The Confluence of Digital Theatre and Social Media: An Analysis of Audience Engagement with Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti Film 2024

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Abstract

This study examines the confluence of digital theatre and social media and how modern performance arts are re-defining audience interaction and communication methods in the digital era. The study investigates how the integration of social media platforms audience engagement and interaction in digital theatre, To analyse the role of participatory media in redefining audience-performer relationships in the 2024 Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti performance, to examine how digital theatre narratives adapt to real-time audience feedback and co-creation across platforms like Youtube, Instagram and Tik Tok, to evaluate the impact of convergence culture on storytelling techniques and performative space in contemporary digital theatre.. The results indicate that social media enhance the accessibility of digital theatre while simultaneously altering its communicative framework, promoting interactive dialogue, immediate feedback and narrative flexibility. This transition indicates a wider reorganisation of performative space and audience agency in modern performance arts. The study indicates that the integration of digital theatre with social media creates a hybrid storytelling form that challenges traditional theatrical norms and promotes a more participatory cultural experience.

Keywords: Digital Theatre, Social-Media, Reimaging, Audience Engagement, Communicative Practice, Contemporary Performance arts

Introduction

Digital theatre has emerged as a dynamic genre that merges traditional theatrical performance with digital technology, offering solutions to the constraints of physical space and enabling new forms of audience engagement (Fadeji, Aluko & Hamzat, 2025). This genre includes productions designed explicitly for digital viewing as well as those adapted for streaming across online platforms (Hamzat, Adelakun & Ambassador-Birkins, 2024). The global COVID-19 pandemic notably accelerated this digital transformation, compelling theatre producers

worldwide to migrate performances online as a means of continuity (Enyinnaya & Arthur, 2024). While initially viewed as a contingency, digital theatre has evolved into a legitimate and innovative mode of artistic expression that offers enhanced accessibility, interactivity and novel storytelling possibilities (Diallo et al., 2023). The digital turn in performance must, however, be examined within the broader context of Nigeria's evolving media culture. In recent years, short-form content, especially comedy skits and dramatic monologues has gained immense popularity across platforms such as WhatsApp status, Instagram reels, Facebook pages and TikTok videos. These brief, mobile-friendly performances have carved out a distinct niche in Nigerian entertainment, shaping audience expectations and expanding the possibilities of what constitutes "theatre." Skits and other user-generated content have blurred the lines between amateur and professional performance, fostering widespread public participation in digital creative expression. This cultural development cannot be ignored when analyzing digital theatre's current trajectory.

Moreover, the social media landscape itself presents a diverse ecosystem of platforms, each with unique capabilities and limitations. YouTube serves primarily as a video-hosting and archiving platform that supports long-form, high-quality digital productions. However, its interactivity is relatively limited, with engagement largely confined to comment sections and "likes". In contrast, platforms like TikTok, Facebook and Snapchat offer greater real-time interactivity, enabling users to respond, remix and redistribute content through duets, stitches, story reposts and reactions. These platforms have proven especially fertile for digital theatrical content that thrives on immediacy, humor, virality and user engagement. The diversity of audience participation across these platforms significantly impacts how performance content is created, circulated and received.

Despite these innovations, there remains a paucity of scholarly research that directly examines the interplay between digital theatre and social media in shaping communicative practices in modern performance art (Olayiwola, 2023; Aluko et al., 2023). Existing literature have tended to focus on streaming logistics, aesthetic choices and technical production (Almakaty, 2024; Ibironke, 2023), leaving underexplored the ways in which social media reframes audience interaction, narrative construction and performative reception (Thammawatsiri et al., 2024).

This gap in scholarship forms the core motivation for this study. The inspiration arises from observing how digital performance, particularly films such as

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (2024), can become interactive social events shaped by user engagement. As a cinematic portrayal of the life and activism of one of Nigeria's foremost feminist figures, the film attracted significant public attention not only for its content but also for the social conversations it sparked on platforms like X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube and TikTok. According to Garson (2024), the film's online release became a catalyst for discussions on gender, colonial resistance and activism, while simultaneously inviting participatory engagement from viewers who used social media as a medium for critique, celebration and reinterpretation.

