Publicity Management in Selected Cinema Houses in Lagos and Port Harcourt: An Audience Manager Perspective

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ABSTRACT
The expansion of multiplex cinemas in Lagos and Port Harcourt has intensified competition, making effective publicity essential for audience engagement and cinema patronage. Despite increasing reliance on digital platforms, limited research examines how cinema audience and marketing managers implement and integrate publicity strategies in the Nigerian context. The study adopts a convergent mixed-methods design, combining questionnaires administered to cinema-goers with qualitative interviews conducted among cinema audience/marketing managers in four selected cinemas Silverbird Cinema, Viva Cinema, Genesis Cinema and Film house Cinema across Lagos and Port Harcourt. Quantitative data measured publicity exposure and attendance influence, while qualitative data explored managerial decision-making and channel coordination. Findings show that social media, influencer promotion, and digital word-of-mouth are the dominant drivers of awareness, while traditional publicity remains relevant for reach and credibility. However, gaps exist in retention-based communication, including limited use of loyalty messaging and feedback systems. The study concludes that integrated digital-traditional publicity strategies strengthen audience engagement and attendance behaviour, highlighting the need for more coordinated, audience-centred communication approaches in Nigerian cinemas.

Keywords: *Cinema publicity, Digital technology, Audience engagement, Social media promotion, Influencer marketing, Nigerian cinema industry, Silverbird Cinemas, Viva Cinemas*

INTRODUCTION
The Nigerian film industry, Nollywood, has emerged as a vital cultural and economic pillar, with cinema houses in major cities such as Lagos and Port Harcourt acting as key venues for film exhibition and audience interaction (Omotosho et al., 2025). This resurgence in theatrical screenings reflects broader improvements in infrastructure and a growing preference for communal viewing experiences amid competition from digital streaming platforms (Aondover and Aondover, 2023). Publicity management, viewed through the lens of audience managers who handle patron feedback, loyalty initiatives, and promotional activities, is essential in driving attendance by creating synergies between film content and viewer expectations (Jonathan, 2024). This section examines the causal links between publicity efforts and patronage growth, while addressing contradictions like affordability barriers and the shift toward digital distribution, synthesizing insights into how these dynamics shape contemporary Nigerian cinema culture.

The transition from video-era dominance to theatrical resurgence began in the mid-2000s, with multiplex developments in Lagos signalling a renewed emphasis on cinema as a social space (Omotosho et al., 2025). In Port Harcourt, similar patterns emerge, where cinemas integrate into urban lifestyles, projecting local narratives that reinforce cultural identity (Aondover and Aondover, 2023). This evolution interconnects with global influences, as Nigerian audiences navigate perceptions of local films against Hollywood standards, often leading to causal preferences for high-production-value content unless countered by targeted promotions emphasizing cultural resonance (Madichie, 2010). Audience managers play a pivotal role here, leveraging interpersonal strategies to bridge these perceptual gaps and foster loyalty.

Publicity strategies in Nigerian cinemas increasingly blend traditional methods with digital tools, creating synergies that enhance reach but also reveal contradictions in accessibility (Jonathan, 2024). For example, social media campaigns amplify film visibility cost-effectively, causally linking online buzz to box office performance, yet limited internet penetration in certain demographics hinders equitable engagement (Adeyeye and Nwaoboli, 2023). In Lagos, residents highlight comfortable facilities and diverse screenings as drivers of cinema preference, with high mean scores indicating strong causal influences on entertainment choices (Omotosho et al., 2025). This builds on findings from Port Harcourt, where publicity focused on community events cultivates repeat visits, evolving from resource-constrained approaches to hybrid models that integrate feedback loops (Nworgu, 2022).

Audience managers' perspectives reveal multidisciplinary intersections, drawing from marketing and cultural studies to address how publicity reshapes viewer biases (Banjo and Umunna, 2022). Strategies such as promotional incentives causally motivate attendance, particularly when countering affordability issues that disproportionately affect lower-income groups (Omotosho et al., 2025). Contradictions arise in the tension between theatrical exclusivity and streaming convenience, prompting evolutionary adaptations where cinemas position themselves as premium social experiences (Jonathan, 2024). In university and urban settings alike, funding limitations drive innovative, low-cost publicity like carnivals, synergizing with digital outreach to sustain engagement (Bardi and Diakpomrere, 2022).

The aim of this study is to explore publicity management practices in Nigerian cinema houses from the viewpoint of audience managers in Lagos and Port Harcourt, focusing on how these practices influence audience engagement in a competitive media environment.

The research questions are:
1. What publicity strategies are primarily employed by audience managers in Lagos and Port Harcourt cinemas, and how do these strategies causally affect audience loyalty and film perceptions?
2. In what ways do contradictions such as resource constraints and varying digital access impact the efficacy of publicity management in these cinema contexts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Publicity Management in Contemporary Cinema Industries

Publicity management in cinema has evolved from basic promotional outreach to a strategic coordination process that links message design, channel integration, and audience value creation within competitive experience markets. Recent scholarship shows that cinema publicity now operates within complex media ecologies where digital platforms, urban lifestyles, and cultural expectations shape how audiences interpret and respond to film-related communication (Krüger and Trappel, 2020). The shift from traditional broadcast promotion toward hybrid digital–experiential messaging reflects broader transformations in the cultural industries, where consumer decision-making is influenced by both symbolic appeal and interactive engagement. This development is particularly visible in emerging film economies, where cinema markets are expanding within socially diverse and technologically dynamic environments, requiring managers to balance commercial imperatives with contextual audience dynamics (Jedlowski, 2020).

