues, the presence of good cultural heritage and artistic offerings in Kampala, these theaters struggle to raise a reasonable number of audiences for live performances for both young people and the community at large. This highly threatens their presence and lowers the relevance of these artistic institutions in Kampala, limiting the growth and development of Uganda's culture, limited growth and promotion of people's talents and Uganda's economic growth.

The low audience attendance also causes financial losses for the theater managers and discourages artists from staging productions. Therefore, my research aims to investigate the factors contributing to low audience turn out for live theater in Kampala with a case study of Uganda national theater and bat valley theater. It describes factors like ticket and booking

prices, marketing and promotion strategies, theater facilities and their relevance, awareness among the potential audiences and competition from other entertainment sources in order to understand how they can be dealt with to attract the audience back to the theater.

1.4. Objectives of study.

1.4.1. Main Objective

To identify the key factors contributing to the decline in audience attendance for live theatre at the Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre in Kampala

1.4.2. Specific Objectives

1. To identify the socio-economic, cultural, and technological factors contributing to low audience turnout;
2. To assess the effectiveness of current marketing strategies and theatre facilities in attracting the audience engagement.
3. To propose actionable recommendations which can help to enhance audience engagement for live Theatre

These objectives aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges which contribute to low audience turn for live Theatre.

1.5. Research Questions

1.5.1. Main question

What are the key factors contributing to the decline in audience attendance of live Theatre performances at the Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre in Kampala?

1.5.2. Specific questions

1. How do socio-economic, cultural, and technological factors interact to influence audience turnout?
2. To what extent do marketing strategies and Theatre practitioners contribute to the shaping of audience number for live theatre.
3. What strategies can be implemented to increase attendance and sustain live Theatre in Kampala?

1.6. Importance of this research

The significance of this research is to analyze the factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theatre performances in Kampala with a case study of Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre and also give some of the solutions which can be undertaken by the theatre practitioners to attract back large number of audiences in theatre shows

The findings of this research can hopefully also be used by different theatres within and outside Kampala which are facing the same problem of low audience for live theatre shows.

1.7. Scope of the Study

1.7.1. Content scope.

The research focused on the factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theatre and what solutions can be done to attract back the audiences for live theatre performances.

1.7.2. Geographical scope.

The study was carried out around Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre Kampala Uganda.

1.7.3. Time scope.

The research was carried out between 1990 Up-to-date in Kampala central division.

1.8. Limitations of the Study

Limited funding to facilitate for research. I faced the challenge of transportation to my field and also some of the respondents wanted to be given money in return of their information. But I solved this problem by using my money and also asking politely with request and introducing myself as a student before those who were asking for money.

Some respondents refused to give me permission to record the interviews and also to include their names in my report. But I solved this by relating their replies with those who allowed me to record and write names.

Most of the respondents used local language (Luganda) and limited me from noting down information while in the field but I solved this by recording the information which helped me play back and attentively listen to their information

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction.

This literature review explores the different factors contributing to low audience attendance for live theatre within the context of Kampala's theatre scene. This review aims to provide the understanding of the factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theatre with specific reference to the Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre and gives an ink to the solutions that can be done to attract back the audience for live theatre in these theatres.

Influence of digital media has brought alternatives of how Ugandans can access entertainment outside live Theatre. That is to say, the presence of Tik Tok, You Tube, Instagram, has directly impacted live theatre audiences. These platforms are easily accessible, cheaper and due to low internet(data)costs and the availability of smartphones. For example, UNICEF report (2022) indicates that smart phone coverage in Uganda is at 83%. This means that even a person in rural Uganda where one would normally expect high poverty levels they possess a smart phone and can easily access alternatives entertainment modes. This argument is similar to that of Martin Banham (2000) where he says "the global spread of digital media in African urban centers has shifted audiences away from traditional performance arts as digital content is more accessible and requires minimal effort." This means that social media platforms have effectively captured people's minds since they have entertainments like soap operas on television, Tik Tok and you tube and also there is loading on data compared to traveling to theatre and pay for the tickets.

Cultural and social perceptions of theatre among different communities where by some people look at theatre as something you do for fun and they do not mind invest in much. Micheal Muhumuza (2021.3) says "most people in communities state theatre as katemba, dikuula, ebyemizanyo or musiru dalada. Hence even those ones who join it, they take it basing on those perceptions". Therefore, this implies theatre as an art form is perceived as anything someone can do or even take part in without professionalism and this has led to low quality of work produced in theatre hence leading to low audience turn out for the live theatre.