Thus, this paper seeks to explore the confluence of digital theatre and social media, using the Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti film as a central case study. It investigates how digital distribution and audience interactivity generate new performative environments that allow viewers to contribute actively to meaning-making processes. Through a textual analysis of the film's online reception, including viewer comments, social media discourse and user-generated content, this research reveals how digital platforms transcend the traditional limitations of stage and screen to create expansive, participatory theatrical experiences.

Statement of the Problem

Previous studies have shown that the emergence of digital technology has profoundly altered the realm of performing arts, leading to the development of digital theatre and a genre that surpasses traditional stage limitations by integrating live performance with digital media (Fadeji et al., 2025; Enyinnaya & Arthur, 2024). Social media have additionally transformed what way audiences engage with and interpret artistic works (Aluko et al., 2022). Collectively, these platforms provide novel potential for broadening story reach, augmenting audience participation and democratising communication techniques in modern performance (Hamzat et al., 2024). Although scholars and practitioners have examined the technical advancement of digital theatre and its capacity to archive performances for broader audiences, insufficient focus has been directed towards the communicative and participatory aspects that arise when digital theatre converges with social media platforms (Abugh & Ademiju-Bepo, 2022).

Recent efforts (Diallo et al., 2023; Ibironke, 2023), such as the Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti film illustrate the transforming function of social media in influencing public perception and the reinterpretation of digitally disseminated performances. The video depicting the life of a trailblazing Nigerian feminist and activist generated considerable internet engagement on sites including X,

Instagram and YouTube. Meanwhile, these locations functioned as venues for collective memory, critique, action and the reworking of historical narratives (Almakaty, 2024). Although these answers emphasise the audience's transition from passive observers to active participants, a deficiency persists in academic research regarding how these digital interactions transform the significance, scope and influence of theatrical events (Thammawatsiri et al., 2024). Presently, the majority of studies on digital theatre emphasise its technological adaptation and accessibility, with few studies examining the socio-cultural ramifications of audience interaction via social media (Olayiwola, 2023). What is needed is a critical investigation of how these digital engagements rearrange narrative ownership, audience-performer dynamics and the communicative potential of modern performance. This study explores the intersection of digital theatre and social media, utilising Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti as a case study to analyse the reconfiguration of audience interaction and communicative practices in the digital age.

Objectives of the study

1. To investigate how the integration of social media platforms influences audience engagement and interaction in digital theatre.
2. To analyze the role of participatory media in redefining audience-performer relationships in the 2024 Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti performance.
3. To examine how digital theatre narratives adapt to real-time audience feedback and co-creation across platforms like YouTube, Instagram and TikTok.
4. To evaluate the impact of convergence culture on storytelling techniques and performative space in contemporary digital theatre.

Theoretical Framework and Discourse

This research is based on Henry Jenkins' theory of convergence culture, which examines how media convergence and participatory culture intertwine the roles of producers and consumers. Jenkins posits that audiences have transitioned from being mere passive recipients of content to becoming active participants in the process of cultural production. This theoretical perspective is crucial for examining how social media enables the audience of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti to interact with the film, reinterpret its themes, expand its narratives and disseminate its messages across digital communities. Therefore, this analysis is positioned within the wider conversation surrounding digital performance and media interactivity, thereby enhancing our comprehension of the evolution of contemporary African theatre and film about technological and social

transformations. This underscores the capacity of digital platforms to democratise storytelling, elevate marginalised voices and reconceptualise theatre as an interactive cultural space. The results provide valuable understanding of why performance art serves as both a product and a process of dialogue, activism and community-building in the contemporary digital landscape

Henry Jenkins' convergence culture theory provides a robust framework for comprehending the evolving boundaries between media production and consumption in the digital age (Jenkins & Jie, 2024). Jenkins asserts that convergence transcends a technological process, representing a cultural transformation in which consumers have greater agency to engage with, modify and disseminate content across various channels (Meiduna, 2023). This theory is especially pertinent to the examination of digital theatre, which fundamentally depends on several media forms, visual, textual, performative and interactive and to communicate storylines. In contemporary performance arts, particularly regarding the Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti film, Jenkins' theory elucidates that audiences have transitioned from passive observers to active participants who collaboratively generate meaning in real-time via digital and social media platforms.

