

ART AND NATION-BUILDING IN ALIBABA’S COMEDY

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Article History

Received: 23 July 2026 | Accepted: 28 July 2026 | Published: 03 Aug 2026

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.21769578](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21769578)

ABSTRACT

This research examines the role of Atunyota Alleluya Akpobome (Ali Baba) in the professionalization of Nigerian stand-up comedy and its evolution into a medium for socio-political engagement. Since the early 1990s, Ali baba has transformed comedy from a low-status craft into a multibillion-naira industry that serves as a tool for national economic development and youth empowerment. Utilizing a qualitative research design involving ethnographic case studies and in-depth interviews, the study investigates how Ali Baba achieves "socio-aesthetic harmony"—the marriage of artistic beauty with functional social commentary. Here, the content, techniques, and context of Alibaba's works are examined. By breaking the fourth wall and employing techniques like spontaneity and improvisation, he fosters a dialogic environment that integrates the audience into the performance. This interaction facilitates functional laughter, where humor is not merely shallow amusement but carries pedagogical and moral values. Ultimately, the research concludes that Ali Baba’s artistry has elevated stand-up comedy into a communal and therapeutic art form that reflects and influences the Nigerian socio-political landscape.

Keywords: Ali Baba, Stand-up Comedy, Socio-aesthetic Harmony, Audience Dynamics, Nigeria, Performance Aesthetics.

Introduction

Atunyota Alleluya Akpobome, professionally known as Ali Baba, is the pioneer and front-runner of the modern Nigerian stand-up comedy industry, having emerged in the early 1990s. Before his arrival, comedic performers were often viewed as low-status jesters or clowns; Ali Baba revolutionized this perception by professionalizing the craft, famously declaring through billboards that “comedy business is serious business”. His work transformed comedy from unorganized jesting into a

multibillion-naira industry that serves as a tool for national economic development and youth empowerment.

In Nigeria, as established earlier, comic actors migrated from the Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre to Celluloid in the late 50s through 80s, a period designated as the golden age of Nigerian cinema. The age of home video films was ushered in when the celluloid tradition collapsed as a result of production costs, technical difficulties, and economic crisis. The rise of stand-up Comedy in Nigeria was aided by the financial success of home video films. When Stand-up Comedy first started, it had no formal structure and was considered a recreational activity or, at most, the occupation of the downtrodden.

After that, Nigerian Stand-up Comedy entered a golden age with a thriving industry. The golden age of comedy in Nigeria was predicated upon the reality of life. Life and living had become complex. There was tension all around because of multifaceted anti-social activities. The need to escape from the unpalatable reality that had created a tensed atmosphere necessitated laughter to provide desired panacea and relief. It was, therefore, a fertile ground for the emergence of Stand-up Comedy. This is in consonance with the principle of indispensability of tension and relief in the human society that asserts that much as there is existence of tension, there is a need for relief which can be provided by laughter. This is the significance and functionality of laughter. It agrees with Morreall (1982) and Brain (2004), who stood on Bergson's opinion in evaluating the roles and functions of laughter in society. According to Morreall, however, "we save a certain amount of psychic energy in all laughter situations, energy that is usually employed for some psychic purpose, but which turns out not to be needed." Laughter is the release of this excess energy." (p. 131).

Atunyota Alleluya Akpobome (Ali Baba,) was the pioneer of this phase. Comedic performers expanded in popularity throughout the home video cinema era. This breakthrough inspired Ali Baba to elevate Stand-up Comedy, which had previously seemed virtually unnoticed Nigeria's popular culture has given stand-up comedy a positive reputation as a performance genre. In addition to religious institutions, it is popular on social media, radio, television, audio devices, and the stage.