The outbreak of covid 19 also impacted the audience turn up for live theatre. Covid 19 came and all services were closed and also theatres had to get closed over 2years. This forced the theatre audience to adopt other social media platforms like You Tube, Tik Tok, television, Netflix among others since people were not allowed to gather in one place. Covid 19 also

made the theatre practitioners to adopt other businesses since their main business was terminated and this made theatre to lose good and creative persons. As asserted in an article by KQ Hub Africa titled "the impact of covid 19 on the African creative industries" (2021) posted on the Internet. This shows that one of the most affected sector was the performing arts such as live music, dance and live theatre due to the ban on gathering and made the audience to adopt to other alternatives the social media which they are still stick on them hence affecting the audience for live theatre.

The influence of celebrities versus the starting theatre practitioners also influences the number of audiences for live theatre. (Uganda National Theatre archives) Says that "the prominent theatre artists like Mr. Pablo, zizinga Dickson, MS Aganza Kisaka, Anne Kansiime, Salvado among others attract large number of audiences because of their celebrity status in the communities while these starting artists struggle to attract bigger numbers of audience since they are not well known. (Uganda national theatre box office records 2010 up to date) say that they always get full house if the show belongs to prominent arts or group of performers like the fan factory of Dickson Zizinga, Yenze Theatre Conservatoires even if their tickets may be 50000shs to 100000shs and this has been happening from 2010 Up to date. Also, the records of bat valley box office also say that they bigger number of audience if celebrities like Abbey Mukiibi and Mariam Ndagire stage a production compared to those artists who are young in theatre. This means that some people come to the show to watch their celebrities instead of coming to appreciate theatre.

Infrastructure and accessibility issues further explains the problem of low audience turnout for live theatre. National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre are located in Kampala which makes it difficult for the people in villages to attend the shows. The transport infrastructure coupled with traffic congestion makes it difficult for attendees to reach these venues particularly for evening performances. The worn-out facilities like old lights which cannot give out good light, curtains, poor sound system the organization has never improved on that. In the same view of infrastructure and accessibility, Mbaye and Dinardi (2019) argue that "accessible cultural infrastructure is crucial for boosting attendance in African theatres". Yet Uganda national theatre and bat valley theatre may be facing funding constraints that limit their ability to upgrade facilities or improve accessibility.

Marketing and audience engagement strategies are notably deficient in Kampala's theatre scene contributing to low audience turnout. Unlike the music and film industries, which

effectively use social media platforms like X, YouTube, and radio, television for promoting and marketing, theatre productions often have limited advertising like word-of-mouth, poster and banners as Kiguli (2021) notes that “theatres in Kampala have been slow to adopt digital marketing strategies that could reach audiences. For example, music festivals in Uganda, such as the Nyege Nyege Festival, have successfully used social media to build anticipation and attract large crowds, a strategy that theatre venues have yet to fully emulate. This implies that Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre could benefit from targeted campaigns that highlight the unique and immersive experience of live theatre as well as partnerships with schools, universities, and community organizations to work on the audience base. In addition, Okello and Kiguli (2019) say that “there is lack of educational outreach programs to introduce theatre to younger generations limits its long-term sustainability”. This means that there is a weakness in creating a strong relationship between the theatre and the young generation which should at least be done through the education sector.

Socio-political dynamics also play a role in shaping audience turnout. Uganda’s political environment, characterized by intermittent censorship and restrictions on artistic expression, has occasionally impacted theatre attendance. Okagbue (2009) points out that “government oversight of cultural institutions can lead to self-censorship among playwrights and producers, resulting in less engaging content that fails to attract big number of audiences. Furthermore, political instability or economic problems can reduce public confidence in attending public events, as audiences may prioritize safety or financial caution over cultural participation”. This dynamic is particularly relevant in Kampala where urban audiences are sensitive to socio-political developments that affect their daily lives. The interplay between politics and theatre underscores the need for space to work on these challenges carefully while advocating for artistic freedom and relevance.

2.2 The possible solutions which can contribute to audience turn for live theatre.

The adaptation of television series to theatre as television carries the largest number of audience and also as the power to influence audience through what they broadcast. In addition, television series creates celebrities or stars which the viewers get affiliated to therefore adopting television series with these stars can automatically attract a bigger number of audiences. (Bukirwa Fatuma Ssendi 2021, 14). this means that the audience will get more excited if they come to know that their celebrities are staging a live production and this can attract more audience back in Uganda national theatre and bat valley theatre in Kampala.

