

Strategic Promotion of Malaysian Bangsawan Theatre: A Historical Analysis of its Golden Era in the Early 20th Century

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ABSTRACT

Malaysian Bangsawan theatre emerged from the global diaspora of modern opera and flourished across Southeast Asia from the 1860s to the 1940s. In Malaysia, it gained immense popularity which evolving into a major commercial entertainment industry. However, Bangsawan has experienced a significant decline and receiving a minimal attention. This decline is often attributed to shifting audience preferences and the advent of new media technologies such as television after World War II social media and many more. The factors do not fully explain the waning interest in Bangsawan theatre. This study explores the promotional strategies that contribute to Bangsawan's prominence during its golden era. Specifically, it analyses and justifies the promotional elements of Bangsawan through the AIDA model. Thus, it will encompass the attention, interest, desire, and action key factors that drove audience engagement including it sustainable to become a popularity in Malaya. By examining the printed ephemera from the period, this paper focuses on three selected sources of 16 samples from Eastern Daily Main and Malaya Tribune. Using qualitative methods applying conceptual studies that analyses historical promotional materials from selected years to uncover patterns in Bangsawan's marketing approach. The findings reveal a structured promotional framework comprising distinct phases: attraction, information, and emphasis. These promotional strategies play a pivotal role in shape the audience engagement and contributing to Bangsawan's widespread which appeal during its peak. Ultimately, this study provides empirical evidence of how strategic marketing efforts. Bangsawan's novelty become as the entertainment medium which influenced to success. The insights gained offer a deeper understanding of historical theatre marketing strategies and their impact on sustaining of the public interest.

Keywords: Bangsawan theatre, Malaysian theatre, theatre business, printed ephemera, theatre promotion strategies

INTRODUCTION

Background of The Study

Bangsawan is a significant genre within the Malay theatre tradition, emerging in the 19th century in Penang. It holds a unique position as a transitional theatre that bridging the gap between traditional forms such as Mak Yong, Menora, Wayang Kulit, and modern theatrical movements, including Sandiwara, Realism, and Experimental Theatre (Zuhra, 1992). Initially it introduced in Penang under the name Wayang Parsi, Bangsawan was performed by Indian merchants around the 1870s (Edrus, 1960). Soon after, this theatrical form was adopted by the Peranakan community in Penang by retaining the name of Wayang Parsi until approximately 1884 (Zuhra, 1992). However, the establishment of Malay Bangsawan is attributed to Mamak Pushi in 1885. He acquired theatrical equipment from a bankrupt Wayang Parsi troupe and subsequently formed Pushi Indra Bangsawan Pulau Pinang, recognized as the first professional Malay Bangsawan troupe (Bujang, 1975).

The narratives presented in Bangsawan performances encompassed a diverse range of influences, including Indian, Arabic, Western, Malay, and Chinese stories. These foreign performances were adapted into the Malay

language, incorporating localized stage pronunciations and character portrayals to resonate with local audiences (Zuhra, 1992). The Malay Bangsawan troupe under Mamak Pushi gained widespread popularity, pioneering mobile performances across Malaya, Singapore, and Sumatra, effectively attracting and captivating audiences (Bujang, 1975). The existence of Bangsawan encouraged the people of Malaya and Singapore who view the performances want to participate or directly be involve in the Bangsawan theatre. The involvement was substantial and enthusiastic. Many Bangsawan groups were established in both Malaysia and Singapore in the 20th century, both large and small in scale (Bujang, 1975). The number of Bangsawan groups grew significantly, leading to fierce competition. This competition was so intense that Bangsawan troupes with larger capital crossed the Straits of Malacca and the South China Sea to find new markets (Beng, 1997).

In the time, Sarawak was a politically, economically, and socially stable state, which making it to become a strategic location for Bangsawan groups from Malaya and Singapore, as it promised a great place for the economic opportunities (N. A. V. Abdullah, 2003). As Bangsawan was introduced in Sarawak, the theatre underwent from the three major phases which is “Bangsawan Tanah Melayu” to “Bangsawan Kampung,” then from “Bangsawan Kampung” to “Bangsawan 1980s,” and finally from the 1980s performances to the “Bangsawan Sarawak.” The factor that contributed to Bangsawan’s popularity was the uniqueness of Bangsawan Tanah Melayu staging this included its stories, costumes, tasmat, music, stage equipment, actors, dancers, and female singers. Bangsawan, therefore, became a highly profitable phenomenon, ensuring the survival of many troupes. This success was driven by the ambition to maintain the quality of performances and acting in the groups they represented.