This paper is focused on the interplay of art and nation building in the content and practices of Ali Baba's comedy. It examines his performance aesthetics, the structure of his shows and his role in transforming an erstwhile pastime or frivolous entertainment into an industry that contributes its quota to the GDP of the country.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This research design includes an in-depth interview with the case subject, Ali Baba. The research also relies on qualitative data from 2020 interviews with industry veterans who provided context on Ali Baba's influence and the mechanics of the trade: These are Ayodeji Richard Makun (AY), Helen Paul,

Segun Ogundipe (LAFUP), Opa Williams, and Bunmi Davies. The major theoretical framework for this paper is socio-aesthetic harmony, a theory that encourages the use of aesthetic values or elements for societal commentary or action.

Literature Review

The study's primary analytical framework is anchored in Bergson's 'theory of laughter.' This is used to evaluate how Ali Baba's performances achieve a socio-aesthetic harmony—a combination of artistic beauty and functional social commentary. Bergson's theory explains how humor can provoke functional laughter, which carries pedagogical and moral values rather than providing shallow amusement.

Ali Baba himself, in his 2020 interview, provides detailed insight into audience dynamics, which involves adjusting language, diction, and content based on the status, class, and religious or political leanings of a specific audience. He explains that for upscale audiences like bank MDs, his jokes are "upscale," but he "scales the performance down" for general staff parties. He also notes that performing for legislators or international gatherings requires considering the environment, tribe, and nationality to ensure the humor is informed by education, awareness, and experience.

Mintz (1985) defines stand-up comedy as a meeting place and a social structure. Mintz argues that stand-up's roots are entwined with rites, rituals, and dramatic experiences, suggesting the form is more complex and socially integrated than a simple humorous encounter. Filani (2015), describes stand-up as a social structure revolving around the production and consumption of humorous narratives. Nwankwo (2014) is cited regarding the professionalization of the industry, Nwankwo's work frames how Alibaba transformed comedy into a serious business. The sources suggest this professionalization made comedy a viable tool for national economic development and youth empowerment in Nigeria.

Lesley (2011) explores the performer/audience relations as a tangible and satisfying expression of social interaction. The researcher uses this to show how breaking the "fourth wall" fosters dialogue and education within the community. Onyerionwu (2010) posits that stand-up comedy is essentially a stage art that shares striking similarities with core dramatic theatre. Like traditional drama, it utilizes visuals, histrionics, and characterization and places a premium on immediacy and spontaneity. The researcher notes that Ali Baba integrates Brechtian techniques by fusing the performance space with the auditorium. This deliberate breaking of the fourth wall allows him to engage in interactive conversations that make the audience feel like he is one of them, enabling him to deliver jokes at their expense while maintaining a pedagogical and moral focus. Ajaye (2002) Cited via Nwankwo (2014), Ajaye emphasizes the professional demand to be funny on demand regardless of your emotional state. This highlights the difficulty of making a group of people laugh and the necessity for comedians to adopt effective performance mechanisms to maintain audience interest.

While Jason (2000) notes that the performance component is the most distinctive feature of stand-up comedy as a comic subgenre, Ian (2008): defines stand-up as a conversation show, emphasizing an environment where the audience is free to respond, participate, and engage directly in the mediation process. Rao (2011) on the other hand, provides a formal definition of stand-up as a solo performer's purposefully humorous performance on a stage.

Ali Baba's Socio-Aesthetic Harmony

Ali Baba's comedic style is defined by several key artistic and technical mechanisms. The theoretical concept that best captures Alibaba's role in nation-building is socio-aesthetic harmony. His performances achieve a marriage of artistic beauty with functional social commentary, ensuring that his jokes are not merely shallow amusement but carry pedagogical and moral values that provoke functional laughter. The "harmony" in this framework is achieved by treating the audience as a collaborative partner rather than passive observers. This is accomplished through several means.

