

Examining the influence of exchange between artiste and society: a case study of Falz the Bahd Guy's music

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Abstract

This research examines the influence of exchange between Falz the Bahd Guy and his fans in the Nigerian society. Through focus group discussions and analysis of the findings, the study explores how Falz's music frames social issues and influences audience perceptions and actions. The research reveals that Falz's music effectively addresses significant social issues prevalent in Nigerian society, including religious and political corruption, inequality, gender roles, leadership incompetence, and other societal vices. Participants offered diverse interpretations of his music, reflecting the subjective nature of art and the varied perspectives of the audience. The study highlights the empowering impact of Falz's music, as it inspires some individuals to engage in social activism and initiate change. However, societal response to his music is mixed, with both praise and criticism from different people based on individual ideological leanings. Participants recognised the influence of societal factors, such as the political climate, economic reality, and the prevalent social movements on the themes and messages conveyed in Falz's songs. Based on the findings, recommendations are made to encourage continued social commentary in music, foster dialogue and critical engagement, support artists' freedom of expression, enhance media literacy, promote collaborations, and invest in music education and mentorship programs. Ultimately, this study provides valuable insights into the intricate interplay between Falz's artistic expression and the Nigerian society, illuminating the transformative potential of music as a catalyst for societal reflection and transformation.

Keywords: influence; exchange; artiste; society.

Introduction

Music, at its most basic form, is simply the expression of imagination or thoughts in sound and rhythm. Music scholars have however provided more detailed definitions of the artistic form. Tagg (2012), for example, sees music as a complex system of symbolic communication that employs sound as its primary medium. Tagg goes further to assert that music encompasses the creation, performance, and reception of organised sound structures that are shaped by cultural and historical contexts (p. 45). Music has also been seen as an art form which uses the organised arrangement of sounds, tones, and rhythms to create aesthetic expressions of human emotion, thought, and culture (Bonds 2014, p. 11).

As music is used to express and even communicate, it is therefore a medium. It has been used in diverse forms like leisure and entertainment; however, it has also been recognised as a powerful medium for social commentary, cultural expression, and activism (Adorno, 2006, p. 14; Street, p. 80). Artists have often used their craft to reflect and respond to the issues and concerns prevalent in their societies, amplifying voices and sparking conversations. In Nigeria, there have been the likes of Fela Kuti, Lagbaja, Femi Kuti. In the last decade, Falz the Bahd Guy has broken into the spotlight for being a music artist who actively addresses societal issues through his music.

Falz (whose real name is Folarin Falana), has emerged as a prominent figure in Nigerian music. He is known for his unique blend of Afro-beats, hip-hop, and socio-political commentary, all done with a fine blend of humour. His lyrics tackle a wide range of topics, including political and religious corruption, social inequality, indecency, and mis-governance. Through his music, Falz has garnered both critical acclaim and a significant following particularly among Nigerian youth; this is evidenced by his being followed by over 14 million people across Instagram (9.2 million), Facebook (2.1 million), and Twitter (3 million).

Against this backdrop, this study aims to delve into the reciprocal influence exchange between Falz and the Nigerian society. By examining the interplay between the artist and his social environment, the research seeks to unravel how Falz's music both reflects and shapes societal attitudes and narratives. Understanding this dynamic relationship is essential to grasp the transformative potential of music and its impact on society.

Literature review

The literature review discusses related key concepts including Music and the African Society and Identity and Ideology, and also discusses theoretical frameworks on which the study is premised including the Framing Theory and Social Identity Theory.

Music and the African society

Music is a major feature of most African cultures and its functionality is diverse as it is both present at the playground and also at the workplace. They also take on different forms, sometimes sacred and at other times, secular. Bebey (1975) explained that African music is an expression of life in all its aspects through the medium of sound. He goes further to say that traditional African music often is intertwined with social, religious, and cultural practices, serving as a means of communication, expression, and

identity formation. By this, it is not just a form of entertainment but also an integral part of everyday life in African communities (p. 3).

In some African cultures, there is music for the different age grades. Among the Igbo ethnic group, entry into some of these age groups often provokes celebrations (Nwakego & Umezina 2015, p. 130). The music of these age groups is often participatory in nature, and people are taught to participate from a very early age (Drummond 2015, p. 38). Cudjoe (1953) investigated the place of music in African society using the Ewe people of Ghana as a case study. These results made him declare that: “(in that society) There is no activity which does not have music appropriate to it: weaver, farmer and fisherman each sing in perfect time to the rhythmic movement of craft... there is also the great social music which accompanies religious, festive and ceremonial occasions” (p. 280).

More recently, Adebayo (2017) explains that in Africa, music plays a vital role in mobilisation, sensitisation, socialisation and cultural transmission. It also functions as a medium for the transfer of oral traditions across generations. When children are born in Africa, we sing; when old people die, we sing; when the harvest is good, we sing; and when it is bad, we sing; when we want to mobilise for war, we sing; and when we are retreating from war to embrace peace or otherwise, we sing. In many African societies, there is a song for every occasion (p. 56). Onyeabadi (2018) seems to agree when he adds that music permeates significant aspects of African society, culture, and tradition (p. 2).