According to Mercy Mirembe Ntangaare, she said that “poor attendance in theatre has a long history like social cultural, political and also religious and also depends on what kind of production and dance festivals and young people’s theater getting a bigger number of audiences compared to drama or play production.” This emphasizes National Theatre and Bat Valley to make much research on which audience they would want. This also means that the theatre practitioners should understand that there is a dynamic change in audience which can make them to get strategies of targeting a particular audience like young people since they contribute a bigger percentage. And also, should start to market using social medias like television and you tube to create wider marketing spaces which can contribute to the attracting back of audience for live theatre in Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre Kampala Uganda.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction.

In this section, I discussed the methods of data collection, the research designs, tools and sample design, modes of collect and analyze the information about my topic of study.

3.2 Research design

In this study, I used qualitative research methodology because it involves the data collection from different respondents individually and allows revealing of depth information. I selected this mode because I wanted the respondents to answer all my questions which I was asking them.

3.3 Sample design

In this mode I used purposive sampling in order to look for people who are directly involved since they had the first-hand information about my topic of study.

3.4 Research tools

3.4.1 Interview method

I used interviews as my major data collection. An interview refers to face to face data collection method where the researcher asks oral questions and gets oral and instant response or information. In order to understand the views of different people who are directly involved in theatre work and audience. I used the interview method as Chris Gratton (2004:288) says that the interview method is too advantageous where by it enables participants to express their views and experience in their own words about on any areas of interest.

I interviewed 12 people who were both theatre practitioners and audience at both national theatre and Bat valley theatre which helped me to understand and get good responses to my research questions.

3.4.2 Direct observation

This was another data collection method I used. I was among the audience in some of the Theatre plays that were staged at Bat Valley and Uganda National Theatre. Plays like “Guntuuse” by K’MAN MEDIA theatre group (6th may 2025) at Uganda National Theatre, “comedy night” by Dr. Hillary Okello (13th June 2025) at Uganda National Theatre, “Dream Again” by Devoted Women (28th June 2025) at Uganda National Theatre. “Praise and

worship show” by Echoes of Christ choir (31st June 2025) at Bat Valley Theatre. I observed a variation in the number of audiences turn up for these performances.

3.4.3 Document analysis

In this study I also used document analysis, Glenn A. Bowen (2009:27) says that “document analysis is a qualitative research method where documents are systematically reviewed and interpreted to give meaning to a research topic. In qualitative research document, document analysis requires you to get documents since they carry witnesses to past events and provide an outstanding background”. I used this to help me get background and the data of past productions. Basing on my research method I analyzed the documents related to theater like "the perceptions of Theatre in Uganda (2014) Michael Muhumuza in order to get the necessary information.

3.4.4 Data analysis

According to Bodgan and Biklen (1982:182) data analysis is the process of systematically organizing and finding patterns in qualitative data to increase your understanding of the subject matter and enable you to present your discoveries to others. I organized my data by playing back the recorder and posing my interview to come up with transcripts of the interviews. After this, I started organizing my data to find the related information and themes of different respondents.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION.

4.1 Introduction.

This chapter presents the findings about the factors contributing to low Audience turn up for live theatre in Kampala at the Uganda national theater and Bat Valley theatre. The chapter also gives different possible solutions that can be applied to attract back the audience at these theatres. The findings were guided by the different research questions where data from the various respondents was analyzed.

4.2 The following are the factors identified.

4.2.1 The competition from social media.

In a personal interview with Ssebagala Andrew on 16th June 2025, the Productions Manager at Uganda national theatre and a theatre practitioner he revealed that “there is much competition from social medias like televisions, You Tube, Tik Tok, X among others. people have decided to deploy them as the best alternative since they host drama series filled with a lot of comedy” he also said that much of the productions staged in this generation are recorded and the producers upload them to the social media platforms where the streaming audience gets at a cheaper price.” This shows that social media has effectively captured people’s attention and taken their time which they could use to come to the theatre since it packages all kind of entertainment at a cheaper price.

The above is similar to what an audience member at Bat valley theatre said " they easily access social media platforms whereby they just buy data of 5000shs and watch or stream live instead of traveling and come for live theater shows. Elsewhere, Frobisher Lwanga an actor notes that “there is much accessibility of apps on phones and many channels on television, You Tube, Tik Tok among others which give people whatever information they need about society not like the previous years when theater was the only mirror of the society." As noted by several practitioners already, this means that social media requires little funding in form of data to access all sorts of entertainment compared to live theatre whereby people use transport and also pay tickets for the show and does not being affected with inconveniences like counseling of the shows since it offers varieties of entertainment packages.