The first is by breaking the fourth wall; a hallmark of his stagecraft is the deliberate removal of the psychological barrier between the performer and the audience. By breaking this fourth wall, he creates a dialogic environment where the performance is conducted with the audience rather than just for them. Another aesthetic technique that has served Ali Baba socially is spontaneity and improvisation. Ali Baba is celebrated for his dexterity at being spontaneous, often creating jokes extempore as events unfold. This mastery of improvisation led him to establish the *Spontaneity Series*, a platform designed to train upcoming comedians in impulsive joke creation based on real-time audience interaction.

Another socio-aesthetic sensibility is his consciousness of audience dynamics. He employs a sophisticated understanding of audience psychology, tailoring his language, diction, and content to suit the specific status, class, and religious or political leanings of his listeners. For instance, he may use upscale jokes for corporate executives while scaling the performance down for a general staff party.

He also applies purely theatrical techniques. His comedy utilizes various dramatic elements, including characterization—where he switches roles and imitates different characters—and physical involvement, such as 'dragging' audience members or stage personnel into his narrative to enhance engagement.

Ali Baba's approach is well-informed; he studies audience psychology and audience theory to refine his stage presence. Ultimately, Ali Baba's artistry has elevated stand-up comedy in Nigeria into a communal and therapeutic art form that is deeply integrated into the country's socio-political landscape. Furthermore, his use of humor is linked to Bergson's incongruity theory of laughter, where juxtaposing imperfect human situations provokes a response. By combining these theoretical

underpinnings with professional stagecraft, Alibaba has transformed stand-up comedy in Nigeria into a communal and professionally rewarding art form.

Ali Baba's Contributions to the Emergence and Growth of Nigerian Stand-Up Comedy

The artistic pursuit that would later be known as Stand-up Comedy was made famous by Nigerian Masters of Ceremonies (M.C.), including John Chukwu, Tony St. Hyke, Femi Jaret, Bisi Olatilo, Femi Segun, Funsho Alabi, and a host of others. These are accomplished masters of ceremonies with a great sense of humour and creative potential. When Ali Baba first arrived in Lagos in the early 1990s, he was a gifted young man who tried to make a name for himself by using Opa Williams's comedy concert *-Night of a Thousand Laughs-* to showcase his wit and humour. As a result, he quickly rose to fame. The comedy concert provided Stand-up Comedy practitioner a perfect stage on which to debut and hone their skills. Ali Baba, a gifted and versatile stand-up comedian, visionary and resourceful, grabbed the opportunity to transform Stand-up Comedy in Nigeria into an extraordinary brand. He started by creating awareness that comedy business is a serious business. For the first time in the history of Stand-up Comedy in Nigeria, he created and installed large fanciful billboards at strategic locations in Lagos. The billboards bore the inscription "Comedy Business is a Serious Business". According to Ayakoroma, (2013:12):

But then, comedy did not become serious business until Alleluia Atunyota Akporobomeriere, (sic) alias, Ali Baba, a 1990 graduate of Religious Studies/Philosophy from then Bendel State University (now Ambrose Alli University), Ekpoma, came on the scene. He had done his first show in 1988, at the pavilion of then Bendel State University, Ekpoma, for a paltry fee of fifty naira only. Ali Baba dared the odds of negative public perceptions to have a breakthrough in comedy.

Professional comedians began to appear in the first wave during the era of "the travelling theatre." That generation of comedians included characters like James Iroha (Gringory), Chika Okpala (Zebrudaya), Usman Baba Pategi (Samanja), Moses Olaiya (Baba Sala), Sunday Omobolanle (Papiluwe/Aluwe), Kayode Olaiya (Aderupoko), Tajudeen Gbadamosi (Jacob), Ayo Ogunshina (Papa Lolo), and Afolabi Afolayan (Jagua) (Ayakoroma, 2013). Though these practitioners and others like them - Ayox Arisekola, Jaguar, James Iroha (Giringori), Laffomania Organisation a campus comedy group in the 90s, Tunji Sotimirin and others are essentially comedic dramatists - it is important to remember that their contributions helped Nigeria's Stand-up Comedy scene to grow and flourish. They made humor more widely accepted in society and acknowledged as a performance genre. This acceptance undoubtedly made Stand-up Comedy and comedy in general more popular among Nigerian audience and other performers (Ayakoroma, 2013).