Statement of Problem

At a time when television technology had not yet emerged, Bangsawan became a dominant form of entertainment. Its popularity was often attributed to being one of the few available theatrical experiences. However, its success was not solely due to the lack of alternative entertainment, but promotional efforts play a crucial role to attract the audiences. For instance, announcements featuring the performance lineup, story titles, and additional acts (extra turns) were publicised through the posters and loudspeakers (Abdul Samat Salleh, 2005). Some scholars argue that these extra turn performances were key in attracting spectators (Shaikh Razak, 2015).

There is a lack of concise and comprehensive factual documentation regarding the promotional strategies that contributed to the rise and widespread popularity of Bangsawan theatre, especially in attracting audiences from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In fact, various opinions and uncertainties surround the key factors that fuelled Bangsawan’s prominence. Despite extensive research and literature reviews, there is no specific or in-depth study on the promotional aspects of Bangsawan has been found. One of the critical gap in existing the research is the absence of discussions that explicitly establish promotion as a driving force behind Bangsawan’s success in the Malay Peninsula. Most of the previous studies has primarily focused on theatrical performance elements, leaving promotional strategies largely unexplored. To fully understand the phenomenon of Bangsawan’s immense popularity during its golden era. It is essential to investigate the promotional techniques that captivated audiences and sustained their interest in the theatre.

Research Question

To address this question, what empirical evidence supports the claim? Which become a specific promotional element that can effectively captured the attention, interest, desire, and actions of audiences, ultimately contributing to the enthusiastic reception of Bangsawan performances. If the widespread appeal of Bangsawan were based solely on the stories performed, it would raise the significant questions, as Malaysia lacks the proper documentation of Bangsawan productions from that era. Furthermore, Bangsawan was not considered as a low-cost form the entertainment that accessible to all people, as ticket prices were relatively high. This indicates that Bangsawan’s promotional efforts must have been compelling enough to reflect the value of the performance as a premium entertainment product. During Bangsawan’s golden age, advertising ephemera and newspaper articles served as primary promotional tools, as mass media technology had not yet emerged. Therefore, the strategic display of promotional materials played a crucial role in attracting of the potential audiences. What were the key promotional strategies that successfully attracted spectators? By tracing the

trajectory of Bangsawan's emergence, rise, peak, decline, and its survival into the present day, it shows the evidence that while Bangsawan Theatre still exists, and is no longer enjoys by the same enthusiastic reception as before.

Research Objectives

This research aims to investigate the promotional strategies that played a pivotal role in elevating Bangsawan Theatre to prominence during its golden era. By utilizing the AIDA model as a framework, the study analyses on the effectiveness of the strategies to captivating and retaining of the audience interest. Additionally, it seeks to identify the key to the promotional elements which contributed to the theatre's widespread appeal and long-last popularity across Malaya. In the historical examining context, this research also examines on how Bangsawan's marketing approaches shaped audience reception, influenced public perception, contributed to the commercial viability of the theatre, and offering valuable insights into its enduring cultural significance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The origins and evolution of Bangsawan theatre has been widely explored by a scholars, with many of the emphasising its diverse influences from both Western and Eastern theatrical traditions. Bujang (1975) traces its lineage to Greek, Roman, and European drama while also acknowledging its development in India through the traditions such as Natyaveda and Natyasastra, which incorporated Hindu religious narratives. In the Malayan context, Bangsawan was linked to Persian Wayang, with early performances predominantly staged by Indian actors. These actors introduced fantastical narratives enriched with elaborate visual elements that helped transcend linguistic barriers that makes Bangsawan an accessible and multidimensional theatrical form that integrated music, singing, and dance (Bujang, 1975).