Interviewee Mukalazi Edwin on 6th June 2025, an actor and director of checka checka theatre production said on this matter that "it's easy to access social media everywhere someone could be because It crosses boundaries and it moves with people compared to live theater where by people have to move from their places and come for the show which seems to be tiresome to some people and also social media is not affected with weather changes like too much rain or wind which could discourage people from attending live theater". This shows that people can access entertainment from social media from anywhere they could be like in their homes, offices and farms and this can stop them from going for live theatre shows and it shows that social media contributes a higher percentage to the factor limiting the audiences from attending live theatre productions.

The form of competition for live theatre comes from sports, like football which has taken 70% of the Theatre audiences since it is streamed in the time of the Theatre shows. In the same view, Isa Serwanja 12th June 2025, a stage assistant at national theatre said that "in the last 25 years, people were not much involved in sports like watching English football matches and betting, but because of social media which brings these kinds of sports at their homes, they end up giving it time which they should have used to go to the theatre". This shows that sports on television has also attracted people's attention and this has impacted the audience turn up for live theatre shows.

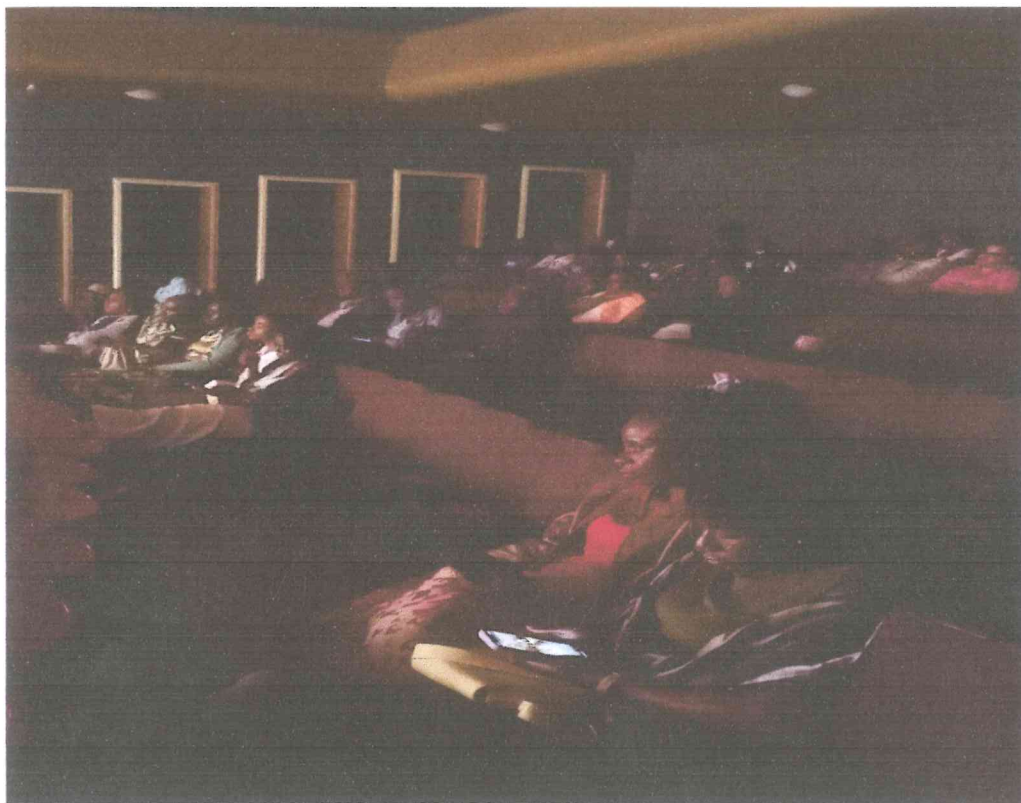
4.2.2 Marketing and audience engagement.

In a personal interview with Julius Lugaya on 19th June 2025, the director of Tingly Toes, he stated "many theater practitioners put less energy on marketing strategies where by some just make posters and banners and don't use social media to advertise their shows, publicity is too low in these producers whereby they don't engage the influencers who can easily market their shows". Indeed, marketing is more than just publicizing an item. One perspective of marketing is that it is managerial function which requires strategic planning and execution. One has to know their target audiences and plan adequately on how to reach them and get them to subscribe for the show.

