

**Digital theatre in Nigeria: interrogating innovation, resistance,
and the pursuit of sustainable integration**

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Abstract

The Nigerian theatre scene is experiencing a significant transformation through the integration of digital technologies. This paper critically examines the implications, persistent obstacles, and potential pathways for this digital shift within Nigerian theatrical productions. It contends that while new media present considerable opportunities for creative expansion, broader audience reach, and enhanced global presence, their lasting and culturally-appropriate adoption is conditional upon effectively addressing critical issues such as chronic infrastructural deficits, skill discrepancies, and the potential erosion of traditional performance forms. Drawing on existing academic discussions and specific Nigerian case studies, this study provides a robust evaluation of relevant scholarly literature, contrasting diverse academic viewpoints on the intersection of technology and performance. It synthesises arguments concerning digital platforms, live streaming, multimedia scenography, and virtual technologies, thereby demonstrating how these elements fundamentally reshape theatrical conceptualisation, staging, and audience reception in Nigeria. Ultimately, the paper posits that a carefully considered and strategic integration, which prioritises equitable access and robust policy support alongside the preservation of cultural integrity, is essential for Nigerian theatre to fully leverage on the advantages of digital innovation without compromising its distinct identity.

Keywords: cultural preservation, digital theatre, new media, technological adoption, theatre challenges

Introduction

Historically, theatre in Nigeria has functioned as a vital cultural institution by serving as a reflection of societal values, struggles, and aspirations through performances. The development of theatre in Nigeria has consistently adapted to the environment, indigenous rituals, masquerade dramas and post-independence political commentary. In the contemporary digital era, this evolution still persists, and it is driven by advancements in technology. Digital tools and platforms are fundamentally reshaping how theatre is conceptualised, presented, and experienced within the nation.

Broadly, new media in the context of this paper refers to emerging digital and interactive technologies that redefine artistic expression and communication. These encompass live video streaming, virtual reality (VR), digital scenography, social media platforms, and real-time audience interaction. As these technologies permeate various sectors of Nigerian life, they also impact upon theatre. For instance, urban centres such as Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt are witnessing increased experimentation with digital projections, hybrid performances, virtual rehearsals, and online ticketing systems, thus indicating a new phase in the country's performance culture.

The incorporation of new media into theatrical practice, however, is not without its complexities. While this transition introduces novel creative opportunities and extends theatre's reach beyond physical boundaries, it simultaneously reveals deep-seated challenges. Issues such as unreliable power supply, limited internet access, the substantial cost of digital equipment, and insufficient training in new technologies threaten to impede progress. Furthermore, a significant concern centres on the potential for these digital trends to diminish or displace the traditional communal essence of Nigerian theatre.

Against the background of the foregoing, this paper critically investigates the extent of new media's influence on theatrical productions in Nigeria. It rigorously examines both the positive outcomes and the structural, economic, and cultural obstacles arising from this technological shift. Crucially, the study aims to illuminate the prospects for a lasting convergence between Nigeria's rich theatrical heritage and the extensive opportunities presented by digital media. This research poses a central question: How can Nigerian theatre meaningfully embrace digital formats while safeguarding its distinct cultural identity?

Review of related literature and theoretical framework

Academic discourses surrounding new media in theatre are extensive, with scholars grappling with their transformative potentials and inherent tensions. This section provides a critical review of relevant scholarly works, comparing and contrasting different perspectives on the conceptualisation, implications, and challenges of

digital integration in theatre performance. It also introduces the theoretical framework guiding the analysis.

Theoretical framework

To critically analyse the digital transformation in Nigerian theatre, this paper employs a dual-theoretical approach that draws on both Diffusion of Innovations Theory and key concepts from Performance Studies.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory - primarily articulated by Everett Rogers (1995) - provides a robust framework for understanding how new ideas, practices, and technologies spread through social systems. This theory posits that the adoption of an innovation is influenced by factors such as its relative advantage, compatibility with existing practices, complexity, trialability, and observability. In the context of Nigerian theatre, this framework allows for an examination of the various stages of digital media adoption, the characteristics of adopters (e.g., urban vs. rural practitioners), and the barriers to widespread diffusion, such as infrastructural deficits or lack of perceived compatibility with traditional methods. By applying this theory, we can move beyond simply identifying challenges to understanding why these challenges impede widespread adoption and how different segments of the theatrical community respond to technological change.