The reaction of the Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti film on platforms such as X, YouTube and Instagram exemplifies Jenkins' notion of participatory culture, a fundamental element of convergence. The video narrates the tale of a prominent Nigerian feminist and anti-colonial activist (Fadeji et al., 2025), rapidly becoming a topic of digital discourse (Hamzat et al., 2024), inciting political commentary (Alalem, 2023), historical reflections (Enyinnaya & Arthur, 2024) and reexaminations of feminist identity (Meidina, 2023). Viewers utilised hashtags, video responses and comment threads to extend the narrative beyond the limitations of the film. These participatory behaviours, according to Jenkins' assertion, stipulate that media consumers have become cultural producers, interacting with content in ways that disrupt conventional storytelling hierarchies (Diallo et al., 2023). Nonetheless, although Jenkins' theory is illuminating in demonstrating the democratising possibilities of digital interaction, it may inadequately address the socio-cultural and political intricacies particular to African contexts (Jenkins et al., n.d.).

Nigerian audiences' engagement with Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti was influenced by media convergence, collective memory, postcolonial identity, gender politics and cultural values grounded in local realities. Jenkins' theory, primarily

formulated within Western media contexts, often highlights media empowerment while neglecting the structural inequalities (Russell et al., 2008). Among these are internet accessibility, digital literacy and content ownership influence on participatory behaviours in the Global South (Martin & Schwartz, 2009). Moreover, convergence culture presupposes that audiences intrinsically wish to engage across platforms, however, this may not consistently hold (Kalamar, 2016). In digital theatre, particularly within African environments that continue to value conventional stage drama, certain audiences may favour linear, observational experiences (Garcia & Schwartz, 2009). Consequently, implementing Jenkins' theory without modification jeopardises the acknowledgement of diverse audience behaviours and the intricate nuances of cultural reception in non-Western contexts (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008).

Nevertheless, Jenkins' concept continues to serve as a significant analytical instrument for this research. It facilitates a detailed analysis of how the Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti film evolved into a multi-platform narrative via user interaction, digital enhancement and reinterpretation (Syahriyani et al., 2022). His theory offers the terminology necessary to comprehend the transformation of audience-performer interactions in modern performance arts, particularly at the intersection of theatrical narrative and the immediacy and scope of social media (Alalem, 2023). Therefore, although Henry Jenkins' convergence culture provides a robust framework for examining the hybridisation of media in digital theatre, its implementation in African contexts, such as that of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, necessitates careful localisation (Kozinets & Jenkins, 2022). Only then can its findings properly encapsulate the depth of audience interaction and the dynamic communicative practices of modern performance arts in the digital era.

The Digital Sphere

The digital sphere refers to the virtual space where cultural, social and artistic exchanges occur through digital platforms. Like Habermas' public sphere, it fosters communication and participation, but in a more interactive, decentralized and dynamic form. Social media platforms such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and X act not just as distribution tools but as digital stages where performances are shared, interpreted and reimagined.

In this space, digital theatre is not confined to passive viewership. Audiences actively engage with content through comments, remixes and reactions, turning performances into participatory events. For example, the 2024 Funmilayo

Ransome-Kuti film sparked diverse discussions and user-generated content across platforms, extending its narrative impact beyond the screen.

The nature of each platform shapes how performances are experienced: YouTube supports long-form viewing with limited interaction, while TikTok encourages short, viral and highly interactive content. This reflects McLuhan's idea that the medium shapes the message and Jenkins' participatory culture, where audiences become co-creators of meaning. Ultimately, the digital sphere enables a new form of theatre—collaborative, fluid and embedded in everyday digital life.