The role of music on the African continent even goes further than all these. Music was used as a tool for survival during the transatlantic slave-trade, and it was also used as a tool for social mobilisation and political agitation (Onyeabadi 2018, p. 2). This is evident in the works of Fela Kuti, and even some Africans in the diaspora like Derek Walcott (a poet) and Nina Simone (in her song “Mississippi Goddam”). Even at the height of the colonial era in the 1930s and 1940s, diverse forms of township music such as Marabi carried with them their own implicit and sometimes explicit political messages against the colonial system in South Africa (Grundlingh 2004, p. 486).

Identity and ideology in music

Identity and ideology are vital aspects of African music, as they reflect the cultural, social, and political contexts in which music is created and performed. Identity is the cultural imprint on any work of art. It is the representation of a people's way of life or other cultural elements in a work of art, thereby making it relatable to people. Hogg and Abrams refer to identity as the people's concept of who they are and is that which makes music relatable to a certain kind of people (Hogg and Abrams as cited in Ajayi 2017, p. 44).

A people's identity is their constructed conceptualisation of themselves (Maynard 2015, p. 19). African music serves a powerful medium for constructing and expressing individual and collective identities, as well as conveying ideological messages. One of the key ways in which African music contributes to identity construction is through its

connection to cultural heritage and tradition. Many African music traditions are deeply rooted in specific ethnic or regional identities. They embody the history, beliefs, and values of particular communities, allowing individuals to maintain a sense of belonging and cultural continuity.

By participating in and preserving traditional musical practices, individuals reaffirm their cultural identities and strengthen communal bonds. Hogg and Abrams (as cited in Ajayi 2017, p. 44), refer to identity as people's concepts of who they are, what sort of people they are, and how they relate to others. Similarly, Deng (1995, p. 1), suggests that identity denotes the way and manner individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others based on ethnicity, language, religion and culture. Jenkins (1996, p. 4) describes identity as the ways in which individuals and collectivities are mapped out in their social relations with other individuals and collectivities. In the words of Ajayi (2017, p. 44), identity can be seen as an individual's or people's perception about themselves in relation to others; a distinctive mark that gives them the consciousness of their distinct singularity as opposed to common plurality.

African music plays a significant role in the formation of national and pan-African identities. During times of colonisation and struggle for independence, music became a powerful tool for fostering a sense of unity and resistance against oppressive forces. Artists and musicians used their music to instill pride in African heritage, challenge colonial ideologies, and promote ideas of liberation, self-determination, and Pan-Africanism. Genres such as highlife, *mbaqanga*, and Afro-beat became synonymous with the fight against colonialism and the celebration of African identity.

Ideology on the other hand, from the artiste's perspective, is the artiste's personal or intellectual imprint on the work of art. It is the unique system of ideas that shape an individual or a people's perception of their political and social world and their behaviour in that world (Maynard 2015, p. 19). It refers to an individual's system of thoughts and values built up by past experiences and present realities which come together to build one's future expectations. Mullins (1997) explains this further when he says that ideology is a logically coherent system of symbols that connect the cognitive and evaluative perception of one's social condition, especially its prospects for the future, to a plan of collective action for the upkeep, modification, or transformation of society. It is often comprised of a more or less sophisticated conception of history (p. 235). To Seliger (1976), ideology refers to "sets of ideas by which men posit, explain and justify ends and means of organised social action, and specifically political action, irrespective of whether such action aims to preserve, amend, uproot or rebuild a given social order" (p. 11). Therefore, Seliger sees ideology as the justification and explanation of peoples' actions.

Ideologies are often embedded within African music, reflecting socio-political realities and advocating for social change. Music has been used as a vehicle for addressing issues such as social inequality, oppression, and injustice. It serves as a means of protest, giving voice to marginalised communities and challenging prevailing power structures. Artists use their lyrics, melodies, and performances to criticise corruption,

advocate for human rights, and call for societal transformation. The music of artists like Fela Kuti, Miriam Makeba, and Bob Marley exemplify this form of social commentary and ideological expression.

In recent times, African music has begun to can embody and promote specific ideologies related to gender, spirituality, and community values. It reflects the social roles and expectations placed on individuals within African societies. For example, certain musical traditions may be exclusively performed by men or women, highlighting gender dynamics and reinforcing cultural norms. Music also plays a central role in religious and spiritual practices, conveying religious beliefs, rituals, and invoking a sense of communal spirituality.