Expanding on this, Nasuruddin (2000) asserts that Bangsawan was introduced to Malaya in the 1870s in Penang, evolving from Persian and Mendu puppetry traditions. The adaptation of Persian performance techniques such as structured narrative frameworks and the use of stage curtains suggests a direct influence on Bangsawan's conventions. Similarly, Abdul Samat Salleh (2005) and Bujang (1989b) argue that Bangsawan originated from Persian theatre, which was introduced to Malaya via Bombay. Initially performed in Indian languages, Bangsawan transitioned through Hindustani before finally being adapted into Malay, a linguistic evolution that facilitated its widespread acceptance in the 1930s. Despite, these adaptations of the structural and performative elements of Bangsawan remains deeply rooted in Persian theatrical traditions. Bujang (1989b) further examines Bangsawan's dramatic style and explore of socio-historical factors contributing to its eventual decline which highlighting the crucial role of plot construction, character development, and dialogue in shaping of the theatrical experience.

Camoens (1982) provides additional insights into Bangsawan's transformation by analysing its relationship with Wayang Parsi and Malay comedy between 1887 and 1895. His work suggests that Bangsawan gradually assimilated into Malay cultural identity which become a process for the further evidenced by its sustained popularity over several decades. Similarly, Abdul Latif Abu Bakar (1982) state the contributions of Rahman Mat, a prominent Bangsawan tauke (theatre owner), whose success in managing the Nooran Opera Group between 1936 and 1952 played a significant role in sustaining Bangsawan's presence in Malaya. Other oral history accounts, such as those by Noraza Hj. Abdul Aziz (2004), offer firsthand perspectives on Bangsawan's cultural impact through interviews with esteemed performers like Aminah Nani. Meanwhile, Beng (1997) examines the structural transformations of Bangsawan from the late 19th century to the early 1980s, linking these changes to broader socio-cultural developments in Malaysia. His research highlights Bangsawan's defining characteristics, including its plot structures, character archetypes, costumes, dialogue, and stage settings.

While these studies provide substantial historical and structural analyses, they primarily focus on Bangsawan's artistic, cultural, and diasporic influences. Several scholars, including Iskandar (1989) and Arybowo et al. (2008), also highlight the role of political systems and state interventions in shaping Bangsawan's trajectory.

However, a critical aspect remains largely unexplored such as the role of promotional strategies in sustaining Bangsawan's prominence. The rises of entertainment industries including Western theatre, cinema, and commercial performance arts were heavily influenced by promotional techniques. It is imperative to examine on how Bangsawan leveraged marketing strategies to maintain through its public engagement.

Despite its immense popularity in early 20th-century Malaya, little research has been conducted on the mechanisms that Bangsawan troupes employed to attract audiences, particularly through newspaper advertisements and other promotional ephemera. Although the researchers recognise of the widespread popularity of Bangsawan, there is a lack of in-depth analysis on how strategic marketing influenced its rise and decline. Addressing this gap, this study aims to explore the promotional strategies utilized by Bangsawan theatre, particularly through the lens of the model. By examining historical printed advertisements from Eastern Daily Mail, Straits Morning Advertiser, and Malaya Tribune. This research seeks to provide empirical insights into the role of marketing in shaping Bangsawan's theatrical success. By using this approach, the study not only expands the existing scholarship on Bangsawan theatre but also contributes to broader discussions on historical theatre marketing and audience engagement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative-conceptual studies using historical methodology, beginning with the selection of a research topic that aligns with the study's objectives. Following the identification of the topic, credible primary and secondary sources are systematically collected and critically examined for relevant evidence. Throughout this process, meticulous documentation is undertaken to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Subsequently, a rigorous critical analysis is conducted to evaluate the authenticity, reliability, and relevance of the 100 samples collected evidence. The next step involves organising and categorising the materials in a structured manner to enhance clarity and coherence. Once the data is systematically arranged, the findings are synthesised into a well-articulated and accessible narrative. This methodological process adheres to the fundamental steps of historical research, including heuristics (the identification and collection of sources), criticism (the evaluation of source credibility and validity), interpretation (the analysis and contextualization of historical data), and historiography (the structured presentation of findings). For this article, only 16 samples were cited as references for the study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

More than 500 sources of ephemera related to the old nobility from the 1910s to the 1930s have been identified through heuristic methods. These materials encompass such a various form of publicity, including publications from Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning, Straits Echo, The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile, and other periodicals. The verification process consists of two stages which is the external criticism and internal criticism. External criticism is employed to examine the outward attributes of the sources, particularly those containing terms such as Bangsawan, Malay Bangsawan, and Malay Opera. This step ensure that the study remains within its intended scope and objectives. Internal criticism evaluates the reliability and credibility of the content within the selected materials. From the initial 500 ephemera sources, a more in-depth analysis is conducted through internal criticism, leading to the selection of 100 materials deemed suitable for further examination. Refer in the Table 1.