The lack of commensurate financial reward, that plagued that generation's accomplishments and sacrifices, demoralized them. Their enthusiasm for their performances was what kept them going. This was the rationale behind most of them continuing to work at other jobs to augment their inadequate earning. According to Ayakoroma (2013), Moses Olaiya, for instance, kept taking on extra labor as a sanitation janitor even after he rose to fame as a comedian. The social standing that the same people who appreciated their art gave them was another disheartening element for this first generation of professional comedians. Back then, most people believed that comedy and theatre were only for the carefree, ignorant, and never successful people. Even though the first generation of comedians had a useful role in society, the same society that valued them so highly did not give them enough credit or a respectable social standing, even though they were appreciated for their ability to divert attention from the nation's serious socioeconomic and political problems. This was particularly true as the economy began to collapse in the 1980s and early 1990s (Olatunde, 2017).

Comedic acts in Nigeria gained momentum when technology introduced television programmes and, subsequently, home videos. There are more of these well-known and well-liked comedians among the populace. Still, these comedians' lives were unaffected financially. The next generation of professional comedians was aware of this trend, therefore, they skilfully repackaged comedy, made it compelling, and presented it to a society that was starting to accept the stand-up comedians as a legitimate form of entertainment.

According to Olatunde (2017), this generation of comedians can be referred to as the second generation. Leading the way was Ali Baba, who amassed a sizable fan base and substantial income for this generation of stand-up comedians. Because of their real-time, jaw-dropping jokes and captivating style, they managed to convince society that they should be paid handsomely for their humour and ability to make people laugh. Comedians of this generation were paid handsomely, sometimes even in hard currency, in contrast to their predecessors. They started solo and group performances that drew important members of the public for a hefty admission fee (Olatunde, 2017). Based on this researcher's observations, it was found that regular tickets to these shows cost N5,000, while VIP tickets cost between N50,000 and N100,000, not to mention tables that could seat multiple people. A lot of them even performed overseas, particularly in South Africa, the United States, and the United Kingdom, where they are paid in hard currency.

Well, I guess it is for someone else to say what he/she feels I contributed to the emergence of Stand-up Comedy in Nigeria. But to answer your question, I will say that Stand-up Comedy has existed on a low key before I came on board. What I did was to drastically change the narrative. The first generation of stand-up comedian were poorly remunerated and looked down upon by the society. I

changed all that when I came on board. I popularised, glamorised and commercialised the art. (IDI, 59 years Ali Baba, 2020).

He explains further what he meant by glamorising and popularising the Stand-up Comedy art in Nigeria:

When I came on the scene in 1989, I decided to do that and change it and I said if that was the only thing that I was going to do I would do it. Deciding that was the only thing that I was going to do meant that I had to take into cognisance a lot of elements, (1), it is not a sector that people had gone into, (2), there were no precedents, there were no leading examples of people who had done it except those ones that were mere jesters. There was no learning institution to learn how to do that. Like if you wanted to be a journalist, you will go read mass communication and go to school of journalism. Since we didn't have any of that, it meant we had to make the rules and break them, so it was hard to get combats who recognise that being a stand-up comedian was something that anyone needed to take as a career. I quite understand it early enough so I started looking at the indices and for me the indices meant it had to be a job/career, I had to get platforms to develop it....(IDI, 59 years Ali Baba, 2020).

Thus, what was hitherto a profession that was not lucrative and considered as mere parttime engagement was changed into a professional career well sought after by talented youth. It subsequently became so financially rewarding that parents started giving their blessing to their children to embrace.