Like Evelyn Kemizinga 12th June 2025, A Theatre practitioner notes "if marketing is weak, you cannot get audiences." She emphasizes that "theatre practitioners should put more emphasis on Tik Tok, you tube and Instagram for marketing and advertising and put less energy on television since people no longer have much time for television." While Kemizinga's view applies generally among younger population, there are some audiences

who do not engage with or spend a lot of time on social media. For example, the elderly and children since they could not have money for smart phones or data to access the internet, hence it also depends on the type of audience one is trying to reach.

Hessan Heri, An audience member of Guntuuse theatre production staged on 6th May 2025 said that “some people first come to the theatre and know any production which is going to be staged. This means that some of the theatre practitioners have put less energy in marketing strategies whereby some of them just use the traditional methods like posters and banners which are even censored by the government in Kampala town.



A photo above is of the audiences in "Dream Again" a stage play by Devoted Women on 28th June 2025. It shows that there was low Audience turn up due to inadequate marketing and advertising strategies as my respondents have said from above.

4.2.3 The cultural and social perceptions.

In an interview with Kemizinga Evelyn 12th June 2025 an actor in fun factory said "my parents were not happy when I started acting because they wanted me to be a teacher by professional because they regarded theater as katemba, dikuula which means something

which doesn't give sense and also regarded theater as a field of failures. But because of being passionate about acting, I decided to take music, dance and drama as my professional. This reviews that some people in the society still undergrade artists and discourage their children from taking performing art as their professionals, and this has led the entertainment industry to lose young creatives who can in future become good artists.

In the same view, Juma Kasujja on 6th May 2025 a producer, and actor in K'man media said " some people in the society think that theater play cannot be watched with their parents and families because they cannot withstand the words in used in performances, some people think that language used in these theaters is majorly English at National Theatre and Luganda at Bat Valley theatre which limits other audience members who are interested in other languages like Lunyankole, Lusoga, Lugishu to attend". Indeed, language is the most important tool in which the message is passed on to the audiences and always depends on the writer's view and the targeted audience.

In addition, Frobisher Lwanga 12th June 2025 said "there is a change in generation where by the audience of last 25years ago is not the same as the current one which doesn't appreciate theater since they give much pressure to social media platforms like Tik Tok, television and YouTube since they contain with all kind of information which they may need". This means that the social perceptions of people in society also contributes as my respondents said and also reflects what Muhumuza Michael (2021:3) said that most people in community take theater a katemba dikuula and don't put much emphasis in it to produce relevant themes reflecting the society and also discourages the young talents from engaging in the work of theatre.

4.2.4 The impact of covid 19.

In an interview with Edwin Mukalazi on 6th June 2025 said that "people still insecure with their lives since they still consider the myth of social distance and they still think that it's still being practiced in these theatres and also during Covid 19 the some people used the time for theatre to do other profitable business, some of them also still go back home very early before the shows start since they still moving with curfew time". Sticking on covid 19, Male Musa on 13th June 2025, a productions manager at Bat Valley also said that" during Covid 19 people gave much priority to other sources of entertainment like You Tube, television, TikTok among others since live theatre was at stand still which made the audience for live theatre to reduce in number since they just data of less fee compared to the ticket prices, he also said

that most of the theatre practitioners also adopted to other businesses since the theatres were closed and some who still in it they always record and upload videos of their performances which also keeps the audience which could come for live theatre in their home since they always expecting new plays on their phones" .This means that Covid 19 made people run away from live Theatre and adopt social media like television and YouTube since they had their phones which can give them any kind of information and entertainment they would want.

4.2.5 Influence of celebrities versus the starting theatre practitioners.

In an interview with Edwin Mukalazi 6th June 2025 said that " people sometimes they come for live theatre to watch their celebs(stars) who at a time watch on television , You Tube or TikTok since they follow them on their social media accounts leaving out the starting theatre practitioners with no audience since they don't know them" I also observed this when physically attended the show at national theatre called "Dream Again" a stage play by the Devoted Women on 28th /06/2025, there was few audience members since the group is not well known by the people but when "comedy night " was staged on 13th/06/2025 by Doctor Hillary Okello, the house was really full to its capacity. This shows that people are now attending live show of people who they know and distance themselves from those who they don't know.

4.3 What National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre can do to attract audience back for live Theatre since they share the same problems.