Complementing this, insights from Performance Studies - particularly concerning the concepts of "liveness" and mediation as explored by Philip Auslander (2008) and the taxonomies of performance and media by Bay-Cheng et al. (2015) - offer a critical lens for evaluating the aesthetic and cultural implications of digital integration. Auslander's work, which challenges simplistic notions of live presence in a media-saturated world, becomes crucial for analysing debates surrounding the "authenticity" of digitally mediated Nigerian performances. Bay-Cheng et al.'s framework provides a vocabulary for dissecting the various relationships between performance and media, allowing for a more precise analysis of how digital tools alter the fundamental nature of theatrical production and reception, moving beyond a mere description of their use. These theories together enable a critical assessment of both the practical mechanics of digital adoption and its deeper cultural consequences.

Conceptualising new media in theatre: evolution or disruption?

While there is a general understanding of "new media" as digital and interactive technologies that reshape communication, its specific application and implications within theatrical contexts are subject to debate. Steve Dixon (2007), in *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theater, Dance, Performance Art, and Installation*, offers a comprehensive historical overview. He frames new media as a continuous evolution rather than a radical break by emphasising its long-standing presence in performance through various technological advancements. This historical continuum suggests that digital tools are merely the latest iteration in a long line of technological integrations into theatre - from lighting advancements to

sound design. Similarly, Matthew Causey (2006), in *Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture: From Simulation to Embeddedness*, explores the progression from early simulations to more integrated digital experiences, proposing a continuum of technological engagement within performance. From this perspective, digital scenography or virtual rehearsals are logical extensions of traditional stagecraft.

However, other scholars, such as Hershey and Linda Friedman (2008), in "The New Media Technologies: Overview and Research Framework", focus more on the defining characteristics of contemporary new media, such as interactivity, networked communication, and digital manipulation, as distinct from traditional media forms. This distinction becomes critical when considering the genuinely disruptive nature of current digital innovations in theatre. For instance, while Dixon might view projected backdrops as a natural progression of scenography, a perspective like Hershey and Friedman's would emphasise the real-time, interactive, and networked possibilities afforded by contemporary digital tools, such as audience participation through social media or live-streamed performances that transcend physical space, setting them apart from earlier projection techniques. Joe Cote (2022) also defines new media broadly as emerging digital and interactive technologies, reinforcing the contemporary emphasis. The argument here is whether the current wave of digital tools constitutes a mere continuation of or a fundamental shift in theatrical production and reception, particularly in contexts like Nigeria where foundational infrastructure might lag behind technological aspirations.

Implications of digital technologies on theatric aesthetics and engagement: expanding reach and re-defining presence

The impact of new media on theatrical aesthetics and audience engagement is a central theme in academic discussions. Philip Ogundeji (2018), in "Innovations in Nigerian Theatre: A Survey of Multimedia Practices," provides specific examples from Nigeria. He notes that productions at institutions, like the University of Ibadan and the Lagos Theatre Festival, have incorporated digital projections and sound mapping to create immersive theatrical environments. This aligns with the broader argument that new media expands creative possibilities through multimedia projections, software-controlled lighting, soundscapes, and digital animations, thereby enhancing narrative delivery and audience immersion. Ogundeji's observations suggest a positive correlation between digital adoption and creative enhancement in the Nigerian context. However, Philip Auslander (2008), in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, offers a more critical perspective on audience engagement and the concept of "liveness" itself.

While acknowledging that live streaming, digital archiving, and interactive platforms broaden access to performances and facilitate active audience involvement, Auslander critically examines the concept of "liveness" in a mediatised culture. He contends that the tactile, communal experience of shared space and time (traditionally central to live theatre), may be diluted when performance is mediated through screens or pre-recorded content. This directly challenges the optimistic view

that new media simply "restructures" the spectator-performer relationship, suggesting instead a potential diminishment of a core theatrical attribute - the irreplaceable immediacy of shared physical presence. This critique is vital for Nigerian theatre where communal participation and the direct interaction between performers and audience are deeply embedded in traditional forms. While acknowledging the redefinition of public space and participation through digital performances Sarah Bay-Cheng et al. (2015) in *Performance and Media: Taxonomies for a Changing Field*, also contribute to this critical examination of how media alters the fundamental nature of performance, echoing Auslander's concerns about transformation, if not outright dilution.