The second generation of comedians' creative rebranding and packaging of their comedic acts played a pivotal role in the paradigm shift in the history of Stand-up Comedy in Nigeria. This is made possible by this generation because majority of them are graduates. To name a few, Atunyota Alleluya Akporobome (Ali Baba) studied philosophy and religion at the former Bendel State University; Gbenga Adeyinka and Kofi studied English and Chemistry respectively at the University of Lagos. Unlike the earlier generations, this generation of stand-up comedians' high incomes are reflected in their way of life. Many of them have millions of naira in investments, a fleet of fancy cars, and buildings in prime locations. According to Ayakoroma (2013), the generation of stand-up comedians in question has profited greatly from the Stand-up Comedy scene. Profits from several overseas engagements, the selling of comedy CDs, show tickets, event compère, and endorsements are some of these advantages. All these achievements are made possible through Ali Baba's goal getting spirit. Odutola (2013) lends support to Ayakoroma. She notes that Stand-up Comedy, which was once thought of as a recreational activity for the illiterate and unserious, has grown into a significant industry that offers a plethora of direct employment opportunities as well as support services. Its practitioners have become millionaires over the years.

Atunyota Alleluya Akpobome (Ali Baba), the pioneer of new Stand-up Comedy in Nigeria is credited with helping this generation of comedians enjoy a financial boom and social recognition. It is logically conclusive therefore, that it was Ali Baba's bold initiative that made Stand-up Comedy as lucrative and well sought after as it is in Nigeria today. Ali Baba's efforts are adequately rewarded. He broke the jinx of poverty hitherto associated with Stand-up Comedy. This is what Ara describes as building a foothold to exert control. (2017). He lives in his own house situated within an eyebrow community in Lagos and possesses expensive cars with customised registration numbers. He worked tirelessly to establish frameworks that will govern Stand-up Comedy as a profession and ensure that it garners appropriate compensation, as a leading figure in the second generation of Stand-up Comedy. Ali Baba rightfully earned the King of Nigerian new Stand-up Comedy title due to his enormous contributions to the societal acceptance and economic success of Nigerian' Stand-up Comedy and other associated issues with the expansion of the industry.

Additionally, Ali Baba pioneered content creation for the burgeoning industry upon which others after him built. He created jokes with different thematic preoccupations on which his junior colleagues constructed their jokes. He ensured the continuity of the industry even when it seemed its end was imminent. At a point comedian were recircling jokes and the entertainment value of the industry was diminishing. Ali Baba took a proactive step by creating a new window for generating novel jokes. This he launched with the establishment of *Ali Baba's Spontaneity* where comedians were stimulated to create jokes impulsively.

Evidently, as revealed in this study, the emergence of this second generation of stand-up comedians coincided with the widespread adoption of social media, which proved to be an extremely effective and unquestionably low-cost means of promotion and projection. The third generation of stand-up comedians in Nigeria originated from the second generation of comedians. The use of social media was optimised by the third generation. In actuality, a large number of them had entered the industry abruptly through social media without ever appearing on any platform, be it traditional or electronic media. Stand-up comedians like Brain Jotter, Woli Arole, Woli Agba, Sabinu, Josh 2Funny to name a few, are typical examples of these. This generation is also recognised for bringing humour into places of worship, particularly Pentecostal or new generation churches.

Stand-up Comedy is here to stay, having developed into a respected comedy subgenre and, no doubt, becoming its own distinct industry within the Nigerian entertainment sector over time, thanks to the efforts of the industry's pioneers who have helped to establish its distinctive styles and aesthetics, which have garnered recognition and rewards in line with them. Similar to other theatrical genres, Stand-up Comedy is a unique and vibrant art form that is present in almost every aspect of human existence. It is important to remember that Stand-up Comedy is a unique and dynamic art form that

cannot be overemphasised. The indispensability of laughter in nearly every human endeavor and life experience accounts for the importance of Stand-up Comedy. Given the plethora of opportunities available to stand-up comedians, it is understandable why this career path is likely to endure.