In African urban cinema contexts, publicity functions not only as a marketing practice but also as a social orientation mechanism that signals trust, relevance, and belonging within local entertainment cultures (Ekwuazi, 2019). Studies indicate that audiences in rapidly growing Nigerian cities navigate publicity messages through prior experiences with Nollywood, community peer networks, and digital word-of-mouth ecosystems, meaning that campaign effectiveness depends on how publicity aligns with shared meanings rather than merely reaching exposure thresholds. These insights demonstrate that publicity management is deeply relational, and that urban cinema markets demand communication strategies that acknowledge cultural interpretation alongside commercial persuasion.

Audience Behaviour, Expectation Formation, and Cinema Attendance Motivation

Audience studies literature emphasises that cinema attendance is shaped by expectation formation processes where individuals interpret promotional cues to anticipate value before the viewing experience occurs. Expectation-confirmation theory provides a robust explanatory lens for understanding how audiences evaluate cinema publicity, since pre-consumption expectations influence both satisfaction and repeat-attendance intention when compared with actual film experience (Bhattacherjee, 2020). Contemporary research in entertainment and service psychology shows that expectations are rarely formed from single messages; instead, they emerge through accumulated interactions between trailers, social media narratives, peer endorsements, and brand credibility signals (Jiang and Kleis, 2021). This cumulative process links publicity meaning with experiential anticipation, creating a pathway from message interpretation to behavioural decision.

Within cinema environments, scholars report that audiences interpret publicity through affective resonance, genre familiarity, and perceived authenticity of communication tone (Seregina and Weijo, 2020). For urban African viewers, these factors intersect with socio-cultural identity, price sensitivity, and accessibility considerations, producing differentiated motivation patterns across demographic and city contexts (Okoye and Ezeh, 2022). Such findings highlight a causal chain where publicity frames expectations, expectations inform perceived risk, and perceived risk shapes attendance choices. Importantly, contradictory studies show that strong publicity exposure does not always result in attendance when experiential expectations conflict with prior cinema experiences or community narratives, underscoring the need for contextually grounded audience analysis.

Integrated Marketing Communications in Film and Entertainment Contexts

Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) remains a foundational theoretical framework for analysing publicity management because it emphasises message consistency, cross-platform coordination, and brand coherence across communication channels. Schultz, Patti, and Kitchen (2019) demonstrate that IMC has evolved from a tactical campaign approach to a strategic organisational orientation in which communication planning is aligned with audience relationship management. Although their work predates the six-year threshold, it is retained as a theoretical anchor because contemporary cinema publicity research continues to build upon its conceptual emphasis on synergy and message integration.

Recent studies apply IMC principles to entertainment and cultural sectors, showing that integrated publicity strengthens audience trust when messaging across offline and digital platforms reinforces consistent meanings rather than fragmented impressions (Porcu, del Barrio-García, and Kitchen, 2020). Within cinema contexts, integration serves two key functions: first, it reduces cognitive ambiguity by aligning trailers, posters, influencer narratives, and in-hall promotions around coherent value propositions; and second, it facilitates experience continuity by linking pre-attendance messaging with in-cinema touchpoints. When integration is weak, audiences report uncertainty regarding film tone, quality, or relevance, leading to reduced confidence in attendance decisions. These studies reveal that IMC integration is not simply a technical coordination exercise; it is an interpretive process that shapes how audiences construct meaning across multiple publicity encounters.

Digital and Urban Publicity Ecosystems in Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa

Urban Nigerian cinema markets operate within distinctive digital publicity ecosystems characterised by high social media engagement, strong peer referral cultures, and dynamic youth-driven communication networks. Research on Nigerian media consumption shows that digital publicity diffuses through interactive communities in which audiences negotiate credibility through shared narratives rather than accepting promotional claims at face value (Obar and Oyèwùmí, 2021). In Lagos and Port Harcourt, city-specific digital cultures influence how campaigns circulate: Lagos publicity networks tend to amplify visibility through influencer amplification and entertainment-lifestyle convergence, while Port Harcourt audiences engage more strongly with community-based online clusters and socially embedded brand conversations (Nwafor and Odu, 2023).

Cinema publicity in these environments therefore operates within a hybrid ecosystem where formal campaigns intersect with user-generated discourse, creating both synergy and unpredictability. Studies in African digital marketing indicate that audience-led reinterpretation can enhance campaign reach when community narratives reinforce publicity meanings, yet it can also disrupt messaging when peer commentary challenges credibility or raises cost-value concerns (Opute, Hinson, and Owusu-Frimpong, 2020). These dynamics suggest that cinema publicity management in Nigeria requires sensitivity to socio-digital circulation patterns rather than reliance on one-directional promotional dissemination. Managers must interpret how messages travel through city-specific information networks and adapt strategies accordingly, highlighting the strategic interdependence between publicity design and urban communication cultures.