4.3.1 Promotion and marketing.

In an interview with Frobisher Lwanga on 12th June 2025 said that " Theatre practitioners should effectively utilize the chance of social media platforms like You Tube, TikTok, television among others in order for productions to reach their targeted audience, they should also first know their targeted audience before writing a play or promoting whereby those who can specialize in young people and old. He also said that theatre practitioners should start to travel to different areas in and outside Kampala and act from there as a way of marking their art". This means that theatre practitioners should not just sit and wait people to come to the theatre hall also should create skits and short plays and act them in different areas which can market and promote them hence attracting back audience for live Theatre in National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre.



The photo above was taken on 23rd May 2025 in Diplock Ssegawa's show, showing that since he marketed well his show, there was a good audience turn up and this highlights that marketing and promotion is crucial for the theatre productions.

4.3.2 School competition.

In an interview with Mukalazi Edwin on 6th June 2025, he said that " the theatre should promote its self by providing free space to schools and young people's theatre, taking theatre in schools and also to sponsor them which can attract the young people to engage in art like writers, actors, directors, producers among others". Also, Juma Kasujja on 6th June 2025 said that" the government should include drama in syllabus which can help these young people to learn much about theatre and also theatre halls should provide space at a discount or free spaces for young people to stage their plays." This can help to capture the hearts of young people and become theatre practitioners and audiences.

In an interview with Male Musa on 13th June 2025, he said that "they also need to organize school national competitions that is to say if Uganda national theatre organizes these

competitions, whoever wins the performances gets a token of appreciation". This can attract sponsors like Coca-Cola company, Pepsi, soft care, pickfare book company among others since all these things deal with big number of people. This means that even if they can get at least 10000 students per year, theatre audience can be boosted and also the government can engage in to support these theatres in form of sponsoring and also these theatres can engage with universities since they can also have many students with different talents. This also can attract audiences to theatres since they would want to watch their fellow students on stage.

4.3.3 Partnership.

In an interview with Edwin Mukalazi on 6th June 2025 said in his personal view that "national theater and Bat valley theater to partner with media houses like UBC, NBS, government or any other social media house can help advertise their client's productions which can make create awareness to the audience members". This partnership can help to create awareness amongst people since UBC and NBS are being followed by bigger number of viewers and this also can make the theatre practitioners to produce good work which can fit their professional.

4.3.4 Upgrading theatres

In an interview with Rushabiro Ryeyimond on 12th June 2025, he said that "theatres should upgrade in order to attract audiences. Because if you look at National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre, the way they were in 1970s it is still the same though they still reserve our cultural heritage but still again, you have to upgrade the system and this can improve marketing, theatre partnerships and allowing other people to be part of them like stage actors, writers among others". This means that they should engage in with the government and also partner with other international theatres for the exchange of artistic ideas. People may enjoy it hence bringing them back to the theatres

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

5.1 Conclusion

In the view of factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theatre in Kampala, specifically at the Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre is connected to inadequate marketing and audience involvement strategies, cultural and social perceptions in which the community has failed to recognize and appreciate theatre because of their negative thoughts and beliefs, competition from social media or digital platforms like television, TikTok, Instagram and YouTube which has taken the bigger number of audiences since they are embodied with different entertainment alternatives.

The impact of Covid 19 which also shifted people from attending live theatre to adopt social media and also made theatre practitioners to withdraw from art since people were not allowed to be in crowd, infrastructure and accessibility of these theatres where by some people don't want to move longer distances to come for the shows and also poor and outdated machines in these theatres since they don't have good sound and lights and this limits directors to utilize these spaces.

The theatre groups should also give us more variety, new materials and also more diverse things like musical and other interesting things. The reason why comedy shows get full houses its because they bring in musical artists. Theatre companies should also start to stage their productions outside theatres like in schools, market places, villages in order to bring their productions closer to the people since it can create a strong fun base for these theatres.

5.2 Recommendations.

The theatre practitioners should effectively utilize social media platforms and media houses to promote and market their production to people since these digital medias carry a lot of viewers like television like television and radio since they can support theatre sector in publicity and also give it exposure in terms of plays being shown on television and also advertisements which can bring people's attention to theatres especially the younger people.

Government bodies like Uganda communications commission, ministry of gender, labor and social development, public services among others should invest in theatres since there is no enough funding that goes in theatres hence as a result stays behind. I believe if these bodies

and other organizations join hands and get involved in theatre business, we shall see a change in audience engagement in the theatres.

The theatre practitioners should also start to travel to different areas in the communities and in schools which can help to attract more talented theatre practitioners and also to engage people with art which can also be a mode of promoting and exposing art, in this also can make them to be known by the community hence also attracting back the audience for live theatre in Kampala.