Furthermore, new media is increasingly recognised as a potent tool for advocacy and cultural dialogue in theatre. Digital platforms effectively amplify the reach of theatrical performances that address social issues. Bay-Cheng et al. (2015) observe that virtual performances, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, became powerful tools for raising awareness on social justice issues, and facilitating transnational collaborations. This aligns with the Nigerian experience where theatre has historically served civic engagement and social commentary. Thus, while the aesthetic impact and the nature of "liveness" remain debated, the role of digital platforms in expanding theatre's communicative and advocacy functions is widely accepted.

Obstacles to digital integration: persistent structural and economic barriers

Despite the perceived benefits, a significant portion of the literature focuses on the substantial obstacles to integrating new media into theatre, particularly in contexts like Nigeria. Economic and skill barriers are frequently cited as areas of challenge. The introduction of complex media technologies often necessitates high production budgets and specialised technical professionals. This creates a significant hurdle for emerging theatre companies, potentially reinforcing existing inequalities within the industry, as they may struggle to afford the necessary equipment or personnel. This disproportionate financial burden can stifle innovation among smaller, independent troupes.

Infrastructural deficits, particularly in developing nations, emerge as a critical and often insurmountable hurdle. Patrick Ebewo and Mzo Sirayi (2015), in "The Role of Theatre in Cultural and Creative Industries in Africa," unequivocally highlight that stable electricity, internet access, and digital equipment are essential for new media use but are frequently unreliable in many parts of Nigeria. They explicitly report that theatre practitioners regularly face power outages during rehearsals and performances, severely limiting the reliability of digital tools. This is not merely an inconvenience but a fundamental barrier to consistent digital practice. Moreover, the high cost of importing technical equipment, exacerbated by Nigeria's foreign exchange policies and customs regulations, renders tools like high-resolution projectors and LED screens financially prohibitive and often inaccessible to smaller troupes. This economic reality directly contradicts the 'relative advantage' principle

of Diffusion of Innovations Theory, where the cost and complexity of the innovation impede its adoption.

Another crucial challenge is the prevalent lack of digital literacy and adequate technical training. While some university theatre departments in Nigeria have begun incorporating digital performance methods, a significant gap in digital literacy persists among many directors, designers, and actors. This skill deficit is compounded by the inherent risk of technological dependency and failure in live, real-time performances. Technical glitches - such as projection misalignment, sound failures, or software crashes - can disrupt the immersive quality and flow of a production, thus posing significant logistical challenges during live shows. Bay-Cheng et al. (2015) also implicitly acknowledge this through their taxonomy of performance and media, where the intricate interaction between performance elements and media technology inherently presents potential points of failure, underscoring that complexity can be a major impediment to reliable application. These infrastructural and human capacity constraints critically limit the full realisation of new media's potential in Nigerian theatre.

Case studies: Nigerian theatre in the digital crucible

To further illustrate the arguments presented in the literature review, this section analyses two significant Nigerian theatrical productions that embraced new media, detailing their successes and the specific challenges encountered. These case studies provide empirical evidence for the theoretical points discussed, and allow for a more critical examination of how digital innovations are adopted and resisted within the Nigerian context.

"The Chibok Girls" (2015, Terra Kulture) – advocacy through multimedia

Play Summary: Wole Oguntokun's *The Chibok Girls*, which premiered in 2015, is a powerful theatrical response to the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls from Chibok, Borno State, by Boko Haram terrorists in April 2014. The play uses a combination of monologues, dramatised testimonials, and factual information to recreate the event, and explore the ensuing national and international reactions. It aims to humanise the victims, highlight the inaction and political responses, and provoke civic discourse around the crisis. The production's use of multimedia was central to its advocacy mission, thus serving as a direct extension of documentary theatre principles.