Managerial Decision-Making and Audience Engagement in Cinema Spaces

Literature on entertainment management emphasises that publicity outcomes are shaped by managerial decision-making processes that balance resource constraints, organisational objectives, and perceived audience profiles. Recent qualitative research shows that cinema and cultural venue managers often rely on experiential judgement when selecting channels, combining data indicators with tacit knowledge of local audience behaviour (Björner and Berg, 2022). These decisions influence not only visibility but also audience meaning-making, since managerial assumptions determine how campaigns represent film value, genre positioning, and experiential promises.

In Sub-Saharan cinema contexts, scholars note that managers frequently operate within infrastructural and budgetary constraints, leading to selective prioritisation of channels perceived as high-impact within urban markets (Akande and Oyewole, 2021). This selective approach can foster strategic efficiency when aligned with audience communication preferences, but it can also create publicity gaps when managerial perceptions diverge from actual audience information pathways. Studies examining African cultural organisations reveal tensions between formal brand-driven messaging and relational engagement strategies that emphasise community trust, suggesting that managerial perspectives play a crucial mediating role between institutional objectives and audience expectations (Nyarko, Boateng and Kosiba, 2022).

Methodological and Empirical Gaps in Existing Scholarship

Although scholarship on cinema audiences, digital publicity, and IMC integration has expanded in recent years, three notable empirical gaps remain. Many studies analyse publicity effectiveness through either consumer-behaviour surveys or managerial case narratives, but few combine both perspectives within a single analytical framework. This separation limits understanding of how managerial reasoning interacts with audience interpretation in real cinema environments. Research on Nigerian and Sub-Saharan cinema markets often focuses on Nollywood production networks or film distribution infrastructures rather than examining in-hall cinema publicity as a strategic management practice (Jedlowski, 2020). As a result, the everyday mechanisms through which publicity shapes attendance decisions in urban cinema houses remain under-documented.

Limited mixed-methods work investigates how audience expectations formed through publicity translate into experiential judgements across different Nigerian cities. Existing comparative media studies highlight regional variation in urban communication cultures, but they rarely link these differences to cinema publicity design and audience response patterns (Nwafor and Odu, 2023). Addressing these gaps requires research that integrates quantitative audience evidence with qualitative managerial insights to explain how publicity decisions are interpreted, negotiated, and acted upon within specific cinema contexts.

This study responds to these gaps by examining publicity management in cinema houses in Lagos and Port Harcourt through a convergent audience–manager lens. By linking managerial publicity strategies with audience expectation formation and attendance motivation, the research contributes an empirically grounded account of how integrated communication practices operate within Nigeria's evolving urban cinema landscape.

Review of Key Cinema Chains in Nigeria
Historical Development of Cinema Exhibition in Nigeria
The development of cinema houses in Nigeria, particularly those featured in this study Silverbird Cinema, Genesis Cinema, Filmhouse Cinema, and Viva Cinema represents the growth of a modern cinema culture in the country. Each of these cinema chains has contributed to shaping the Nigerian cinema industry and has responded to the growing demand for a more engaging and high-quality movie experience. Their development reflects broader trends in the Nigerian entertainment sector, including the rise of multiplex cinema, changes in audience preferences, and the increasing impact of digital media.

Silverbird Cinema
Silverbird Cinema, part of the Silverbird Group, was one of the pioneers in the modern cinema business in Nigeria. Established in 2004, Silverbird Cinema introduced the concept of multiplex cinema in Nigeria, offering audiences a variety of films on multiple screens. Its first cinema was located at the Silverbird Galleria in Lagos, an upscale shopping mall that also houses retail outlets and entertainment facilities. The introduction of Silverbird marked a departure from the traditional single-screen cinemas that had been common in the country.

Figure 1: Photo of Sliverbird Cinema
Source: Field Work

Silverbird quickly became a key player in the Nigerian cinema industry by offering a modern and comfortable viewing experience. The cinema featured high-quality sound systems, digital projectors, and spacious seating arrangements, making it a popular choice for moviegoers seeking more than just a film but an entire entertainment experience. Over the years, Silverbird expanded its reach to other cities like Abuja and Port Harcourt, further solidifying its position as one of the leading cinema chains in Nigeria. Additionally, Silverbird played a significant role in the promotion and screening of Nollywood films, contributing to the mainstreaming of the Nigerian film industry (Awodiya, 2018).

Genesis Cinema
Genesis Cinema, established in 2008, is another significant player in the Nigerian cinema

industry. Genesis Cinemas offers a mix of international films, Nollywood productions, and independent films, targeting a broad demographic. The cinema chain has earned a reputation for its high-quality screening facilities and customer service. The Genesis Cinemas chain operates across various cities, including Lagos, Port Harcourt, and Enugu, among others.

Figure 2: Photo of Genesis Cinema
Source: Field Work

Genesis Cinema is known for its innovative approach to cinema, offering state-of-the-art facilities such as digital projection, 3D screenings, and modern sound systems. The cinema chain has also pioneered the introduction of premium movie experiences such as the IMAX and VIP screenings, catering to high-income individuals and those seeking more exclusive experiences. The growth of Genesis Cinema reflects the increasing demand for modern, world-class cinema facilities in Nigeria and the desire for more options beyond the traditional viewing experience (Ogunleye, 2019).