Framing theory

The theoretical model adopted in this work is the Framing theory. This is because this work not only studies the society in the music artiste but also the music artiste in the society. Therefore the Framing theory will prove invaluable in the process of this study. This is because it is widely believed that the most essential function of art is to mirror its society, to frame up this society and hang in it a piece of art so high that everyone can see. This also aligns with the fundamentals of framing theory. By utilising framing theory, this research is able to offer insights into the framing strategies employed by Falz, the audience's interpretation of his music, and the potential influence on social change. It provides a theoretical framework to analyse the complex interplay between artistic expression, media influence, and societal dynamics in the context of Nigerian music.

Entman (1991) describes framing as a process of “selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicating text in a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation” (p. 52). This fundamental function of the Framing theory, which is selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration in framing an issue, are equally recognised by Tankard et al. (Onyebadi 2018, p. 4). Framing, therefore, selects areas of reality which are considered relevant, and excludes others which are considered less relevant.

The use of framing theory in this research is justified due to its relevance in understanding the influence exchange between Falz and the Nigerian society. Framing theory provides a conceptual framework for analysing how individuals and groups interpret and make sense of information, emphasising the role of media and communication in shaping perceptions and attitudes.

Framing theory allows for a systematic analysis of how Falz's music frames social issues and influences the way they are perceived by the audience. It helps identify the underlying themes, narratives, and discourses in his music and how they contribute to framing societal problems and potential solutions. Framing theory also enables an examination of how the audience interprets and constructs meaning from Falz's music.

It helps identify the frames activated by the listeners, how they relate to their own social realities, and how these frames shape their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

By applying framing theory, the research is able to explore how Falz's music frames social issues in a manner that resonates with the Nigerian society. It allows for an investigation into the potential influence of these frames on the audience's perception, awareness, and actions related to social change. Framing theory gives opportunity to examine how Falz's music sets the agenda for and influences public opinion that manifests in shaping public discourse and drawing attention to specific social issues.

Social identity theory

Much of what is discussed in the social identity theory has already been discussed in 'Identity and Ideology' section of this work. However, in order for this work to be firmly rooted theoretically, the Social Identity theory is selected for use.

The Social Identity theory was developed by Tajfel and Turner in 1979. McLeod (in Adams 2019, 9) describes social identity as a person's sense of who they are based on group membership. Tajfel himself asserted that people attached their pride and self-esteem to groups which they belonged to, these groups gave them a sense of belonging to the social world.

Tajfel (Adams 2019, 9) also believed that stereotyping, putting people into groups and categories, is based on a normal cognitive process: the tendency to group things together. Consequently we also tend to exaggerate the differences between groups and also exaggerate the similarities of individuals and thoughts in the same group. In using the Social Identity Theory, there are three mental processes used in evaluating groups as formulated by Tajfel and Turner. These processes take place in the order of categorisation, social identification, and social comparison.

Categorisation

Individuals, thoughts and actions are categorised in order to be understood and identified. In order to understand a social environment, we categorise the human beings who live there. Behaviour can also be defined by reference to the norms of the groups the individuals who exhibit them belong to.

Social identification

After these categories have been made, people identify with them, they adopt the identity of the category which they fall into by biological or social categorization. Categories and social identities can also be less permanent at times. This majorly happens due to maturity, evolution, political decisions, or self-realisation.

Social comparison

This stage will create room for evaluation. As mentioned earlier in this work, the categorisation of people breeds a mentality of division along the lines of *We* and *Them*.

An urge therefore arises for *we* to compare favourably with them. This helps to boost self-esteem and pride.

These theories would be relied upon in the solving of the problems highlighted in the earlier part of this work. It also would help the work achieve its aim and objectives. The Framing Theory will be used to examine how well the artist under study, Falz The Bahd Guy, has been able to reflect the reality of his society. It would answer the question of how much relevance the artiste's work has in society, while the Social Identity Theory will help us identify the social group that the artiste belongs to, highlight the social group that identifies with his work and also evaluate how this social group, which are his audience, are able to influence his art.

Objectives of the study

This study seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the role of music artists in society and their potential to drive social change, attempts to shed light on the ways artists respond to societal challenges. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. examine the nature and dynamics of the influence of exchange between Falz and his fans in the society;
- ii. discuss the use or outcomes of influence of exchange between Falz and his fans in the Nigerian society; and
- iii. identify the key problems related to the influence of exchange between Falz and his fans in the Nigerian society.

Methodology

To explore the reciprocal influence of exchange between Falz and the Nigerian society, focus group discussions (FGDs) will be employed as a qualitative research method. FGD is the method of choice because it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations, thereby facilitating a rich understanding of the research topic. For conducting our FGD, we did a purposeful sampling where we selected participants based on their familiarity with Falz's music and their engagement with Nigerian popular culture. These participants were purposively selected to comprise different genders, socioeconomic backgrounds, and regions within Nigeria so as to capture a range of perspectives.