Social Media and Digital Theatre: The Nexus

The nexus of social media and digital theatre represents a transformative juncture in contemporary performance arts, redefining audience engagement, narrative structures and performative spaces. Digital theatre, enhanced by platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok, transcends traditional theatrical boundaries by enabling real-time interaction and participatory storytelling, thus shifting spectatorship from passive observation to active co-creation (Vinay Kumar et al., 2025; Abugh & Ademiju-Bepo, 2023). This convergence fosters a hybridized performative form that merges live and digital elements, allowing for dynamic narrative flexibility and expanded audience accessibility across geographical and social divides (International Research Journal of Education and Technology, 2025).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated this integration, catalyzing a widespread adoption of live streaming and digital archiving, which have since become enduring features that augment rather than replace live theatrical experiences (Vinay Kumar et al., 2025; Sullivan, 2025). Social media have become a crucial tool for theatre promotion, audience building and sustaining interactive discourse between creators and viewers. It facilitates the formation of digital performance communities where audience feedback directly influences narrative adaptation and performative innovation (Baldin et al., 2024; Abugh & Ademiju-Bepo, 2023).

Moreover, social media's real-time word-of-mouth and electronic engagement contribute to demand prediction and sustained audience interest, reflecting a reciprocal relationship between online audience activity and theatrical attendance (Baldin et al., 2024). While digital theatre expands inclusivity and experimental scope, critical discourse also notes the risk of digital inequality and the potential marginalization of live theatre's embodied immediacy (Federal State Budgetary Institution of Culture, 2025).

The 2024 release of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti exemplifies this nexus. As a digitally distributed film with theatrical elements, its presence on platforms like TikTok, Instagram and YouTube not only extended its reach but also transformed it into a cultural event. Users engaged with the film through hashtag campaigns, video reactions, activist commentary and aesthetic reinterpretations. Social media platforms enabled conversations around themes of gender equality, anti-colonial resistance and feminism, turning audience engagement into a performative act in itself. These engagements illustrate how digital theatre, when intertwined with social media, evolves into a participatory public discourse that transcends the boundaries of scripted performance.

In essence, the nexus of social media and digital theatre signals a paradigmatic shift in the performative arts. It challenges hierarchical modes of cultural production, amplifies marginalized voices and democratizes artistic participation. This intersection not only expands the spatial and temporal reach of theatre but also redefines the meanings of authorship, audience and performance in the contemporary media landscape. Thus, the intersection of social media and digital theatre cultivates novel aesthetics and participatory cultural practices that are reshaping contemporary performance art globally.

Reviewing Literature and Conceptual Analysis

The notion of digital theatre embodies the fusion of theatrical performance with digital technologies, facilitating virtual staging, real-time broadcasting and interactive engagement from viewers (Castanha et al., 2023). It transforms the conventional performance environment, shifting from physical theatres to digital platforms like YouTube, Instagram and Zoom. Within the Nigerian context, this transition has arisen as a creative response to infrastructural challenges and a strategic adaptation to global technological developments. Lonergan (2024) opines that digital theatre in Nigeria fundamentally expands the limits of storytelling, enabling artists to explore various forms, temporalities and spatial dimensions, thereby reaching wider and more diverse audiences. Social media, functioning as an interactive digital environment, introduces an additional dimension of change by transforming audiences into collaborative creators of meaning (Marshall, 2022). In this context, the concept of audience engagement transforms from a passive form of observation to an active process of interaction (Remshardt & Mancewicz, 2023). Platforms like X, Facebook and TikTok serve not only as promotional tools but also play a crucial role in the development, critique and reception of narratives (McKendrick, 2024). They facilitate immediate dialogue, iterative feedback and reinterpretations, cultivating a

collective sense of performance that is both decentralised and dynamic (Ortiz, 2023).