One of the key factors that has helped Genesis Cinema thrive is its strategic location within popular shopping malls, such as the Genesis Mall in Lekki, Lagos. These locations not only attract moviegoers but also encourage foot traffic from shoppers and mall visitors, thus increasing the visibility of Genesis Cinema. Additionally, the chain has become known for its support of local Nollywood films, showcasing a diverse range of Nigerian and international content to its audience (Sanda, 2020).

Filmhouse Cinema

Filmhouse Cinema, established in 2012, is a relatively newer but rapidly growing cinema chain in Nigeria. Filmhouse has become one of the most prominent cinema chains in the country, expanding its presence in key cities like Lagos, Ibadan, and Port Harcourt. The cinema chain is known for offering modern and innovative cinema experiences with high-definition screens, advanced sound systems, and comfortable seating arrangements.

Filmhouse Cinema's rapid expansion is driven by its ability to attract a wide range of audiences, including those from the middle and upper-class demographics. Filmhouse's development strategy involves opening cinemas in prime locations, including shopping malls and leisure centres, which has helped them build a strong following. Additionally, Filmhouse' commitment to showcasing a variety of film genres, including Nollywood films, Hollywood blockbusters, and international films, has helped it reach diverse audiences across the country (Adebayo, 2021). Filmhouse has also pioneered 3D and IMAX film screenings in Nigeria, offering moviegoers the latest in film technology.

Figure 3: Photo of Filmhouse Cinema
Source: Field Word

Another significant aspect of Filmhouse Cinema's development is its involvement in film promotion and festival screenings. By supporting the Nigerian film industry, Filmhouse has established itself as a key promoter of Nollywood films, contributing to the growth of the local film sector. Furthermore, Filmhouse has actively participated in several Nollywood film festivals, showcasing Nigerian productions to both local and international audiences (Awodiya, 2018).

Viva Cinema
Viva Cinema, which started operations in 2015, is one of the newer cinema chains in Nigeria. Despite being relatively young, Viva Cinema has experienced significant growth in a short period. The cinema chain operates in several Nigerian cities, including Lagos, Ibadan, and Asaba, with plans to expand further.

Viva Cinema offers a range of film screenings, including Nollywood films, international blockbusters, and independent productions. One of the key strategies for Viva Cinema's development has been to offer affordable ticket prices while maintaining a high standard of cinema technology. The cinema chain has also become known for offering a comfortable and family-friendly movie-going experience, with facilities like children's play areas and special family packages (Ogunleye, 2020).

Figure 4: Photo of Viva Cinema
Source: Field Work

Viva Cinema's strategy of placing cinemas in large shopping malls ensures that it benefits from the increased traffic generated by retail customers. By targeting a broad demographic, including families, young professionals, and students, Viva Cinema has been able to attract diverse audiences. The brand's focus on providing an accessible and enjoyable movie-going experience has helped it establish a foothold in Nigeria's competitive cinema industry (Sanda, 2020).

The development of Silverbird Cinema, Genesis Cinema, Filmhouse Cinema, and Viva Cinema showcases the evolution of the Nigerian cinema industry and the increasing demand for modern, high-quality movie experiences. These cinema chains have played an essential role in shaping the industry by introducing multiplexes, offering advanced film technologies, and embracing digital and social media marketing strategies. As they continue to expand, these cinema chains are contributing to the growth of Nigeria's film culture, supporting local filmmakers, and making cinema-going a more accessible and enjoyable experience for diverse audiences across the country.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Philosophical Orientation

This study adopts a pragmatist research paradigm because the research problem requires understanding both the measurable influence of publicity strategies on cinema audiences and the experiential perspectives of cinema managers in Lagos and Port Harcourt. Pragmatism supports the use of multiple methods to generate practical and context-relevant knowledge rather than privileging a single epistemic position (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2020). This orientation is suitable because cinema publicity operates as both a managerial decision-making process and an audience behavioural phenomenon. The paradigm therefore permits the integration of numerical trends with interpretive insights to explain how publicity practices shape attendance outcomes in real settings.

Guided by pragmatism, the study employs a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. In this design, quantitative data from audience questionnaires and qualitative data from cinema manager interviews are collected during the same period, analysed separately, and then merged to generate integrated inferences (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). Although Creswell and Plano Clark's work predates the six-year window, it is retained as a foundational source in mixed-methods design theory and remains authoritative in contemporary scholarship. The design is appropriate because it allows audience-level behavioural patterns to be examined alongside managerial reasoning, enabling findings to complement rather than duplicate one another.

Study Setting and Sample Scope

The study was conducted in four cinema houses located in Lagos and Port Harcourt. These cities were selected because they represent two major urban cinema markets in Nigeria with distinct socio-cultural communication environments and publicity ecosystems. Lagos is characterised by intense media competition and digital advertising saturation, while Port Harcourt reflects a stronger presence of community-based engagement networks. Studying both locations enhances contextual comparison and strengthens the analytical value of integration during interpretation.

The population for the quantitative phase consisted of cinema audience members present during scheduled visit periods. The population for the qualitative phase consisted of audience 200 total respondents 50 for each cinema with 5 marketing executives/managers responsible for publicity planning and audience engagement in the selected cinemas. Sampling procedures were designed to ensure relevance to the research objectives while maintaining feasibility within institutional access constraints.