REFERENCES

1. Banham, M. (2004). *A history of theatre in Africa*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
3. Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th ed.). Oxford University Press.
4. Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
5. Kaiza, A. K. (2013). The harsh rebirth of professional theatre in Uganda. *Start Journal*. <https://startjournal.org/2013/03/the-harsh-rebirth-of-professional-theatre-in-uganda/>
6. Kiguli, S. (2021). Cultural consumption and the youth: Challenges for the performing arts in Uganda. *African Arts Journal*, 54(3), 45–56.
7. Mbaye, J. F., & Dinardi, C. (2019). Cultural participation in African cities: Reflections on urban cultural policy. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31(1), 1–15.
8. Mukwaya, J. (2024). State of theatre audience in Kampala: Bat Valley Theatre as a case study. Makerere University Dissertations. <https://dissertations.mak.ac.ug>
9. Okello, J., & Kiguli, S. (2019). Economic barriers to cultural participation in Uganda. *East African Journal of Arts and Culture*, 3(1), 22–34.
10. Ssewanyana, D. (2020). Theatre production in Uganda: The need for professionalization. *Uganda Theatre Review*, 7(1), 15–27.
11. Uganda National Cultural Centre. (2016). Uganda National Cultural Centre-Theatre. Africultures. <http://africultures.com/lieux/uganda-national-cultural-centre-theatre/>
12. Wikipedia. (2025). Uganda. Retrieved from <https://hu.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uganda>
13. Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Appendices

1a). The list of the interviewees.

1. Ssebaggala Andrew
2. Mukalazi Edwin
3. Frobisha Lwanga
4. Evelyn Kemizinga
5. Isa Serwanja
6. Okwale Leonard
7. Lugaya Julius
8. Heri Hassan
9. Kasujja Juma
10. Rushabiro Rweyimondi
11. Male Musa

1b) The interview schedule.

On 6th June 2025.

Edwin Mukalazi

Kasujja Juma

Heri Hassan

12th June 2025

Rushabiro Rweyimondi

Frobisher Lwanga

Kemizinga Evelyn

Serwanja Isa

13th June 2025

Male Musa

16th June 2025

Ssebaggala Andrew

Okware Leonard

19th June 2025

Julius Lugaya

Appendix ii:

interview guide. Factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theatre performances.

Study title: FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR LOW AUDIENCE TURN UP FOR LIVE THEATRE IN KAMPALA, A CASE STUDY OF UGANDA NATIONAL THEATRE AND BAT VALLEY THEATRE.

Researcher: Bataze Deo

Date: (Date of interview)

Interviewee:(Name and title of interviewee and background)

Introduction: thank you for your time and the chance given to me. My name is Bataze Deo, and I am a student of Makerere university. I am conducting my research on the factor responsible for low audience turn up for live theatre in kampala, with a case study of Uganda National Theatre and Bat Valley Theatre. The information you share with me will be valuable to my study. Your response will be kept confidential and used only for academic purposes. Please may I have your consent to proceed.

IIa). Demographic information.

- 1.What is your current position in the theatre sector?
- 2.For how long have you been in theatre?

IIb). Explaining factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theatre.

1. In your view, what are main reasons why live theatre is no longer getting much audience as it used to be?
2. How competition from other entertainment forms like social media, music concerts has contributed to low audience turn up for live theatre performances.
3. What is the current state of the physical infrastructure and facilities at this theatre and how is it contributed to low audience engagement for live theatre performances.
4. What is your comment on marketing strategies and public perception on theatre performances and how has it contributed to the low audience turn up for live theatre.
5. How do economic factors like ticket prices and general cost of living impact the audience's attendance for live theatre productions.

IIc). Assessing the strategies to attract back the audience for live theatre productions.

1. How can the Uganda National Theatre/ Bat Valley Theatre effectively use digital outlets to market and engage with the audience.

2. What strategies have already been tried to attract the large number of audience and how did it work?
3. In your opinion, what new strategies and innovation approach can be used to attract back the large number of audiences for live theatre productions.
4. How important is collaboration with stakeholders like the educational institutions, the government, private entities in attracting back the audience interest in live theatre performances.

Conclusion:

Thank you for your time and for sharing your views and the information you have provided is highly valuable for my research.

Appendix III: Transcriptions

Interview transcripts: factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theater productions

researcher : Bataze Deo

Interviewee: Mr. Edwin Mukalazi

Current role: actor, director, play wright and production officer Uganda National Theatre

Age Range: 40s

Years involved: over 15 years.