The participants were recruited at a Falz's Concert held at the International Conference Centre, University of Ibadan. They were screened based on predetermined criteria like how long they had been following Falz's music, if they were really fans or if they just attended the concert, all these to ascertain if they were fit for the FGD. The FGD guide was designed to explore various aspects of the influence exchange between Falz and the Nigerian society, including participants' perceptions of Falz's music, its impact on societal issues, and the ways in which societal dynamics shape his artistic expression. It consisted of open-ended questions that encourage participants to share their opinions, thoughts, and personal experiences related to the study.

To collect the data, further visits were made to a garden on the University of Ibadan campus to ensure comfort and an easy flow of discussion. An experienced moderator

led the discussions, ensuring equal participation and maintaining a respectful and open atmosphere. The FGDs was recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate capturing of the discussions, and notes were also taken to capture facial reactions and other noteworthy observations. Participants were, however, assured that their identities and personal information will be kept confidential, and data will be anonymised during analysis and reporting.

The study will now do a thematic analysis of the discussion. Common themes and patterns related to the influence exchange between Falz and the Nigerian society will be identified and made into subsections.

Qualitative review of selected works of Falz The Bahd Guy

In order to discuss Falz the Bahd Guy, it is important to note that his art extends beyond just music. As mentioned earlier in this work, Falz is a comedian, actor, and musician who has grown from his early days in hip hop to the creation of his own musical genre, Wazup Music, and music label, Bahd Guys Record.

Early songs and the focus on women and wealth

At the beginning of his musical career, Falz's music revolved around women and wealth, and used beats that bore significant semblance to American hip-hop freestyles. In 2009, while at the University of Readings in the United Kingdom, he released *Shakara* (Folarin, 2009), which had the following lyrics:

Lyrics

Hey you this fine girl
Come let me order
See your fresh face
Ahahnoo kola
I'm a very rich man
I have house moka
Just look over there
Yes mowa motor wa
You can come with me
Let's ride to town

Meaning of some of the lines

Oh you've got no tribal marks
I have eleven houses
Yes I came in a nice car

Another song released in the same *Shakara* album of 2009, *Mr. Big Boi*, has the following lyrics:

Lyrics

I'm mister normal guy
Hate it when he starts to oppress
She's a VIP and surely cannot settle for less
And I'm just chilling I guess,
In my made in china
But he's a bigger boy,

Meaning of some of the lines

So he coordinates designer	
I'm not worried	
Still hoping that I may be finer	
... When would it be my turn?	
Mehn I don dey wait for this?	I have been waiting for this
I wan dey pack moet	
Mehn I don dey wait for Chris	I have been waiting for Chris
'Cause i don tire o	I'm getting tired
Dem go soon buy my girl away	They will soon buy my girl away
Why it no be me,	Why is it not me?
That all these fine ladies dey chat?	That all these fine ladies are chatting
up?	

Evidently, wealth and women were the dominant themes in his music. The Nigerian society is not averse to this kind of music as a song with similar themes, *Yahooze*, was only released two years prior to Falz's *Shakara*. *Yahooze* was so accepted that it won the Song of the Year award at the 2008 Headies Awards, and it won the Hottest Single of the Year award at the 2008 Nigerian Entertainment Awards (*BellaNaija* 2017). Therefore, it seems like the lack of acceptance did not stem from themes of his song. It also did not stem from a lack of capital to push his business as he was from the prominent family of popular Nigerian Lawyer and human rights' activist, Femi Falana.

The Nigerian music industry has good examples of children from prominent families finding success and thriving in the Nigerian music industry possibly due to they have access to resources that can facilitate their entry and progress in the music business. They can afford to pay for high-quality music production, studio time, marketing campaigns, and collaborations with established artists. Financial resources can also enable them to acquire expensive equipment, instruments, and engage professional support teams, such as managers, stylists, and publicists. These advantages can give them a competitive edge and help them create polished and well-produced music that resonates with audiences.

The social connections and networks that come with wealth also play a significant role in propelling their careers. They may have access to influential individuals within the music industry, including record label executives, producers, and established artists. These connections can open doors, secure collaborations, and provide opportunities for exposure and promotion that may not be easily accessible to those without such privileges. Falz's 2009 mix tape *Shakara* was promoted and distributed by Jungle Entertainment Ventures, the same company that promotes and distributes the music of prominent Nigerian musicians like Psquare and Adekunle Gold.

In spite of the availability of resources, Falz's launch into the Nigerian market failed for a while. He even recorded a song titled *Gbono Feli Feli* in 2009, a year after famous Nigerian musician D'banj released a song with a similar title *Mo Gbono Feli Feli*.