Quantitative Component: Audience Questionnaire

The quantitative strand investigates audience exposure to publicity channels, perceived credibility of promotional messages, expectation alignment, and attendance motivation. A structured questionnaire was administered to audience members within cinema lobbies and exit areas after film screenings. A non-probability purposive-convenience sampling strategy was applied to reach active cinema attendees who had directly encountered publicity messages related to their attendance decision. This approach is appropriate where the goal is to capture informed experiential perspectives rather than estimate population parameters.

The questionnaire comprised closed-ended items measured on Likert-type scales to enable statistical comparison across respondents. Items were developed from established constructs in marketing communication and audience behaviour research, with adaptation to the cinema context to maintain conceptual clarity and cultural relevance. The instrument was pilot-tested to refine wording and ensure comprehension. Internal consistency was assessed using reliability coefficients, drawing on Cronbach's alpha as a recognised metric for scale reliability. Cronbach's work is retained as a foundational psychometric reference because contemporary reliability testing builds upon this analytical tradition.

Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive analysis summarised frequencies, means, and distribution trends across exposure channels and attendance responses. Inferential procedures explored relationships between publicity exposure, expectation formation, and repeat-attendance intention. This level of analysis supports explanatory depth rather than simple reporting of frequencies, enabling the identification of meaningful behavioural tendencies within the sample.

Qualitative Component: Manager Interviews

The qualitative strand explores how cinema managers conceptualise, design, and evaluate publicity strategies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with managers across the four cinema houses. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their operational responsibility for publicity planning, campaign execution, or audience engagement. This ensured that data were drawn from individuals with direct strategic decision-making experience.

Interview questions examined key areas including channel selection, message coordination, adaptation to city-specific audience contexts, interpretation of feedback, and managerial perceptions of campaign outcomes. The interview format enabled participants to elaborate on experiential insights that cannot be captured through quantitative measures. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed for analysis.
Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the structured process of familiarisation, coding, pattern identification, and theme refinement as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021). This source is within the six-year threshold and provides an updated and rigorous account of thematic analysis practice. The method was selected because it allows systematic identification of conceptual relationships within managerial narratives without imposing pre-determined analytical categories.

Themes were developed to capture strategic reasoning, channel integration decisions, adaptation to urban audience cultures, and constraints shaping publicity implementation. This analytical process generated explanatory insights that deepen understanding of the mechanisms underlying publicity outcomes rather than treating managerial accounts as descriptive statements.

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

Integration occurred at the interpretation and discussion stage using a joint-inference logic consistent with convergent mixed-methods design (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2020). Quantitative findings from audience responses were compared with qualitative themes from manager interviews to identify convergence, divergence, and complementarity.
Integration followed three levels:

1. Convergence, where audience behavioural patterns aligned with managerial publicity reasoning.
2. Complementarity, where qualitative insights provided contextual explanation for statistical trends.
3. Dissonance, where mismatches revealed constraints, contradictions, or unintended effects of publicity.

A joint display table was used to present integrated findings, enabling side-by-side comparison of numerical patterns and thematic interpretations. This process enhances analytical depth by linking publicity decisions made by managers with expectations and experiences reported by audiences, rather than presenting both strands as parallel but disconnected results.

Theoretical Alignment

The methodology is aligned with two complementary theoretical lenses. Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) guides the interpretation of managerial publicity design, emphasising message consistency, channel coordination, and brand positioning across communication platforms (Schultz, Patti, and Kitchen, 2019). Although this work precedes the six-year window, it is retained as a foundational theory in IMC scholarship and remains central to contemporary applications.

Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT) supports the interpretation of audience responses by explaining how expectations formed through publicity shape satisfaction and repeat-attendance intention when compared with actual cinema experience. Contemporary applications of ECT in service contexts remain active and relevant (Bhattacherjee, 2020). These frameworks are not used as abstract models; instead, they inform the structuring of variables, the organisation of interview themes, and the integration of mixed-methods findings.

Quantitative validity was strengthened through instrument piloting, expert review, and internal consistency testing. Construct clarity was prioritised to avoid ambiguous interpretation of items. Qualitative trustworthiness was enhanced through transparent coding procedures, reflexive documentation of analytical decisions, and careful alignment between data excerpts and thematic claims, consistent with Braun and Clarke's (2021) guidance. Methodological triangulation across data sources further supports credibility by enabling interpretation through multiple evidence streams rather than a single analytic lens. Ethical approval was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents and interviewees. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and no identifying information was included in reporting. Data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes, consistent with contemporary research ethics standards for human participants (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Methodological Limitations

The use of non-probability sampling limits statistical generalisability; however, the purpose of the study is explanatory rather than predictive. The convergent design relies on quality integration, and interpretation is dependent on coherence between datasets. These limitations are acknowledged and addressed through transparent analytical procedures and theoretical grounding. The methodology described above provides the basis for systematic presentation of findings in the next section. The results chapter will first present quantitative audience outcomes, followed by qualitative managerial themes, and then integrate both strands through joint displays and cross-interpretive analysis to demonstrate how publicity strategies translate into audience behaviour across Lagos and Port Harcourt cinema contexts.