Background: I started acting in early 2000s when I was still at Makerere university, I also acted at Bat Valley Theatre until when I settled at Uganda National Theatre and now am acting in checka checka theatre company.

Factors contributing to low audience turn up for live Theatre productions: In the early 2000s theatre was one of the major source of entertainment but now things changed completely. One of the most factor is **digital media**. People have resulted to social media since it's easy to access and with endless supply of entertainment. For example Tik Tok, You Tube, Television. And also it crosses boundaries whereby you can access it from any play.

Strategies to attract back the audience: We should embrace digital platforms for advertisements and marketing and also uploading our work so that audience can watch from there.

Interviewee2. Kasujja Juma

Current role: Director, Producer and actor,K'man media theatre company.

Age Range: 50s

Years involved: 30 years.

Background: I am a journalist by professional but I like acting and I have written many plays like Ekwi play production, Guntuuse Webyaali Siwebiri among others.

Factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theater productions: There are different factors and the most outstanding is poor marketing strategies where by some practioners just put small posters and expect many people to come yet we are completing with different sources like film and music industry.

What strategies can be done: The practitioners should result to modern marketing strategies like use of digital media to advertise their productions like Tik Tok, YouTube Television among others since they can easily be reached upon by the audience. We should also use influencers to market our productions since they also attract audience.

Interviewee 3: Male Musa

Current role: actor, producer and production manager Bat Valley Theatre.

Age Range: 40s

Years involved: 20years

Background: I started acting in my early 20s when I was still at compass and I joined the African talent theatre group at Bat Valley Theatre.

Factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theater productions: We used to attend theatre and audience was pleasant compared to the current one and this has happened due to poor scripts which are staged and incompetent stage management since most of the current practitioners lack educational theatrical knowledge since they just learn things just from field. This has completely chased away the audience and adopt other alternatives live digital media.

Strategies to attract back the audience. Theatre practitioners should at least be emphasized to attend some lectures about theatre like play writing, stage management, sound and light in order to stage improved shows that would bring back the audience into theatre.

Interviewee 4: Evelyn Kemizinga

Current role: actor in fun factory and play writer.

Age Range: 40s

Years involved: 20years

Background: I am a teacher by profession and an actress, Back then theatre had a good number of audience since it was a real mirror of the society but now things have really changed.

Factors contributing to low audience turn up for live theater. Poor perceptions of Theatre performances by the people in our societies. Since most people call theatre katemba,

Ebyemizanyo they don't give much interest to it. And also some people think that theatre shows are performed with vulgar language and the result to distance their selves from them.

Strategies to attract back the audience. Theatre practitioners should start to travel to different societies and bring these performances close to the people so that they also engage in understand the language which it is used in to eliminate their poor perceptions.

Interviewee 5: Mr Ssebagala Andrew.

Current role: actor, producer and production manager at Uganda National Theatre.

Age Range 50s

Years involved: 30years.

Background: I started acting in legends of theatre when I was still at Makerere university and I went in Afri talent of Abbey Mukiibi and until when I settled at Uganda National Theatre as a productions manager and I really witnessed bigger number of audience in passed years.

Factors contributing to low audience turn up for live Theatre. The generation has really changed where by now we live in a digital era in which people enjoy entertainment from their homes, offices or wherever they would be. Unlike the previous years where people would move to theatre since it was one of the major source of entertainment. Digital media has captured young people who would become good theatre practitioners and future audience.

Strategies to attract back the audience. Theatre practitioners should travel to schools and other communities which encompasses young people so that they can attract their interest and motivate them to join theatre.

Interviewee 6: Frobisher Lwanga.

Current role: actor, producer working with fun factory.

Age Range: 40s

Years involved 25years

Background: I started acting when I was still at Makerere university in Afri talent theatre group of Abbey Mukiibi, acting in Mizigo Express and fun factory and also Man to Man play. And theatre had a good number of audience unlike today.

Factors contributing to low audience turn up for live Theatre. One of the mostl disturbing factor is the out break of Covid 19 made people to distance them selves from theatre. The Covid 19 era of 2020 to 2021 made people to stop engaging them selves with theatre since it put people's lives at stake. People decided to look for other alternatives and that was digital media as their source of entertainment. People were not allowed to gather in a crowd yet theatre is a gathering place.

Strategies to attract back the audience. The practitioners should encourage these people by advertising their shows on digital media so that people can know that theatre are now safe.