Critical analysis of digital integration and challenges

Oguntokun's *The Chibok Girls* stands as a prominent example of Nigerian theatre that utilises multimedia for social advocacy. The production powerfully depicted the abduction, integrating documentary material with live performance. It strategically employed projected images, real news clips, and multimedia backdrops to portray the abduction and the subsequent national and international reactions. Video footage and sound effects were used to simulate environments and heighten emotional

realism, with performers interacting directly with these media on stage. Akinwale (2015), in *The Guardian Nigeria*, notes that this production was part of a wave of advocacy theatre responding to the Boko Haram crisis that aimed at raising awareness and stimulating civic dialogue. The central role of visual media in its design solidified its dual function as both performance and political advocacy. However, the production faced considerable challenges that exemplify structural barriers to digital adoption in Nigeria. These challenges include limited access to high-quality digital tools, audience reception and literacy, technical and power limitations, and censorship and sensitivity.

Limited access to high-quality digital tools

Despite its innovative approach, the production was severely constrained by its reliance on borrowed, hired, or improvised digital materials, including video footage and lighting rigs. This directly impacted the creative range of multimedia elements, with a noticeable lack of high-definition projectors, automated lighting consoles, and professional multimedia editors impacting visual quality. This issue directly illustrates the economic barriers and the 'complexity' attribute from Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, where the cost and availability of sophisticated equipment impede its widespread and high-quality application.

Audience reception and literacy

A significant challenge was ensuring audience comprehension, particularly for segments of the live audience unaccustomed to digital performance who struggled to interpret multimedia symbols or found them distracting. The profound emotional weight of the real-life tragedy also created a difficult balance between spectacle and sensitivity, particularly when using graphic imagery or actual news clips. This highlights a critical aspect often overlooked in the enthusiasm for new media: the audience's digital literacy and cultural preparedness for such mediated experiences, which directly relates to the 'compatibility' principle in Diffusion of Innovations.

Technical and power limitations

Nigeria's notoriously unreliable electricity supply presented constant problems during rehearsals and live performances. The reliance on backup generators not only increased production costs but also caused disruptive interruptions. Projection equipment occasionally over-heated or malfunctioned due to fluctuating power voltage. This is a pervasive issue in Nigeria, which explicitly corroborates Ebewo and Sirayi's (2015) claim of a subsisting infrastructural deficit, and this underscores a fundamental obstacle which even highly motivated productions may not overcome easily.

Censorship and sensitivity

Given the politically-charged subject matter of the Boko Haram insurgency, the production navigated pressures to temper certain content. The organisers faced a delicate balance between effective advocacy and potential censorship. While not directly a digital challenge, the expanded reach and visibility afforded by multimedia can intensify scrutiny, thereby introducing an additional layer of complexity for politically-engaged theatre in a sensitive socio-political climate.

Ola Rotimi's "The Gods Are Not to Blame"

Summary of the play

Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1968) is a classical Nigerian tragedy inspired by Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, but adapted to a Yoruba cultural context. The play follows the tragic fate of Odewale, a prince who unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother in fulfillment of a prophecy. It explores themes of destiny versus free-will, leadership, political intrigue, and the role of traditional beliefs in modern society. Its strong mythological and supernatural elements make it a compelling subject for digital scenography.

Critical analysis of digital integration and challenges

Digital scenography has revolutionised performances of Ola Rotimi's classic *The Gods Are Not to Blame* by enabling visual representations of mythological and supernatural elements previously confined to imagination in performance context. Many recent adaptations have explicitly integrated digital technology.

A notable adaptation by the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan (in 2017), incorporated multimedia elements with digital components such as projections and LED-lighting to depict the gods, and facilitated scene transitions. As a student-led production, it digitally rendered visual elements like thunder, prophecy scenes, and deities by projecting them onto screens to dramatise the play's supernatural dimension. This marked a significant departure from traditional set-based storytelling to digitally-enhanced performance among Nigerian student troupes, which exemplifies early adoption of new media in academic theatre settings.