This transformation also modifies the communicative practices within contemporary Nigerian performance arts (Takala, 2023). The traditional hierarchical model of communication, characterised by a one-way exchange where the performer conveys information while the audience passively receives it, is increasingly being replaced by more dialogic and reciprocal forms of interaction (Remshardt & Mancewicz, 2023). The Nigerian audience now engages in meaning-making, political discourse and the formation of cultural identity through likes, shares, commentaries and digital remixes (McKendrick, 2024). Consequently, the intersection of digital theatre and social media represents a significant transformation in the realm of performance (Ortiz, 2023). This evolution facilitates broader access, enhances narrative ownership and redefines the dynamics between audiences and performers, all while being informed by cultural contexts and technological advancements (Geddes, 2021).

Evidence gathered from Nigeria indicates an increasing embrace of digital theatre, especially as a reaction to socio-political issues and infrastructural constraints (Lawhead, 2022). Productions such as The Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti movie, Moremi: The Digital Reimagination and Zoom performances during the COVID era illustrate the ways in which Nigerian artists are utilising digital platforms not merely for distribution, but as innovative creative environments (Raffa, 2024). These productions frequently utilise hybrid formats, merging pre-recorded visuals with live interactions, integrating subtitles and graphics and actively involving audiences through comment sections and social media polls (Lengel et al., 2022). Research findings and audience feedback indicate that Nigerian viewers are progressively interacting with theatrical content outside of conventional settings. For example, digital premieres frequently gain traction on X, igniting important conversations regarding historical accuracy, cultural representation and socio-political themes (Walgren, 2022). The reception of Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti demonstrated this phenomenon, as audiences engaged in post-screening discussions, Q&A sessions with the creators and community debates through platforms such as Instagram Live and Clubhouse. Thus, these practices demonstrate how social media amplifies the communicative role of theatre, facilitating feedback and encouraging participatory interpretation (Mellado & Hemida, 2021).

Furthermore, information derived from social media metrics, such as views, comments, hashtags and retweets, underscores the increasing influence of

audiences in determining the reception and lasting impact of performances (Dinis, 2023). Digital tools enable theatre-makers to assess audience sentiment in real-time, adjust storytelling methods and enhance themes that hold cultural significance (Pavlou & Castro-Varela, 2024). Nonetheless, obstacles persist, such as disparities in digital access, issues related to content piracy and variable internet connectivity, which hinder inclusivity (Meston, 2024). Nonetheless, the empirical evidence indicates that performance arts in Nigeria are not merely adjusting to digital environments but are also flourishing within them. The integration of digital theatre with social media creates a significant platform for cultural exchange, the preservation of history and innovative forms of activism, transforming the concept of performance within a connected, audience-focused and media-saturated environment (Rousell et al., 2023).

Methodology

This study employs textual analysis as method. The method is useful because it enables a thorough reading and interpretation of text. The choice of textual analysis is based on its capacity to uncover the intricate meanings present in both the performance texts and the associated participatory discourse. In this study, the text refers to the digital theatre performances disseminated through platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok. The choice of these platforms is grounded in their widespread use, accessibility and ability to promote interactive engagement with the audience, which is essential to the aims of this study.

This study employs a selection of performances in the Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti film. The study analysed textual elements such as, you didn't study the script, dialogues, hashtags, comments, live reactions, video remixes and user-generated content and seeks to identify patterns in audience engagement and communicative practices.

Data for this study weas collected using purposive sampling of audience responses and engagements across these platforms. This included the collection and analysis of user comments under the official YouTube release of the film, interactive hashtags and duets on TikTok, as well as reels, story mentions and comment threads on Instagram. Additional data was sourced from X, where users engaged in threaded conversations and critiques of the film. The analytical process focused on identifying patterns and themes in how users responded to the performance. Specific attention was paid to audience tone, narrative reinterpretation, frequency and nature of participatory content and the emergence of communal discourse. Through this approach, the study was able to assess how real-time feedback and social media interactivity contribute to the formation of a

hybrid performative space—one in which audiences are no longer passive spectators but active participants in meaning-making and theatrical expression.