Table 1: List of Ephemera Promotional Item

No.	Ephemera Promotional Item
1.	Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser, 23 July 1906, Page 2
2.	Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser, 20 July 1906, Page 2
3.	Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser, 24 August 1906, Page 4
4.	Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser, 28 July 1906, Page 4
5.	Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser, 25 July 1906, Page 4

6.	Straits Echo, 22 February 1907, Page 5
7.	Straits Echo, 7 February 1907, Page 5
8.	Straits Echo, 28 January 1907, Page 5
9.	Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser, 12 October 1907, Page 2
10.	Straits Echo, 6 February 1907, Page 4
11.	Straits Echo, 25 May 1909, Page 4
12.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 19 June 1909, Page 1
13.	The Straits Times, 4 June 1909, Page 8
14.	The Straits Times, 22 June 1909, Page 8
15.	The Straits Times, 27 May 1909, Page 8
16.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 31 May 1909, Page 1
17.	The Straits Times, 14 June 1909, Page 8
18.	The Straits Times, 11 July 1910, Page 8
19.	Straits Echo, 30 December 1911, Page 2
20.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 28 August 1911, Page 1
21.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 22 August 1911, Page 1
22.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 29 July 1912, Page 1
23.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 27 May 1912, Page 1
24.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 22 April 1912, Page 1
25.	Malaya Tribune, 27 June 1914, Page 1
26.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 14 December 1914, Page 1
27.	Malaya Tribune, 26 June 1914, Page 1
28.	The Straits Times, 15 March 1915, Page 8
29.	Malaya Tribune, 16 March 1915, Page 1
30.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 15 March 1915, Page 1
31.	The Straits Times, 16 March 1915, Page 8
32.	Straits Echo, 10 January 1916, Page 5
33.	Straits Echo, 11 January 1916, Page 3
34.	The Straits Times, 17 April 1917, Page 5
35.	The Straits Times, 13 August 1917, Page 7
36.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 28 May 1918, Page 2
37.	Straits Echo, 29 May 1918, Page 2
38.	Malaya Tribune, 25 July 1919, Page 6
39.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 19 November 1920, Page 2

40.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 22 October 1920, Page 4
41.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 18 November 1920, Page 4
42.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 21 July 1920, Page 5
43.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 17 July 1920, Page 5
44.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 31 July 1920, Page 4
45.	Malaya Tribune, 19 January 1920, Page 6
46.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 16 July 1920, Page 2
47.	Malaya Tribune, 22 February 1921, Page 6
48.	Malaya Tribune, 22 June 1921, Page 6
49.	The Straits Times, 12 September 1921, Page 6
50.	Malaya Tribune, 21 February 1921, Page 9
51.	The Straits Times, 14 February 1922, Page 6
52.	The Straits Times, 9 January 1923, Page 6
53.	Malaya Tribune, 5 October 1923, Page 5
54.	Malaya Tribune, 4 October 1923, Page 5
55.	The Straits Times, 3 December 1923, Page 7
56.	Malaya Tribune, 22 January 1923, Page 5
57.	The Straits Times, 14 March 1923, Page 7
58.	The Straits Times, 4 September 1923, Page 6
59.	Malaya Tribune, 14 March 1923, Page 5
60.	Malaya Tribune, 3 September 1923, Page 5
61.	Malaya Tribune, 4 September 1923, Page 5
62.	The Straits Times, 22 January 1923, Page 6
63.	Malaya Tribune, 23 January 1923, Page 8
64.	Malaya Tribune, 13 March 1923, Page 5
65.	The Straits Times, 24 January 1923, Page 6
66.	Kabar Slalu, 4 March 1924, Page 5
67.	Kabar Slalu, 21 April 1924, Page 7