Another production of the play at the National Theatre, Lagos, in August 2021, utilised digital scenography, pre-recorded soundscapes, and visual overlays to modernise the classical story. This version employed multimedia to represent dreams, divine interventions, and crowd scenes, and complemented by interactive lighting and digital sound design. It was co-produced by the National Troupe of Nigeria and private media firms as part of a broader national initiative to revitalise Nigerian theatre infrastructure. Adeoye (2021), in *Vanguard Nigeria*, highlights this production as part of the National Theatre's digital transformation that signalled institutional efforts towards modernisation.

Despite these innovative strides, both productions encountered significant hurdles, underscoring systemic and cultural resistance to digital innovation.

Challenges in the 2017 production at the University of Ibadan

Budget constraints

As a student-led initiative, funding was minimal, which led to a reliance on locally assembled or borrowed digital tools. This directly impacts the 'trialability' and 'observability' aspects of Diffusion of Innovations, as limited resources constrain the ability to experiment and showcase high-quality digital integration.

Inconsistency in technical execution

The absence of dedicated technical staff trained in digital scenography was a major issue. Projectors and lights failed during technical rehearsals, disrupting cue timing and leading to a loss of synchronisation between live actors and digital elements. Frequent re-designs of the stage setup were necessary due to the unavailability of stable mounting rigs. The production team also faced a steep learning curve with digital software, resulting in occasional execution errors during performances. This illustrates a severe skill gap and highlights the 'complexity' barrier in Rogers' model, where the difficulty of mastering the innovation impedes effective implementation.

Challenges at the National Theatre production

Institutional bureaucracy

Being part of a national modernisation initiative, the production had to adhere to government protocols. This led to delays in funding approvals and equipment clearance, which disrupted pre-production planning. This bureaucratic hurdle, distinct from direct financial constraints, reveals how governmental structures can inadvertently impede innovation even when the intent is modernisation.

High Costs of Imported Technology

The sophisticated multimedia system (including large LED walls, motion graphics software, and digital sound-mixing), had to be imported or leased at considerable expense. Customs delays and fluctuations in the dollar-to-naira exchange rate further inflated production costs. This reinforces the economic challenge faced by *The Chibok Girls* and demonstrates that even well-funded institutional projects are vulnerable to external economic pressures, thus making the 'relative advantage' of digital tools less compelling.

Resistance from traditionalists

A significant challenge was the criticism from some older theatre practitioners who viewed the digital re-invention as "distracting" or "Westernising". They argue that the spectacle diminished the ritualistic and communal essence of Yoruba-based theatre. This directly echoes Auslander's (2008) concerns about the potential loss of authenticity through mediation. This resistance represents a powerful cultural barrier, challenging the 'compatibility' of digital innovations with deeply embedded performance traditions and suggesting a conflict between modernisation efforts and cultural purism.

Technical downtime during live shows

The production experienced disruptive technical issues, notably pausing twice during its opening night due to audio feedback and projection glitches caused by sudden system lags. This reinforces the issue of technological dependency and highlights the fragility of live digital performances in an environment with unreliable technical support and unstable infrastructure.

Discussion

Reconciling innovation with tradition in Nigerian theatre

The case studies of *The Chibok Girls* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* illuminate a critical tension within the digital transformation of Nigerian theatre: the aspiration for innovative expression versus the persistent realities of infrastructural limitations, financial constraints, and the imperative of cultural preservation. While new media elements demonstrably enhance audience experience, increase accessibility, and unlock new creative possibilities, the challenges associated with their implementation, particularly technical difficulties and the potential for a loss of authenticity, cannot be understated.

The paper's findings align with broader academic discussions on technological adoption and the implications for performance. The high production budgets and need for specialised technical expertise, evident in the limited access to quality digital tools for *The Chibok Girls* production, and the high import costs for the National Theatre's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, directly resonate with the "Economic and Skill Barriers" identified in the literature. These findings affirm the arguments of Ebewo and Sirayi (2015), which state that the prohibitive costs and specialised skill requirements create significant hurdles for theatre companies in developing nations. Similarly, the recurrent technical failures during both productions directly corroborate the concern about "Technological Dependency and Failure" discussed by Bay-Cheng et al. (2015), where the complex interaction of media and live performance inherently presents points of vulnerability.