Findings and Extractions

The analysis of particular Nigerian digital theatre performances on YouTube, Instagram and TikTok reveals that digital platforms are profoundly altering the narrative frameworks and aesthetic modalities of theatrical storytelling. In productions such as Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, narrative composition surpasses the linear development of a script. Digital formats facilitate modular and episodic storytelling, with portions designed for brief consumption, particularly on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram Reels. This fragmentation creates multiple opportunities for audience participation and interpretation. Performative components like as camera angles, lighting effects and editing techniques are recontextualised to conform to social media conventions, deviating from traditional stagecraft. The performances often feature compelling visuals, direct camera interaction and intentional use of captions and graphic overlays, enhancing both dramatic impact and accessibility. The pieces work together to improve the theatrical experience, fostering both emotional and intellectual involvement from digital viewers.

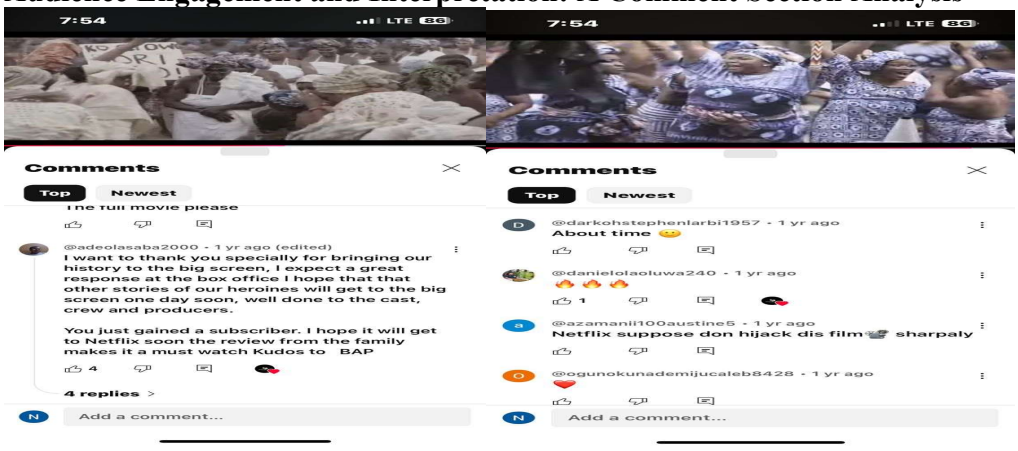
Social media sites, particularly X and Instagram, augment audience participation by fostering participatory discourse over these performances. Viewers interact not only through likes and comments but also via quote-tweets, story reposts, digital remixes and discussion threads. The instance of Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti exemplifies how post-screening debate functioned as a crucial platform for the reassessment of feminist ideals, historical veracity and cultural representation among participants. Hashtags like #FunmilayoFilm and #DigitalTheatreNaija functioned as digital venues for viewers to articulate their responses, question societal conventions and reflect on contemporary themes depicted in the performance. This style of interaction aligns with Henry Jenkins' notion of "participatory culture", in which the audience evolves from a passive consumer to an active co-creator of meaning. Audience-generated content, such as reaction videos and critical TikTok monologues, exemplifies a shift in communicative practices, where interaction extends beyond mere viewership to include co-narration and social discourse.

The findings demonstrate that platform affordances substantially affect the reception and recontextualization of performances. The long-form nature of YouTube enables sustained viewing and in-depth discussions, typically provoking more reflective audience reactions. Conversely, TikTok's succinct structure