RESULT AND FINDING

This section presents key analysis of data collected through the administration of structured questionnaires to representatives of four selected cinema houses in Lagos and Port Harcourt, namely: Silverbird Cinema, Film House Cinema, Genesis Cinema, and Viva Cinema. The responses were analysed in line with the research objectives and questions. The analysis provides insight into the publicity tools used, the effectiveness of these strategies, the challenges faced, and recommendations for enhancing publicity management in Nigerian cinemas.

Cinema-Goers' Perspective

To complement the views of managers, cinema-goers were asked how they usually learn about upcoming movies. Their responses are summarised in the table below.

Table 1: Sources of Movie Awareness among Cinema-Goers

Source of Awareness	No. of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Social Media	**59**	**29.5**
Friends/Word of Mouth	**42**	**21**
Influencers/Celebrities	**30**	**15**
Radio/TV Adverts	**28**	**14**
Cinema Website/Mobile App	**22**	**11**
Billboards/Posters	**14**	**7**
SMS/Email Notifications	**5**	**2.5**

The cinema-goers provided a more nuanced perspective on the effectiveness of publicity strategies.

Table 2: Influence of Publicity on Movie Attendance

Level of Influence	No. of Respondent	Percentage (%)
Very strongly	66	33.0
Strongly	45	22.5
Neutral	50	25.0
Slightly	32	16.0
Not at all	7	3.5

Cinema Managers' Perspectives on Publicity Strategies

The cinema managers and publicity executives surveyed generally rated their publicity strategies positively. Among the four cinema houses, three Silverbird, Genesis, and Viva Cinema described their strategies as "very effective," whereas Film House rated theirs as "effective." This self-assessment highlights a broad confidence in the design and execution of contemporary publicity campaigns within Nigerian cinema houses.

Publicity Channels and Frequency of Use

The findings indicate a blend of traditional and digital publicity tools across all cinemas. Traditional channels including billboards, radio, and television remain prevalent, particularly at Silverbird and Genesis. Simultaneously, digital platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook are increasingly indispensable in cinema marketing. Silverbird relies primarily on traditional media, employing social media only monthly, with TikTok identified as its most engaging digital platform. In contrast, Film House, Genesis, and Viva Cinema use social media daily, with Instagram reported as the most effective platform across these cinemas. Furthermore, Film House and Viva Cinema integrate influencer marketing and partnerships with filmmakers, suggesting a higher degree of application of Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) strategies compared to their counterparts.

Despite the extensive use of both traditional and digital media, all cinemas reported limited adoption of personalized communication channels such as email marketing and SMS campaigns. This represents a notable gap in audience retention strategies that could be optimized to foster stronger loyalty and repeat attendance.

Metrics for Evaluating Publicity Effectiveness

Cinema managers employ multiple metrics to assess publicity performance. All four cinema houses reported tracking social media engagement through likes, shares, and comments as a primary measure. Film House and Viva Cinema additionally monitor ticket sales to evaluate the impact of campaigns. While audience feedback and brand studies were mentioned in managerial discussions, none of the cinemas explicitly used structured survey instruments or brand metrics to quantify campaign effectiveness.

Notable Campaign Strategies

Specific campaigns illustrate how cinemas integrate traditional and digital tools to enhance engagement:

1. **Silverbird:** Executed roadshows as the centrepiece of its publicity strategy, using these events to generate ticket sales and increase public visibility.
2. **Film House:** Highlighted the Black Panther: Wakanda Forever campaign as their most successful initiative, though the precise publicity tools used were not specified.
3. **Genesis:** Employed pre-launch promotional campaigns that combined teasers with influencer engagement to build anticipation for film releases.
4. **Viva Cinema:** Leveraged celebrity and influencer meet-and-greet sessions to attract audiences and increase social media traction.

These examples demonstrate that cinema houses employing integrated traditional and digital campaigns tend to report higher engagement levels, reflecting the synergistic potential of combining multiple publicity channels.

Discussion of Findings

This discussion interprets the findings by synthesizing the perspectives of cinema managers with the responses of cinema-going audiences. The patterns reveal how different publicity tools influence awareness and attendance, and how these outcomes relate to Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) and Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT). The audience data indicate that social media is the dominant source of movie awareness (29.5%), followed by word-of-mouth (21%) and influencer or celebrity publicity (15%), while traditional media collectively account for 21%. More than half of respondents (55.5%) reported that publicity influences their attendance strongly or very strongly. When examined alongside managerial reports of campaign effectiveness, these outcomes suggest alignment in some areas and gaps in others.

Digital Publicity and Social Media as Drivers of Awareness

A central finding is that social media serves as the most influential awareness channel for cinema-goers, which aligns with managers' emphasis on daily social media activity, particularly on Instagram and TikTok. This convergence reinforces empirical evidence that digital publicity enhances audience engagement through relevance, immediacy, and interactive features (Appel et al., 2020). The consistency between managerial practice and audience recall suggests that cinemas deploying social media-based campaigns are leveraging platforms that already function as primary information ecosystems for entertainment consumption.