Dban'j's song has the following lyrics:

Lyrics

Listen, I'm hot and you're not
And I'm hot and you're not
And he's hot and you're not
And I'm hot, ha!
Don't know about you, but I'm handsome
Most people wanna hold me for ransom
See the kokolet, all up in my mansion
Hmm, African Michael Jackson
Just to see me now, demdey pay a large sum

On the stage I dey give dem all the action

And in the room maximum satisfaction
So don't hate me now because
Mo gbono felifeli biamala to jinogaangan
Don't hate me 'cause I'm hotter than you
I'm hotter than you
Mo gbono felifeli biamala to jinogaangan

Don't hate me 'cause I'm hotter than you
I'm hotter than you

Meaning of some of the lines

Just to see me now, they pay a large sum
On the stage I do give them all the action

I'm as hot as a well-prepared Amala

I'm as hot as a well-prepared Amala

While Falz's *Mo Gbono Feli Feli* has the following lyrics:

Lyrics

I'm hot and you're not
How do you tell me immagbono feli fel

And I know I can see it for myself
You can nearly tell me
Mo tigbonoju I'm feeling myself
It is very scary
I see greatness from me
I manifest it, let me tell you
The reason why I'm hot than you
I can't be normal see how fluently
I'm rhyming on the beat
I'm addicted I love it
The music is my opium

Meaning of some of the lines

How do you tell me I'm going to be very hot

I'm too hot I'm feeling myself

D'banj's version of the song was a hit. Describing how accepted it was in Nigeria, Nigerian entertainment website, *BellaNaija* said "it took Nigeria by storm" (Sono

2017). While Falz's version was not a commercial success in Nigeria. The FGD used in this study revealed that Falz's core fans did not like his brand of music then. A good number of them heard the songs. A particular participant said that he didn't just not like the song, he swore that this kind of artist will never make it in the industry. Most of them did not start following him until *Karashika* and *Marry Me* both released in 2014.

Changing style and theme of content towards conscious music

By 2012, it seemed like he had started to re-strategise. As posited in the Social Identity Theory, people must relate to a work which has them as its target audience, or else the work will be rejected or ignored. In a bid to make his work more relatable, Falz moved beyond hedonism towards conscious music. In his single release *Welcome to the Jungle* (2012), he leaned heavily towards conscious music. He was warning men and women against the perils of society. He used his music to expose corrupt spiritual practices like harmful ritual sacrifice which sometimes involved the killing of "7 virgin girls (to make you) stinking rich / then you can purchase anything that you really wish" (Folarin 2012). The content of *Welcome to the Jungle* sounded like they were patterned after Fela Kuti's style of conscientising society by calling out religious corruption. Falz says in his song lyrics:

Lyrics

...too many prophets sef,
weno know which is clean
Sheyna God be the ginger
or is it the green?
Under the table business
dondey for church.
Small congregation,
we don't pray for such.
We dey trek,

but the man of God dey him Porsche
...all the evil men do,
only God go judge
(Folarin 2012)

Meaning of some of the lines

There are too many prophets
We don't know which of them are clean
Is God the motivation?
Or is it the green (the colour of US Dollar)
Illegal practices
Now happen in church

We are walking (because we don't have cars)
But the man of God uses a Porsche

We leave for God to judge

In *Suffering and Smiling* (1978), Fela says:

Lyrics

Suffer, suffer for world
Enjoy for Heaven
Christians go deyyab
"In SpiritumHeavinus"

Meaning of some of the lines

You might suffer on earth
Enjoy in heaven
Christians keep saying
InspiritumHeavinus

Muslims go dey call
"Allahu Akbar"
Open your eye everywhere
Archbishop namiliki
Pope na enjoyment
Imam nagbaladun
(FelaKuti, 1978)

Muslims also say
"Allahu Akbar"
Archbishop is a juicy position
The pope is also a juicy position
The pope is also a juicy position

Beyond just musical connections, the legendary Afro-beat singer was an ally and client of Falz's father, Femi Falana (Oluwagbemi 2017). This leaning towards Fela's style is also significant in Falz gaining some ground among Nigerian music lovers because Fela remains popular among lovers of conscious music in Nigeria. Since 1998, a week-long festival has been organised in his honour to celebrate his life, music, and ideologies. So, patterning his music after Fela opened Falz up to a new kind of audience who offer a loyal kind of patronage that even 25 years after Fela Kuti's death, still idolise him by attending the festival in his honour, visiting his Afrika Shrine, and listening to his music. Perhaps a worthy measure of this is seen in social media following. A YouTube channel created for Fela Kuti's music has over 162,000 subscribers, and his Instagram page has over 240,000 followers. While these numbers seem small when compared with current artists' following, they are put into proper perspective when compared with his peers. Ayinla Omowura, for example, has no official YouTube account or Instagram Account, Ebenezer Obey has 19,400 subscribers on YouTube, and 17,600 followers on Instagram., King Sunny Ade has 8,900 followers on Instagram and 13,000 subscribers on YouTube. So, even many years after his death, Fela Kuti remains popular among lovers of conscious music. As of the date of writing this research, FelaKuti has 552,207 monthly listeners on Spotify (Spotify 2023).