68.	Malaya Tribune, 20 October 1924, Page 8
69.	Malaya Tribune, 17 June 1925, Page 5
70.	Malaya Tribune, 7 December 1926, Page 9
71.	Malaya Tribune, 17 August 1926, Page 4
72.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 14 January 1927, Page 7
73.	Malaya Tribune, 1 August 1927, Page 7
74.	Malaya Tribune, 30 July 1927, Page 7
75.	The Straits Times, 5 August 1927, Page 6
76.	The Straits Times, 5 October 1927, Page 6
77.	Malaya Tribune, 5 August 1927, Page 7
78.	The Straits Times, 3 September 1927, Page 6
79.	The Straits Times, 4 June 1927, Page 6
80.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 8 November 1928, Page 7
81.	Malacca Guardian, 2 July 1928, Page 3
82.	Pinang Gazette and Straits Chronicle, 10 November 1928, Page 2
83.	Malaya Tribune, 29 August 1929, Page 11
84.	Malaya Tribune, 30 December 1929, Page 11
85.	Straits Echo, 4 February 1910, Page 4
86.	The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser (1884-1942), 28 August 1911, Page 1
87.	Malaya Tribune, 24 January 1930, Page 12
88.	Malaya Tribune, 13 January 1930, Page 11
89.	The Straits Times, 23 January 1930, Page 8
90.	Malaya Tribune, 10 January 1930, Page 11
91.	Malaya Tribune, 4 February 1930, Page 11
92.	Malaya Tribune, 3 February 1930, Page 11
93.	The Straits Times, 4 February 1930, Page 9
94.	Malaya Tribune, 5 February 1930, Page 11
95.	Malaya Tribune, 6 February 1930, Page 11

96.	The Straits Times, 29 July 1925, Page 7
97.	The Straits Times, 10 July 1925, Page 8
98.	The Straits Times, 26 September 1925, Page 7
99.	The Straits Times, 28 September 1925, Page 7
100.	The Straits Times, 7 May 1925, Page 7

Source: Singapore NewspaperSG

Table 1 shows the advertisements and promotional materials for Bangsawan theatre were widely circulated through several prominent newspapers of the time, reflecting the regional reach and popularity of the performances. The publications such as the *Eastern Daily Mail*, *Straits Morning Advertiser*, *Straits Echo*, *The Straits Times*, *The Singapore Free Press*, *Mercantile Advertiser*, *Malaya Tribune*, *Pinang Gazette*, *Straits Chronicle*, *Malacca Guardian*, and *Kabar Slalu* play a crucial role in disseminating information about upcoming shows. These newspapers, spanning across Singapore, Malaya, and Penang, indicate a well-established promotional network targeting diverse audiences from local Malay communities to British colonial elites and other ethnic groups. The widespread coverage suggests that Bangsawan was not only become a significant form of entertainment but also a cultural phenomenon that captivated audiences across different regions.

The frequency and distribution of Bangsawan theatre advertisements from 1906 to the 1930s reveal of the significant trends in promotional activity, reflecting the evolving popularity of this traditional performance art. The data shows a steady increase in advertisements from 1906, reaching a peak between 1909 and 1923 which become a period coinciding with the golden age of Bangsawan theatre. This surge suggests growing audience demand and a thriving industry supported by active promotions across major newspapers. However, a noticeable decline in advertisements during the late 1920s and early 1930s indicates a potential shift in entertainment preferences, with the rising influence of cinema providing a modern alternative to live theatrical performances. Additionally, economic challenges such as the Great Depression may have further impacted on the theatre attendance and the financial viability of Bangsawan productions, leading to reduced promotional efforts in the press.

The promotional strategies employed in Bangsawan theatre advertisements reflects a calculated approach to audience engagement and visibility. One key strategy is the repetition of advertisements across multiple newspaper issues, reinforcing audience awareness and maintaining interest in upcoming performances. Additionally, the strategic page placement often on prominent pages such as 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 has ensured of the maximum exposure to readers, increasing the likelihood of capturing potential theatregoers' attention. The language is used in these promotions also plays a crucial role in drawing audiences, with phrases like "New Play," "To-Night," "Grand Performance," and "Special Attraction" deliberately chosen to create excitement, a sense of exclusivity, and urgency. This combination of repeated visibility, prime newspaper positioning, and compelling language highlights the sophisticated marketing efforts behind Bangsawan theatre's enduring appeal during its peak years.