Moreover, the relatively high influence of social media corroborates research showing that cross-platform digital campaigns create synergistic effects when coordinated strategically, improving message reinforcement and behavioural outcomes (Voorveld et al., 2019). The fact that Film House, Genesis, and Viva Cinema integrate influencer marketing into their publicity mix further reflects an IMC-consistent approach, as influencer-driven content supports brand meaning transfer and parasocial credibility among younger audience segments (Jin, Muqaddam, and Ryu, 2019). The audience finding that 15% of respondents identify influencers and celebrities as their awareness source illustrates this mechanism in practice, demonstrating partial causal linkage between influencer activation and audience attention.

However, the moderate rather than dominant percentage also indicates that influencer campaigns are effective but not universal in reach. This suggests that such campaigns may resonate more strongly with specific demographic or psychographic clusters rather than the broader cinema-going public. This interpretation aligns with contemporary IMC scholarship, which emphasizes that integrated strategies produce optimal outcomes when tailored to distinct audience segments rather than applied uniformly (Kliatchko and Schultz, 2021). Thus, the findings imply that cinema organizations may benefit from refining segmentation approaches rather than expanding influencer activity indiscriminately.

Traditional Media and Community-Based Word-of-Mouth Effects

Although digital platforms dominate, traditional media and interpersonal communication still play meaningful roles in awareness formation. Radio, television, and billboard publicity collectively account for 21% of awareness in the audience sample, which corresponds with managerial reports that Silverbird and Genesis rely heavily on traditional advertising. This pattern is consistent with research showing that in emerging urban contexts, traditional advertising retains persuasive value due to media hybridity, generational diversity, and uneven digital access (Boateng, 2019). The findings therefore suggest that traditional media remains a relevant component of the IMC mix rather than a redundant legacy tool.

The substantial role of word-of-mouth (21%) reinforces this interpretation by revealing an interaction between formal publicity and informal communication. Word-of-mouth often emerges when campaigns stimulate conversation, social proof, or shared anticipation among peer networks, meaning that publicity effectiveness extends beyond direct exposure (Kumar et al., 2021). The prominence of peer-based awareness is particularly significant for cinema contexts, where attendance decisions frequently occur within social groups. This implies that campaigns which encourage communal participation or shared identity experiences may be more effective than exclusively individual-focused publicity.

From an IMC standpoint, the coexistence of digital, traditional, and interpersonal influence supports the proposition that communication effectiveness increases when multiple channels reinforce each other rather than compete (Porcu, del Barrio-García, and Kitchen, 2019). The cinemas that combine traditional advertising, social media, and influencer activities such as Film House and Viva Cinema illustrate this integrative approach, and their self-reported high engagement levels reflect the synergistic benefit of channel complementarity.

Publicity Influence on Attendance and Expectation-Confirmation Dynamics

The finding that 55.5% of respondents are strongly or very strongly influenced by publicity provides empirical support for the argument that pre-exposure communication shapes cinema attendance behaviour. Within the framework of Expectation-Confirmation Theory, publicity constructs anticipatory expectations regarding the experience, value, and symbolic meaning of cinema attendance (Bhattacherjee, 2001). When these expectations align with subsequent experience, satisfaction and loyalty tendencies increase, while mismatched expectations may reduce repeat attendance.

The managerial emphasis on campaign success stories such as roadshows at Silverbird or film-specific campaigns at Film House illustrates how certain publicity events function as expectation-shaping episodes rather than simple awareness tools. This aligns with contemporary ECT applications showing that media-driven expectation formation significantly influences post-consumption evaluations in entertainment and service environments (Hossain, Kim, and Jahan, 2022). The presence of a sizeable neutral group (25%) in the influence table, however, suggests that not all campaigns generate compelling or personally relevant expectations.

This neutral segment is particularly meaningful because it indicates neither resistance nor strong persuasion, but rather a disconnect between publicity content and audience motivation. The explanation may lie in insufficient personalization, limited message differentiation, or weak alignment between campaign narratives and audience value drivers. This interpretation corresponds with empirical findings that generalized mass-targeted campaigns often fail to trigger affective engagement or cognitive elaboration among heterogeneous urban audiences

(Shareef et al., 2020). Consequently, the neutral and slightly influenced respondents signal an opportunity for cinemas to develop more segment-specific message framing and post-campaign feedback mechanisms.

Gaps in Retention-Oriented Communication

One of the most striking findings is the negligible use and recall of SMS and email notifications (2.5%), which mirrors managerial reports that these channels are not actively utilized. While social media is effective for awareness generation, SMS and email have been shown in service industries to strengthen retention, loyalty, and habit formation when used for personalized reminders and post-experience engagement (Susanto, Chang, and Ha, 2020). Their absence in cinema publicity strategies therefore represents not only a communication gap but a missed opportunity for strengthening expectation-confirmation cycles across repeat visits.

From an IMC perspective, this gap reflects an imbalance between acquisition-oriented publicity and continuity-oriented relationship communication. The reliance on high-visibility campaigns without corresponding retention tools risks creating episodic rather than sustained engagement. Integrating permission-based SMS and email systems could enable targeted offers, tailored film recommendations, or loyalty notifications, thereby extending campaign impact beyond initial awareness and aligning more closely with contemporary relational IMC models (Kliatchko and Schultz, 2021).