By 2013, Falz had started to use more Nigerian languages that Nigerians could relate to and identify with. He uses Pidgin English, Yoruba, and Pure English. These are languages Nigerians understand and identify with, hence his acceptance by the Nigerian society. He even framed issues affecting the everyday Nigerian in his works by addressing the issue of the Jos crisis and Police brutality and making them salient in his song in order to draw people's attention to what was happening in Jos. In 'Johnny', he tells the story of a young Nigerian who was killed during the Jos crisis. He tells this story in Pidgin-English, Yoruba, and English language, and then lays bare what is wrong with the country by asking questions thereafter.

Beyond making his music in Nigerian languages, Falz said in an interview with Seun Badejo, that he had to relocate to Nigeria because he believed that as an artist, "the fans (society) want to connect more directly with you and even if you are not based here (in Nigeria, the society itself), you should have your trips often" (Falz 2013).

The re-birth and re-acceptance of Yeye acting

In the quest for relatability, Falz researched historical popular entertainment forms in Nigeria and decided to pick a leaf from Moses Olaiya's comic style. Moses Olaiya, who was popularly known as Baba Sala was a theatre person who seamlessly flowed

between farce and satire. He did *Yeye* (make fun) on T.V. Sometimes he made fun just for the fun of it, while at other times his fun was aimed at diagnosing and projecting societal problems with the hope that someone will pick it up and fix these problems.

Falz began to do this too. However, Falz uses the persona of a popular Yoruba comic character, 'Boda Taju', which makes him speak in a humorous voice with a very obvious (thick) Yoruba accent, and the 'lens-less' eyeglasses of Baba Sala. He uses this in his Instagram skits and especially in his portrayal of 'Sege' in the TV series, *Jenifa's Diary*.

All of these earned Falz a nomination as the Best Comic Actor in the Africa Magic Viewer's Choice Award which allows viewers to vote for whoever they think the best actor for the year is. Falz won that award in 2013 and that was a testament to Nigerians' acceptance of the style (Awojulugba 2018). The acceptance of this very old style particularly proves the relevance of social identity theory as people could identify with these forms of entertainment even if they did not necessarily know Baba Sala, it got him acceptance and launched him into prominence. Falz was therefore able to re-invent an old style, thereby creating a nexus between the past and the future of entertainment, particularly satirical entertainment in Nigeria.

Infusion of serious-humour into music

As established in an earlier section, Falz also takes a leaf from Fela Kuti's style of conscious music. In a 2014 interview with SoundCity, he admits that "With my music, I always try to have content (message) for the society" (SoundCity 2014). Having received acceptance and recognition from society as a comic actor, he then creates a style where he infuses humour into serious music. This is what this research refers to as 'serious-humour'. This way, while he polices the society on one hand, then becomes the court jester on the other hand. This style is evident in works like 'Johnny', 'Talk', and 'Hypocrite' where he has Fela's voice playing in the background, and also in 'This is Nigeria' where he uses Boda Taju's voice, Baba Sala's lens-less eyeglass, and FelaKuti's shirtless style and raised fists.

In 'This is Nigeria' he creates humourously lyrics which first make people laugh, then think, he says:

Lyrics

This is Nigeria
Where that Madam Philomena
Money Vanish for your Office, 36 Million
You talk say na animal
This is Nigeria...
...Police station dey close by 6
For security reason o

Meaning of some of the lines

Where is Madam Philomena?
36 Million misses from your office,
but you're saying an animal stole it

Police stations close by 6

As funny as these lyrics are, they draw society's attention to the prevalent problems with the hope that the people will be stung to look for solutions.

In spite of Nigerian society does not do well with being policed. In as much as the society appreciates music that they can identify with, they also want to be entertained. In order satisfy this demand of the society Falz makes music that falls into this category. Songs like 'Bullion Van' fall into this category. Here, he sings about popular themes like women and sex which are highly consumed by the Nigerian society.

Lyrics

I'm with your girl in Zanzibar
You no fit get my stamina
She say the way you dey fall her hand
You dey turn her into handicap
I know you're thinking of wifing her
But she told me you're the side nigga
And she told me that she like the part
Wey I use all the five fingers

Meaning of some of the lines

You can't have my kind of stamina
She said you were disappointing on bed
That you're making her handicap
But she says you're not her main man
That I used my five fingers

He talks about vulgar things, though using words that do not directly carry vulgar meanings unless heard with a deeper understanding. The society has this deeper understanding therefore these songs are accepted. Considering Falz's elitist background, some think that he went into music as a show of rebellion against his father, Femi Falana. An interview granted to SoundCity by the artiste shows that this belief is not entirely true. He says: "my father's relationship with Fela as his Lawyer inspired my decision to go into music, but he (his father) didn't really support the decision to go into music. It was after I won the BET that they (his family) all took me seriously. My parents threw me a party to celebrate it, I was happy" (Falz, 2016).