For example, according to Edward (2018:28), Ali Baba was only recently asked to create Stand-up comedy-specific courses for Lagos State University in Ojo. Designing and creating content for brands and institutions is another way stand-up comedian like Ali Baba can support themselves. Ali Baba's sharp sense of humor granted him access to the Nigerian president, where he engaged with the political elite and became associated with Olusegun Obasanjo's inner circle. A few years later, stand-up comedians Michael Ogbolosingha, Uche Ogbuagu, and Okey Bakassi, among others, were named Special Advisers on Culture, Tourism, and Entertainment, mostly because of their career aspirations. It also implies, in Edward's opinion, that the Stand-up Comedy business is thriving and well-supplied. Thanks to Ali Baba's creative efforts, partnerships, corporate conglomerates, telecom companies, international organisations and other private and public parastatals and agencies in Nigeria now view Stand-up Comedy as a legitimate tool for marketing their brands, products, services, and policies. This has led to the hiring of stand-up comedians as activists, promoters, faces or models for ads, and brand ambassadors. For example, Ali Baba represents Remi Martins as a brand ambassador. Among many others, Basket Mouth, AY, Gordons, Bovi, Funny Bone, Buchi, Akpororo, Francis Odega, and Dan D'Humourous have signed millions of naira contracts to serve as brand ambassadors for illustrious communication companies like MTN, Globacom, and Airtel. Their endorsement deals are thought to be far larger than their standard Stand-up Comedy shows and other social event artist fees (Edward 2018).

Ali Baba's Stand-up Comedy and Youth Employment

Ali Baba's Stand-up Comedy is beyond the provision of entertainment. It is beyond Ali Baba's economic consideration. Ali Baba wanted to positively influence his generation and make an industry out of Stand-up Comedy. He had the vision to make Stand-up Comedy lucrative and an enduring career. In order to accomplish the mission of his vision he devised and bathed *Ali Baba Spontaneity* and *Ali Baba January 1st Concert*.

Ali Baba Spontaneity and Ali Baba January 1st Concert

Ali Baba Spontaneity started in the first quarter of 2015. Its birth was predicated upon Ali Baba's desire to develop a new generation of comedians who could take Stand-up Comedy to the next level. It was at a stage in the industry when comedians were beginning to either copy one another or recycle old jokes. Monotony had set in and Ali Baba saw the need to rescue the industry by opening a new window of Stand-up Comedy art. He assumed, and rightly so, that the industry needed a new crop of

Stand-up comedians who could create jokes on the spur of the moment simply by relating with the audience (Davies, 2020: Interview).

Consequently, Ali Baba recruited talented and creative upcoming comedians via rigorous auditions. The hallmark of *Spontaneity* was to enhance creativity by being able to improvise jokes while the performance lasts. It started as a quarterly event, during which three finalists featured each quarter making a total of twelve participants every year. Later the number was reduced to three times yearly and a selection of four finalists each time. The reduction to three times was necessitated in order to cut costs as the show was getting too expensive to run. Ali Baba felt that what was worth doing at all was worth doing well, so he preferred to reduce the number of times/ quantities to reducing the standard/ quality of the show. It was discovered after some initial versions, some of the participants who had come for audition, from various parts of the country, expected funds for transporting themselves back. This unexpected development translated to unbudgeted financial commitment that had to be met. Therefore, the number of times logically was reduced. The social media plays a major role in creating awareness for the audition into the *Spontaneity* platform. According to Bunmi Davies: The event is widely publicised on social media and the text messaging method of information is efficaciously employed to invite would be participants for audition. Also, the “each one tell one” method of information was utilised where expedient. After successful editions of the show, it began to advertise itself. The trophy to be won also made the events popular among budding comedians and the general public (IDI, Male, 50 years Bunmi Davies, 2020)

Audition is vigorous, intellectually and physically tasking. The audition is in different phases which include:

1. Registration
2. Qualifying Audition
3. Short listing
4. Spontaneity proper
5. Announcement of results and declaration of winners.