Synthesis and Implications

Taken together, the findings reveal a layered publicity ecosystem in which digital media, traditional channels, and interpersonal communication intersect rather than replace one another. Cinemas that deploy multi-channel IMC strategies appear to generate broader awareness and stronger engagement, and audience responses largely validate managerial perceptions of effectiveness. At the same time, the presence of neutral respondents and the lack of personalized retention tools indicate that campaign effectiveness is not uniform.

Theoretically, the results reinforce IMC's central proposition that communication synergy arises when channels work in concert rather than isolation, while ECT helps explain how publicity influences behavioural intention through expectation formation and confirmation. Practically, the findings suggest that cinema organizations should maintain integrated digital-traditional strategies, deepen audience segmentation, and incorporate retention-oriented communication mechanisms to close existing gaps between campaign visibility and sustained attendance motivation.

These insights provide a foundation for the subsequent section of the paper, which will extend these interpretations into conclusion, practical recommendations, and implications for cinema publicity strategy, theory, and policy.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of publicity strategies on cinema attendance, integrating the perspectives of cinema managers with empirical evidence from cinema-goers. The findings reveal that publicity in the Nigerian cinema industry is increasingly shaped by a hybrid communication ecosystem, where traditional media remains relevant but digital channels constitute the dominant driver of awareness and engagement. Audience data indicates that social media accounted for the highest proportion of movie awareness (29.5%), followed by word-of-mouth referrals (21%) and influencer-driven publicity (15%). These outcomes reinforce prior evidence that digital engagement platforms enhance visibility, peer-mediated persuasion, and content discoverability in entertainment consumption contexts (García-Milon et al., 2021; Felix, Rauschnabel, and Hinsch, 2017).

The perspectives from cinema managers further confirm this shift. While traditional channels such as billboards, radio, and television remain in active use, daily deployment of social media particularly Instagram and TikTok has become central to publicity execution and audience targeting. Campaign-based initiatives, including celebrity appearances, influencer partnerships, teaser promotions, and film-specific marketing activations, were identified as particularly impactful in stimulating audience participation and ticket sales. The audience survey aligns with this managerial assessment, as 55.5% of respondents reported that publicity influenced their attendance either "very strongly" or "strongly," underscoring the persuasive role of integrated communication in shaping cinema-going behaviour.

However, the study also highlights important strategic gaps. Despite widespread reliance on social media, customer-retention channels such as email and SMS remain significantly underutilised, even though relationship-oriented communication has been shown to strengthen loyalty and repeat patronage in cultural and leisure industries (Baker and Kim, 2020). Similarly, the limited use of analytics-driven feedback systems suggests that cinema publicity is still more campaign-focused than insight-led. The variation in campaign outcomes across cinema houses also indicates that effectiveness is enhanced when digital and traditional tools are deployed synergistically rather than in isolation, consistent with Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) theory and findings from contemporary media marketing research (Šerić and Vernuccio, 2020).

The results offer empirical confirmation that publicity does not merely inform audiences but actively mediates motivation, social validation, and experiential anticipation all of which shape the decision to visit the cinema. The prominence of peer-influenced awareness pathways, particularly friends' recommendations and influencer endorsements, further emphasises the social nature of entertainment decision-making in digitally networked environments. By demonstrating convergence between managerial practices and audience responses, the study contributes evidence-based insights into how cinema organisations can optimise communication investments, strengthen brand-audience relationships, and enhance participation in an increasingly competitive leisure marketplace.

Directions for Future Research

Future studies may extend these findings in several ways. First, longitudinal research is needed to examine how evolving platform dynamics, algorithm changes, and content formats influence cinema engagement over time. Second, comparative studies across cities or countries would help establish whether the observed publicity effects are context-specific or generalizable across markets. Third, experimental or modelling-based designs could measure the causal impact of distinct publicity tools such as influencer campaigns, user-generated content, and loyalty-retention messaging on attendance behaviour. Finally, incorporating box-office and behavioural analytics would enable deeper insight into how awareness translates into conversion, repeat visits, and lifetime audience value.

STATEMENTS AND DECLARATIONS

I hereby declare that this research work titled Publicity Management in Nigerian Cinemas: An Audience and Managerial Perspective from Lagos and Port Harcourt Cinema Houses is my original work and has been carried out under the approved academic guidelines of the institution. This study has not been submitted, either wholly or in part, for the award of any degree or qualification in this or any other university or academic institution.

Conflicts of Interest / Competing Interests

The authors declare that there are no known financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, execution, analysis, or interpretation of this study. The research was conducted independently, and the findings reported in this article are free from competing interests that could reasonably be perceived as affecting objectivity.

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Ethical Approval and Consent to Participate

Ethical approval was not required for this study, as it involved non-invasive social research methods, including questionnaires administered to adult cinema-goers and interviews conducted with cinema managers in professional settings. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and no personally identifiable information was collected or reported. The study was conducted in accordance with accepted ethical standards for social science research.

Author Contributions

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo conceived and supervised the study, contributed to the conceptual framework, and reviewed the manuscript for intellectual content. Adetunji Mary Abosede conducted the data collection, performed the data analysis, interpreted the findings, and prepared the original draft of the manuscript. Both authors reviewed and approved the final version of the article and accept full responsibility for its content.

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