The widespread appearances of Bangsawan theatre advertisements across multiple newspapers indicates that performances were staged in various theatres across key regions, including Singapore, Penang, Malacca, and Kuala Lumpur. This geographical spread suggests that Bangsawan was not confined to a single city but was a thriving entertainment form with a broad and diverse audience. Furthermore, the recurring listings in different publications which imply the traveling theatre troupes as a common practice, moving from one location to another just to reach the new audiences. This mobility reflects the dynamic nature of Bangsawan performances by allowing troupes to sustain of the popularity and adapt to regional demand while fostering cultural exchange across the Malay Peninsula.

The extensive presence of Bangsawan theatre advertisements in English language newspapers highlights its broad appeal beyond the Malay community which attracting a diverse audience including the British colonial elites and other ethnic groups. This suggests that Bangsawan was not only a popular form of local entertainment but also a cultural bridge that reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of colonial society. The sustain promotional efforts over several decades further emphasise that Bangsawan's significance as more than just theatrical entertainment. It was a vital medium of artistic expression, storytelling, and social commentary. Furthermore, its endurance in the public sphere attests to its role in shaping the cultural identity of colonial Malaya which preserving of the traditional narratives while adapting to evolving on the audience expectations. This dataset of ephemera promotional materials provides a crucial insight into how Bangsawan theatre was marketed, perceived, and consumed during the early 20th century. The findings reflect a dynamic and evolving entertainment industry with using the strategic distribute the information through the newspaper placements, repetition, and urgency-driven language to attract audiences. This collection serves as a valuable historical record of the rise and transformation of performing arts in Malaya.

This model provides a structured approach to understanding how ephemera materials engage audiences. The findings reveal that attention is primarily drawn through the typography used in the ephemera. Analysis indicates that two main font styles serif and sans-serif are utilized. However, not all Bangsawan theatre ephemera incorporate both of the styles some feature only one. The second factor interest is assessed by investigating the motivations that drive audiences to attend Bangsawan theatre performances. The study identifies that audience interest is influence by the strategy of the production team emphasises the unique attributes of Bangsawan theatre in their promotional materials.

The analysis of Desire and Action focuses on the effectiveness of taglines and persuasive elements in ephemera which encourage of the attendance of Bangsawan theatre performances. By examining the language and marketing techniques was used. The study determines on how of these materials successfully evoke curiosity and compel audiences to participate in these cultural events. In conclusion, this study highlights the role of ephemera as a crucial medium in promoting Bangsawan theatre during the early 20th century. Through the AIDA model, the research provides insight into how historical publicity materials engaged audiences and contributed to the legacy of Malay theatrical traditions.



Figure 1 Eastern Daily Mail and Straits Morning Advertiser, 1906 – 1907

Retrieved Source: National Library Board Singapore (2024)

The collection of ephemera sourced from the *Eastern Daily Mail* and *Straits Morning Advertiser* demonstrates on how strategic linguistic techniques were employed to attract audience attention, aligning with the first stage of the attention principle. One of the most effective methods used is the deliberate use of capital letters, which enhances visibility and creates a strong visual impact. A Words like "ARRIVE! ARRIVED!" is used immediately to stand out, sparking curiosity and compelling readers to seek more information about the announcement. This approach is particularly effective in the printed media, where the words is bold

typography can differentiate key messages from surrounding text. Repetition is another technique that reinforces urgency and importance. The phrase "TO-NIGHT! TONIGHT!!" not only emphasizes the immediacy of the event but also psychologically engaging the audience, prompting them to act. The repetition of words with increasing a punctuation further intensifies the dramatic appeal, making the message more persuasive.

Additionally, comparative and superlative language is employed to build anticipation and convince potential attendees of the performance's quality. A phrases like "STRONGER THAN EVER" suggest improvement and excellence, by implying that this production surpasses on the previous ones. This not only attracts on the returning audience members but also persuades new attendees by assuring them of an elevated entertainment experience. Overall, the strategic use of typography, repetition, and persuasive phrasing in these ephemera serves as an effective mechanism to capture attention, ensuring that promotional materials stand out and engage potential audiences.