Each of the segments has time frame. In order to instil discipline, late coming is frowned at and late comers severely sanctioned. Registration is simple and straightforward. The contestants give their real names, states of origin, phone numbers and email addresses. In order to facilitate fast and smooth registration many administrative staff are equipped with state of the arts laptops to register the teaming contestants that come yearly. The contestants are registered as soon as they arrive and allocated numbers. Discipline is well maintained but concessions are given people with peculiar cases (Davies, 2020: Interview). Qualifying auditions for past editions were rigorous and intellectually challenging. According to the producer Bummi Davies:

In the first year what we did was that the initial design was to have qualifying series every quarter. Being a yearly show, we had a qualifying quarter and from which we took three spontaneous comedians, but what we did at the beginning was that we took a whole day for the audition and another day for the event proper. But we found out that after that audition a lot of comedian were stranded, most of them were just struggling to get by, some came from Benin, Jos, Port Harcourt, Kaduna for that audition and had to go back. Initially those that qualified were made to stay overnight to participate in the show the next day. It was an expensive arrangement for the struggling comedians. Consequently, the audition and the show were done the same day. Though it was very demanding to the organisers, it was cost effective for the participants. Thus, audition was conducted in the morning and the show took place in the evening. Twelve finalists eventually emerge from the breath-taking audition to compete at *Ali Baba January 1st*. (IDI, 59 years Ali Baba, Male, 2020)

By implication, the audition serves dual functions. For all the participants, the auditions were training grounds for budding comedians as they get immediate feedback from expert judges on one the hand and on the other hand, help to determine those to be shortlisted. Those who do not make it to the qualifying stage are given the option of playing the audience as the audition continues. As such, they are able to learn the rudiments of the art.

Structurally, *Ali Baba Spontaneity* is anchored by two masters of ceremonies while the contestants make three appearances each to showcase their artistry. For each appearance they take turns to blind pick instructions from a box on what to create their jokes around. The contestants who were never less than twenty per quarter, were after their first appearance eliminated according to their performances until only three were left standing. Later when the show was reduced to three times per year, the same process culminated into the selection of four contestants per quarter. In both cases, twelve participants eventually emerge to slog it out at *Ali Baba January 1st Concert*.

Spontaneity, as discussed above, is the recruiting platform for *Ali Baba January 1st Concert*. It is the grand finale of the quarterly *Spontaneity* show where the overall winner gets the star prize. *Ali Baba Spontaneity* is the precursor to a segment of the *Ali Baba January 1st Concert*. The emergence of *Ali Baba January 1st Concert* was predicated upon the thought of starting the New Year with reflective, thought-provoking entertainment. According to Ali Baba:

From my experiences attending several concerts across the nation, I have found that they often follow the same format. At various points, different acts take the stage and go about their separate business. But I think Nigerians are entitled to so much more. Put another way, Nigerians ought to receive something unique and exceptional. The jokes that revolve on universally understood topics should, above all, amuse Nigerians. The topics will include politics, sports, and significant incidents that made news last year. IDI, 59, Male years Ali Baba, 2020)

By extension, the show was borne out of the need to organise a show that is out of the norms in comedy shows in the country. This dynamism was reflected in the contents and the avant-garde structure of the show. *Ali Baba January 1st Concert* comprises of multiple segments which include:

1. Pre-show
2. Grand finale of *Ali Baba Spontaneity*
3. Ali Baba's welcome performance
4. Musical interlude
5. Merit Awards Segment
6. Invited guests back-to-back
7. Announcement of the winner of Spontaneity and presentation of star prize
8. Music Star performance
9. Ali Baba's vote of thanks performance.