Findings

It is discovered that people like Falz because they can relate with his music. As argued by the social identity theory, the (Nigerian) society appreciates the art (Falz's music) because they can relate with, and identify with the content of his work. Some discussants said that it is difficult to tell that Falz spent years away from the country because he sings in 'everyday language' (we identified this to be Pidgin English), so his music is easy to decode and enjoy.

Young Nigerians also like Falz's use of the *Yeye* tradition, which involves the use of humour to pass across serious messages, and also ridicule the perpetrators of vices in society. The *Yeye* tradition has been used and appreciated by an older generation of Nigerians in the past, yet it has found usage and appreciation among a younger generation. This suggests that trends do not just die, they just go out of use and they have tendency to resurface or regain relevance depending on the manner in which they are used.

It is also discovered that Nigerians rejected/ignored Falz's art until it grew beyond just another rapper, or just another comedian. Until his music began to highlight societal problems and issues, many Nigerians did not take him serious. Some others did not take him serious when he started highlighting these issues until they start watching his

comic skits on social media. For some, they prefer his songs that are not dedicated to activism, like 'Bahd Baddo Baddest', and 'Knee Down'. This shows that artistes, especially artistes who do activism music, expanding their repertoire, singing different kinds of music, and participating in different forms can offer them several benefits, including Artistic growth and versatility, as singing various genres allows musicians to explore different artistic styles, techniques, and musical traditions. It broadens their musical palette and fosters creativity by exposing them to diverse musical structures, rhythms, melodies, and vocal techniques. This exploration enhances their versatility as performers and nurtures their overall artistic growth. They are also exposed to expanded audience reach as their music now appeals to a wider range of audiences. Different musical styles resonate with different listeners, and branching out into various genres allows artists to connect with new fan bases. This expanded reach leads to increased exposure, recognition, and opportunities for collaboration and performance, thus enabling activist-musicians to explore a broader range of emotions and narrative style. It also allows them to delve into themes of love, joy, heartbreak, introspection, or other aspects of the human experience that may not be considered in activism music. This diversity of expression can deepen their artistic repertoire and connects with their fans on a more personal level. Discussants specifically highlighted Falz's track 'Knee Down' (2022) as the song they feel most emotionally connected to. Some said it is Falz's most-accepted song in their clique since he released the "Chemistry" EP with Simi in 2016.

There are opportunities for collaboration with musicians from diverse backgrounds. Collaborations across genres can result in innovative and boundary-pushing musical projects that blend different styles, creating unique and captivating compositions. This cross-pollination of ideas and influences can lead to exciting artistic discoveries and the forging of new musical pathways as Fela Kuti did with Afro-beat. This will ultimately lead to personal growth where artists challenge exploration: Exploring different genres allows musicians to challenge themselves and step outside their comfort zones. It encourages them to expand their vocal abilities, experiment with new vocal techniques, and discover their artistic range. This personal growth and exploration contribute to their overall development as musicians and performers.

It is also noticed that Falz's infusion of humor into activism music adds a unique dimension to the message being conveyed and engages audiences in a distinct and memorable way. This is done by exploiting the capacity of humour for attention-grabbing and enhancing relatability and general enjoyment thereby leading to greater engagement and retention of the activist themes.

Falz's humour also helps diffuse the tensed environment and provide a light-hearted entry point into difficult discussions. It allows listeners to approach sensitive topics with a more open and receptive mindset. They are more sharable and memorable and shareable content. Humorous elements in activism music make the content more memorable. When a song combines catchy melodies and clever humor, it increases the likelihood that listeners will remember and share it with others. This amplifies the reach and impact of the activist message, spreading it to a wider audience.

The focus group discussions also revealed that Falz's music effectively frames and addresses significant social issues prevalent in Nigerian society. Participants identified themes such as corruption, inequality, religious corruption, religious extremism, and political unrest as prominent in his music. The participants offered different interpretations of Falz's music, indicating that his messages are subject to individual perspectives and experiences. While some participants perceived his music as social commentary and critique, others saw it as entertainment or a reflection of personal experiences.

Participants acknowledged and appreciated Falz's role as an artiste who is using his platform to address social issues. They expressed that his music has raised awareness and sparked discussions among the audience, highlighting the potential of music as a catalyst for social change. They particularly noted his 2023 song, 'Mr. Yakubu', which lampoons the 2023 general elections in Nigeria. The discussions then revealed that Falz's music has inspired some participants to take action and engage in social activism. Some revealed that they participated in the musical challenge organised by Falz to draw people's attention to the elections and the dissatisfactions. They shared other instances where his music made them introspect as in 'Hypocrite', and when his posts on social media motivated them to speak up, join movements, and contribute to positive moves within their communities.

The findings indicated mixed societal responses to Falz's music. While many participants praised his efforts, there were also instances of backlash and criticism, particularly from individuals and groups with differing ideologies or interests.