Next, in the Interest aspect, these ephemera leverage elements of attraction through phrases such as "WAYANG PUSI", which have the potential to arouse curiosity, particularly if they refer a distinctive or captivating form of performance art. Furthermore, the phrase "ENTIRELY NEW PLAY" serves as a strong incentive for audiences seeking fresh and innovative entertainment experiences. This wording reassures to the potentially attendees that the production is not a mere repetition of past performances but offers something distinct and original. The emphasis on "new" suggests an updated storyline. A reimagined performance style or an introduction of novel theatrical techniques makes it particularly appealing to returning audiences who desire variety and exclusivity in their viewing experiences. By leveraging cultural intrigue and the promise of originality, these ephemera effectively generate audience interest, ensuring that potential attendees feel compelled to learn more about the event and consider attending the performance.

The Desire aspect is evident in phrases such as "New Faces. New Dresses. New Scenery." The repetition of "New" strategically reinforces the idea of a fresh and dynamic experience which appealing to diverse audience segments. "New Faces" taps into the audience's curiosity about the cast, suggesting the introduction of talented performers who bring renewed energy and interpretation to the production. This appeals to theatregoers who seek variety and enjoy witnessing emerging or celebrated actors. "New Dresses" extends beyond traditional theatre enthusiasts to captivate fashion conscious spectators eager to admire intricate costume designs, reflecting changing styles and artistic craftsmanship. "New Scenery" words are used to enhances the visual spectacle of the performance by attracting those who appreciate stage aesthetics and of the set design. The promise of updated scenography suggests a richer more immersive experience that enhances storytelling. Additionally, the phrase "Our own Orchestra of Clever Musicians" further amplifies of the audience desire by underscoring the uniqueness and exclusivity of the musical component. The possessive phrase "Our own" instils a sense of pride and authenticity, implying that the production boasts a dedicated, in-house musical ensemble. The use of "Clever Musicians" serves as an endorsement of their skill and artistry, positioning them as highly talented performers whose expertise is worth witnessing. This phrasing appeals to music enthusiasts and reinforces the overall prestige of the event. By emphasizing novelty, exclusivity, and artistic excellence, these ephemera effectively cultivate audience desire, transforming initial curiosity into a compelling urge to attend the performance.

Finally, in the Action aspect, the ephemera employ linguistic strategies that prompt immediate audience engagement. The phrase "To-Night! Tonight!!" serves as a direct call to action, urging potential spectators not to miss the performance. Similarly, "Prices as Usual" alleviates any hesitation by assuring audiences that ticket prices remain consistent with previous shows, reinforcing their confidence in attending. Moreover, the phrase "We want you to judge yourselves" subtly challenges the audience to evaluate the quality of the performance firsthand, creating a psychological nudge that encourages them to attend and form their own opinions. This element was not only to sustains of the interest but also compels audiences to take immediate action. In conclusion, these ephemera effectively employ the AIDA model in capturing attention, generating interest, stimulating desire, and driving audience action. The combination of persuasive language with compelling visual and emotional appeal ensures that the production garners the expected reception.



Figure 2 Malaya Tribune, 1914 -1919 Malaya Tribune, 1914 -1919

Retrieved Source: National Library Board Singapore (2024)

Building upon the attention aspect of the AIDA model, the strategic use of bold, capitalized words such as "The International Opera Co." instantly commands the reader's focus, creating the impression of a globally recognized and prestigious theatrical company. The term "International" reinforces the idea of a large-scale, high calibre production, elevating the perception of Bangsawan theatre as a refined and esteemed art form. This choice of wording lends credibility and sparks curiosity about the performers and performances being promoted. Similarly, names like "Star Opera" and "Grand Opera Co." serve as powerful attention-grabbing tools. The word "Star" evokes images of celebrated actors and top-tier talent, appealing to audiences who appreciate the artistry of Bangsawan performers. Meanwhile, "Grand Opera Co." emphasizes the scale, magnificence, and elegance of the production, aligning with the expectations of theatregoers seeking an extraordinary experience. These descriptive terms "International," "Star," and "Grand" function as persuasive marketing elements, drawing in potential spectators by promising quality and exclusivity.

Beyond the company names, the advertisements employ high-impact phrases like "To-night! To-night!!", "Look Out!", "Grand Opera!", and "Special Programme" to further capture the reader's attention. The repetition and punctuation in "To-night! To-night!!" create an immediate sense of urgency, compelling audiences to act swiftly before missing out on a one-night-only spectacle. These linguistic choices reflect a deliberate promotional strategy designed to generate excitement, heighten anticipation, and ensure that Bangsawan theatre remains a captivating entertainment option. The emphasis on the word "tonight" reinforces the element of exceptionality, prompting immediate action. "Look Out!" serves as an exclamation that actively attracts attention, as if warning the reader that something important or interesting is happening. It creates curiosity and signals that something worth focusing on is unfolding.