A central argument emerging from this analysis is the critical necessity of balancing innovation with tradition. While scholars like Ogundeji (2018) emphasise the expansion of creative possibilities through multimedia, the palpable resistance from

traditionalists during the National Theatre's production of *The Gods Are Not to Blame* directly underscores Auslander's (2008) concerns regarding the dilution of the immediate and intimate experience of live theatre when mediated through screens. This is not merely an aesthetic debate but a deeply cultural one: it suggests that for digital integration to be sustainable in Nigerian theatre, it must actively engage with and address anxieties about cultural erosion. Simply adopting technology for its own sake, without a careful consideration for its compatibility with established cultural practices, risks alienating a significant portion of the audience and artistic community that is rooted in traditional performance values. This illustrates a critical aspect of Rogers' Diffusion of Innovations Theory, where compatibility with existing values and practices is crucial for successful adoption.

Furthermore, the persistent "Infrastructural Deficits and Power Supply" highlighted by Ebewo and Sirayi (2015) are not merely theoretical issues but tangible impediments, as evidenced by the power outages and equipment malfunctions in both case studies. This underscores a fundamental argument: technological aspirations in Nigerian theatre cannot be divorced from the broader socio-economic realities of the nation. Without significant and consistent investment in reliable power supply, internet access, and affordable digital equipment, the scalability and consistency of new media applications will remain severely limited, and make the 'relative advantage' of digital innovation difficult to achieve in practice.

The lack of "Digital Literacy and Technical Training" is another critical point substantiated by the University of Ibadan's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* production, where the team faced a "steep learning curve" and "occasional execution errors". This clearly indicates a pressing need for formalised training programmes and revised academic curricula in theatre departments to equip practitioners and learners with the necessary skills for digital production. The 'complexity' of digital tools, as a factor in Diffusion of Innovations, directly manifests as a skill barrier that requires systemic educational intervention.

The challenges presented in the case studies are not isolated incidents but represent systemic problems that constrain the full realisation of digital transformation in Nigerian theatre.

Prospects for a sustainable digital future: strategic interventions

Despite the formidable challenges, the potential of new media to revitalise Nigerian theatrical productions and enable them to compete on global stages while preserving local authenticity, remains significant. Attaining this potential hinges on strategic approaches to education, infrastructure, and policy support.

Educational and archival opportunities

New media offers powerful tools for documentation, analysis, and dissemination of theatre practices. Virtual reality can recreate historic performances for study, and

digital archives democratise access to global theatrical repertoires. Gabriella Giannachi (2004), in *Virtual Theatres: An Introduction*, elaborates on these possibilities, highlighting how digital tools can extend the lifespan and accessibility of ephemeral performances. Given the risk of the loss of much of Nigeria's oral and performance heritage, new media constitute vital tools for safeguarding these traditions in digital formats, thereby ensuring their preservation for future generations. Theatre education must increasingly incorporate digital literacy as an essential skill by moving beyond traditional methods to preparing practitioners and learners for the evolving demands of the industry.

Expanded global reach and documentation

New media offer Nigerian theatre the unprecedented potential to reach global audiences through live streaming, digital archiving, and online festivals. The convergence of live theatre and new media facilitates transnational collaborations and digital activism, thus fundamentally redefining public space and participation. This aligns with Bay-Cheng et al.'s (2015) observations on how these performances can "redefine public space and participation," which extends the audience base far beyond physical venues and national borders. This expansion of reach increases the 'relative advantage' of digital media, and in this way make it an attractive proposition for globalising Nigerian theatrical expression.

Policy development and educational reform

In order to fully harness the benefits of new media, strategic investment in education, infrastructure, and funding for digital arts is imperative. Universities and arts academies must revise their curricula to include digital scenography, media dramaturgy, and performance technology in order to ensure that students and future practitioners are equipped with relevant skills. Government and private institutions need to actively fund digital arts incubators and festivals that promote innovation, which would foster a supportive ecosystem for digital theatre development. Furthermore, ensuring accessible platforms for rural theatre groups and community artists will be crucial for an inclusive and sustainable digital transformation in Nigerian theatre, and prevent a digital divide within the creative sector itself.