The pre-show is the curtain raiser where upcoming comedians who had not yet established themselves, but have potentials, perform while the audience are arriving and settling down. Thereafter, the show per se commences with the first appearance of the *Ali Baba Spontaneity* finalists. After the first appearance, the judges put head together for the first round of elimination.

In no particular order, the activities listed above come one after the other as the day dictates. What is however constant is that the appearances of the *Ali Baba Spontaneity* finalists are spread round the show activities in such a way that the announcement of results and presentation of trophy stand out as the highlights of the events of the day. Some of the show's highlights are the Scholarship Awards given to a select group of first-class university graduates and the Recognition Awards given to Nigerian pioneers. Its contents demonstrated this concert's vitality. *Ali Baba January 1st* starts by 6.00 P.M. has a pre-show session which is to give upcoming comedians and other performing artists the platform to showcase themselves.

The event featured invited comedians divided into two acts: The first group were to chronicle the important events of the previous year 2014 through their comedy acts, while the other twelve billed for the second act tagged "Roast and Toast" they were to do a review of distinguished people. The show featured comedians like Basket Mouth, Bovi, AY, Akpororo and Yaw and so on, as well as musicians like D'banj, Waje, Jaywon, Harry Song and Oritiselemi. The show also featured and celebrated people who were the first to achieve something great in their field, including university students who had first class who were given their first million. (Osae-Brown, 2014: Online)

Ali Baba January 1st Concert offers various degrees of tickets. There are regular tickets of six thousand (6,000) Naira, and VIP of twenty-five thousand (25,000) Naira, tables. Tables go for five hundred (500, 000) Naira, one million (1m) Naira, one million five hundred thousand (1.5m) Naira,

two million (2m) Naira and five million (5m) Naira. These ticket categories cater for the different economic strata in the country.

Recommendations

Ali Baba falls into the category of exemplary artists whose works organically merge their aesthetic capabilities with societal consciousness and impact. These are artists whose works are suitable for teaching artists and also fertile for analysis in the larger field of academia. Alibaba's artistry as a stand-up comedian should be a model for art students on how to apply their talents to the development of their nation.

Ali Baba's economic model and ambition for his art are also emulatable traits for burgeoning artists in Nigeria who struggle in a system bedeviled by several economic and systemic challenges. It is a genius blend of art and entrepreneurship that is typical to several trailblazers in Nigeria's cultural economy.

Ali Baba's January 1st and Spontaneity Concerts are landmark events in the development of stand-up comedy in Nigeria and instrumental to the formation of the careers of several comedians. These shows are also emblematic of Ali Baba's impact on his industry. Concerts like this, although powered by individual will, should be well supported and encouraged by the government through art councils and grants.

Conclusion

Ali Baba's Stand-up Comedy is an experimentation of the concept of socio-aesthetic harmony, as it marries aestheticism with functionalism. Ali Baba played a frontrunner role in the emergence of new Stand-up Comedy in Nigeria and transforms the art into a veritable tool for national economic development, youth empowerment, national recognition and glorification. His artistry and career are testaments to the age-long role of art in nation-building and politics.

This study also foregrounds comedy as an art that is so much more than entertainment but a means whose content and context can be geared towards social change. The intrinsic elements of comedy and the organization of its performances and industries should be tailored with the consciousness of nation-building in mind. That way, the comedian in training will be sensitized that he is just as valuable as any other professional in the welfare of a nation and its citizens.

Article Publication Details

This article is published in the [International Journal of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Studies](#), ISSN XXXX-XXXX (Online). In Volume 1 Issue 1 (July – Aug) 2026

The journal is published and managed by [IRPG](#).

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Acknowledgements

We sincerely thank the editors and the reviewers for their valuable suggestions on this paper.

Funding

The authors declare that no funding was received for this work.

Data availability

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The author(s) declare that it is not applicable.

Consent for publication

The author(s) declare that this is not applicable.

Competing interests

The author(s) declare that they have no competing interests.

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