Additionally, "Grand Opera!" refers to something large, magnificent, and extraordinary. The word "Grand" evokes luxury, elegance, and scale, appealing to those who appreciate high-class entertainment. Using "Grand" to describe opera elevates the performance, suggesting it is more than ordinary it is an exceptional and classy experience. "Special Programme" further implies uniqueness, indicating that the show offers something different and exclusive, sparking interest in what makes this event stand out from others.

The next aspect is *Interest*. The researcher identifies several elements in the ephemera material that attract interest, such as the name "Indra," which is associated with greatness and wisdom. This increases the reader's curiosity about the character, suggesting that they may play a significant role in the story. The name may also attract those interested in historical, mythological, or aristocratic narratives. Meanwhile, "Njai" is a title for a woman who plays an important role in social or cultural contexts often in traditional or historical stories. "Njai Dacima" appeals to readers interested in local culture or folklore, sparking curiosity about her role and background. The word "Princess" quickly attracts interest because it implies royalty, power, and high social status, promising a story full of intrigue and excitement. The name "Sheher Arief" adds a sense of uniqueness and exoticism, arousing further interest in this character's role and the conflicts she faces.

The final aspect is *Action*. This refers to the actions readers are encouraged to take after encountering the ephemera. Phrases such as “To-Night! To-Night!” and “Commencing from Sunday, July 27th,” along with “Phone 1368 for seats,” serve as urgent calls to action. “To-Night! To-Night!” suggests that the event is only happening that night, making it seem like an opportunity not to be missed. By providing a clear date “Sunday, July 27th” the ad offers specific direction, helping the reader plan and act accordingly. Additionally, “Phone 1368 for seats” is a direct, clear call to action, offering an easy and immediate way to secure tickets. This makes it simple for readers to act without hesitation, ensuring they can quickly reserve their seats.

Overall, these phrases are designed to encourage quick and effective action, ensuring that readers act immediately. “To-Night! To-Night!” creates urgency, “Commencing from Sunday, July 27th” provides clear timing, and “Phone 1368 for seats” offers practical instructions for booking. This combination encourages readers to take swift action, ensuring they do not miss the chance to attend the event.



Figure 3 Part of Research Findings: Strategic Formulation of Ephemera in Promoting Bangsawan Theatre During Its Golden Era

Source: Muhammad Azman Masri (2024)

CONCLUSION

This study has provided an in-depth on the analysis of the promotional strategies that contributed to the success of Bangsawan theatre during its golden era. By examining historical ephemera through the AIDA model, it has been established that Bangsawan’s marketing approach was highly structured and strategically designed to attract and sustain audience engagement. The findings reveal that elements such as bold typography, persuasive language, and urgency-driven phrases play a crucial role in capturing public attention. Additionally, the emphasis on diverse actors, extravagant stage designs, and special performances (extra turns) served as major crowd-pullers, ensuring continues audience interest.

The research highlights the effectiveness of promotional materials in positioning Bangsawan as a prestigious and must-see entertainment spectacle. Clear and transparent ticket pricing reinforced a sense of exclusivity while encouraging immediate action from potential spectators. The study also underscores on how Bangsawan theatre successfully blended local and international cultural elements, making it appealing to a broad and diverse audience across Malaya and beyond.

Despite its historical significance, Bangsawan has experienced a decline in contemporary times, partly due to the rise of new media and shifting entertainment preferences. However, the insights gained from this study demonstrate that strategic promotional efforts were instrumental in sustaining its popularity. By understanding these historical marketing techniques offers valuable lessons for contemporary performing arts, emphasizing the importance of effective audience engagement and targeted promotional campaigns.

In conclusion, Bangsawan theatre was not only a cultural phenomenon but also a testament to the power of strategic promotion. By leveraging persuasive marketing techniques, Bangsawan troupes successfully

positioned their performances as premium entertainment, sustaining their appeal for decades. This study contributes to the broader discourse on theatre marketing history and offers a framework for reviving interests in traditional performing arts through innovative and historically informed promotional strategies.

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