Conclusion:

The digital transformation of Nigerian theatre is an undeniable reality, presenting both immense opportunities and significant challenges. While new media elements are increasingly incorporated to enhance audience experience and expand creative possibilities, the formidable obstacles of technical difficulties, persistent infrastructural deficits, and the potential for a loss of authenticity cannot be understated.

This paper has critically examined how digital technology reshapes performance in Nigeria, arguing that its sustainable integration demands a delicate balance between

embracing innovation and diligently preserving cultural integrity. The case studies of *The Chibok Girls* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame* vividly illustrate that despite the creative successes, fundamental issues like unreliable power, high equipment costs, and limited technical expertise remain pressing concerns that impede the consistent and widespread adoption of new media. These challenges underscore the practical limitations of the 'relative advantage' of new media and highlight its 'complexity' and 'compatibility' issues within the Nigerian context, as illuminated by Diffusion of Innovations Theory. Moreover, the critical analysis of scholarly perspectives reveals ongoing debates about the very nature of theatrical "liveness" and authenticity in a digitally mediated world, which resonates deeply with the cultural resistance observed in Nigeria.

Addressing these challenges through robust policy support, targeted educational reforms, and equitable digital access is paramount. Ultimately, the future of Nigerian theatre in a digital age hinges not on a wholesale adoption of technology, but on a strategic, culturally sensitive, and economically viable integration. Further empirical research is imperative to continually assess the precise impact of new media on live theatre, particularly in terms of audience reception, economic sustainability for smaller troupes, and the specific strategies employed to ensure that this digital evolution genuinely enriches, rather than diminishes, the essence of Nigerian performance.

Recommendations:

Based on the foregoing analysis, the paper recommends the following to guide towards sustainable and impactful integration of new media in Nigerian theatrical productions.

Prioritising infrastructural development

Government and private sector should invest in reliable electricity supply and affordable, high-speed internet across key artistic hubs. This foundational infrastructure is non-negotiable for consistent digital integration, which would directly address the core impediment to new media adoption.

Investing in digital literacy and technical training

Universities and vocational institutions offering theatre programmes must integrate comprehensive curricula on digital scenography, media dramaturgy, performance technology, and digital archiving. Partnerships with technical experts and international theatre organisations can facilitate knowledge transfer and hands-on training for students practitioners at all levels, thus bridging the existing skill gap, and reducing the 'complexity' barrier.

Fostering of local innovation and production

Incentives should be provided for local manufacturing or assembling of digital equipment that are suitable for theatrical use in order to reduce reliance on expensive imports, and thereby mitigate the impact of foreign exchange volatility. This could involve grants for theatre companies to develop and adapt existing technologies for creative applications, making digital tools more accessible and reducing the 'cost' element of the 'relative advantage'.

Developing supportive policies and funding

Government arts councils and cultural ministries should formulate policies that encourage digital innovation in theatre, including dedicated funding for digital arts projects, tax incentives for companies investing in theatrical technology, and streamlined processes for equipment acquisition. Such policies are critical for creating an enabling environment for digital transformation.

Promotion of hybrid performance models

Opportunities should be given **for** experimentation with hybrid performance models that blend live presence with digital elements, recognising that digital components can enhance rather than replace the traditional communal experience. This involves fostering dialogues within the theatre community to bridge the gap between traditionalists and digital enthusiasts by directly addressing the 'compatibility' issues raised by cultural resistance.

Embracing digital archiving for cultural preservation

Active funding and support initiatives should be emplaced to digitally document and archive Nigerian theatrical performances, including indigenous rituals and historical plays. This will not only preserve cultural heritage but also create valuable educational resources and global accessibility, and serve as a powerful 'observable' benefit for the artistic community.

Exploring emerging technologies strategically

While maintaining a critical perspective on cost and feasibility, theatre practitioners and researchers should actively explore the potentials in the application of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies in performance. Pilot projects and collaborative ventures can assess their artistic and audience engagement potentials, and ensure that these technologies serve the narrative and aesthetic goals of Nigerian theatre rather than merely being adopted as novelties.

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