Further, participants also recognised the influence of societal factors on Falz's music. They noted the initial general disinterest in Falz's style. They also noted how the increasing corruption, poverty, and mis-governance made it necessary for Falz to delve into activism in the themes and messages conveyed in his songs, indicating the reciprocal nature of the influence exchange.

Incorporating humor into activism music has been an effective approach to engage, entertain, and inspire audiences. It has enhanced the impact of the activist message, and made it more accessible, thereby contributing to the overall effectiveness of using music as a vehicle for social change.

It is also discovered that rejection or ignoring an artist's work, while paying attention to some others is one of society's ways of influencing an artist's art. That way he is sent back to the drawing board to do less of what does not sell, and more of what sells while still having a firm grip on his ideology.

Overall, the findings of this research demonstrate the significant role of Falz's music in reflecting and responding to social issues within the Nigerian society. His music has been effective in framing and addressing key societal concerns, raising awareness, and inspiring action among the audience. However, the reception and interpretation of his

music vary among individuals, and societal factors play a role in shaping the themes and messages he conveys. These findings provide some understanding of the influence of exchange between music artistes and society, highlighting the potential of music as a transformative force for social change.

Conclusion

Falz's music effectively frames and addresses significant social issues prevalent in Nigerian society, such as corruption, inequality, gender roles, and political unrest. The diverse interpretations of his music reflect the subjective nature of art and the varying perspectives and experiences of the audience. Participants acknowledged and appreciated Falz's role as an artist using his platform to address social issues, and his music has raised awareness and sparked discussions among the audience.

The research highlights the empowering impact of Falz's music, as it has inspired some participants to take action and engage in social activism. However, societal responses to his music are mixed – there are both praise and criticism from discussants who belong to different ideological groups. The influence of societal factors on his music was also evident, with participants recognising how the political climate, cultural shifts, and social movements shape the themes and messages conveyed in his songs.

Based on these findings, the study notes that encouragement should be given music artistes to enable them continue addressing social issues and foster dialogue and critical engagement around music's social impact. Supporting artistes' freedom of expression and promoting media literacy are crucial in navigating the complexities of music's framing of social issues. Collaboration, documentation, and support for music education and mentorship programs can further amplify the impact of socially engaged music and nurture emerging artists.

Overall, this research underscores the transformative potential of music as a vehicle for social commentary and activism. It emphasises the reciprocal relationship between artistes and society, highlighting the role of music in reflecting, influencing, and shaping societal dynamics. By recognising and harnessing the power of music, stakeholders can work towards a more engaged, aware, and socially conscious society.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the research recommends that music artists, like Falz, continue to address social issues in their work. Music is a competent platform for raising awareness, sparking conversations, and promoting positive societal change. Encouraging artistic expression that reflects and critiques social realities can contribute to a more engaged and aware society.

This work also highlights the importance of promoting dialogue and critical engagement around music and its social impact. Platforms and initiatives should be created to facilitate discussions and debates on the messages conveyed in music. This can be achieved through organised events, panel discussions, or online platforms that provide space for diverse perspectives and interpretations. Thereby giving the society more avenue to influence music artists competently.

While society is encouraged to influence artists, to control what affects culture, amongst other reasons, it is also recommended that artists are provided with an environment that supports their freedom of expression. This includes protecting their rights to express their views and opinions without fear of censorship or backlash. Policy makers and stakeholders should create an enabling environment that fosters artistic freedom, ensuring that artists can address social issues without undue restrictions.

From the discussions, there were varying interpretations and reception of music, it is therefore important that media literacy programs are promoted to enable audiences to critically engage with the messages conveyed in songs. Education and awareness campaigns can help individuals navigate the complexities of media influence, allowing them to analyse and question the framing of social issues in music. School curriculums should also actively promote critical thinking and even offer it as a general course at tertiary education level.

It is also recommended that artists, civil society organisations, policymakers, and academia collaborate to amplify the impact of music on social change. This will encourage cross-sector partnerships, and it can facilitate the development of initiatives that address social issues through the fusion of art, research, and activism.

The sudden re-emergence and renewed relevance of the *Yeye* Tradition, and Fela Kuti having more than 500,000 monthly listeners on Spotify suggests that there is a need to preserve some old artistic practices. Socially engaged music should be documented and archived to preserve their impact and legacy. This includes recording and archiving performances, interviews, and discussions related to music artists' social commentary. This documentation serves as a resource for future research, education, and inspiration for future artists.

Having realised how much power music holds, as it has the ability to influence and spark conversations, it is important to prioritise investing in music education and mentorship programs which can nurture emerging artists who aspire to use their talent for social change. These programs can provide the necessary skills, guidance, and platforms for young artists to engage with social issues and express their perspectives through music. It could help balance the scale for artists from humble background.

The recommendations will help stakeholders harness the potential of music as a tool for social change. They will also empower artistes towards addressing pressing societal issues, and foster a more informed and engaged society.

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