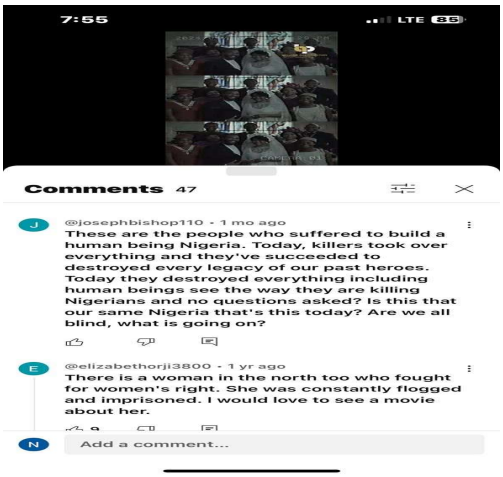
encourages swift and creative interpretations, resulting in widespread repetition of themes, situations, or statements through duets and remixes. Instagram operates as a hybrid medium, employed for both official marketing and grassroots audience interaction through stories, reels and comment sections. The varied affordances provide multiple layers of engagement, encompassing informational, emotional, creative and critical aspects. Audience remarks often serve as succinct assessments, emphasising symbolic components within the performance or linking scenes to broader societal contexts. These interactions demonstrate an evolving literacy in digital theatre, allowing viewers to comprehend the narrative along with its cultural, political and artistic ramifications.

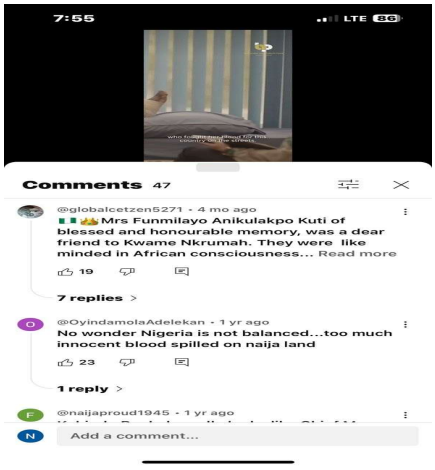
The textual analysis reveals that these digital theatrical experiences often stimulate critical engagement with Nigerian socio-political reality. Themes such as gender equality, activism, colonial legacies and community resistance, exemplified by Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, profoundly resonate with modern audiences encountering similar situations. Responses on platforms like X demonstrate considerable emotional and political involvement with the narratives, as many users see parallels between the performance and current feminist or democratic movements. Textual cues, like protest chants, historical footage and activist slogans, are amplified through social media, where users disseminate clips or highlight quotes in digital art or advocacy dialogues. These modes of involvement demonstrate how digital theatre operates as a communication practice that intertwines entertainment, education and protest. Performances transcend the credits, evolving into continuous interactions within and between communities.

Audience Engagement and Interpretation: A Comment Section Analysis









The comment section from various social media excerpts on the 2024 Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti film reveals an overwhelmingly positive reception, underscoring the emotional resonance the film holds for viewers. Many users expressed deep gratitude to the filmmakers for bringing the story of such a prominent historical figure to the big screen. A particularly telling comment from @adeolasaba2000 thanks the producers for reviving national history and emphasizes the significance of such representations in restoring pride in Nigeria's heroines. This reflects a strong sense of cultural appreciation and national identity, suggesting that the film has succeeded not only in storytelling but also in stimulating historical reflection among its audience.

Another major theme in the comments is the demand for greater visibility and accessibility of the film. Users expressed a strong desire for the movie to be

picked up by international streaming platforms such as Netflix. Comments like "Netflix suppose don hijack dis film sharpaly" and "I hope it gets to Netflix soon" show a clear audience push for the film to gain global recognition. This reveals the growing awareness among Nigerian viewers of how digital platforms shape global narratives and cultural export and it suggests that viewers see Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti not just as a local achievement but as a globally relevant story deserving of international attention.

Beyond admiration, the film also sparked intense political and social commentary. Several viewers used the film's historical themes to reflect on present-day Nigeria, highlighting perceived parallels between past injustices and contemporary issues such as corruption, leadership failure and violence. One commenter lamented how those who fought to build Nigeria have been dishonored by current realities, questioning, "Are we all blind, what is going on?" Such statements reveal how historical cinema can serve as a mirror for current societal anxieties, encouraging political critique and engagement from ordinary citizens.

Cultural pride and pan-African consciousness were also notable elements in the comments. Users referenced Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti's relationship with other African icons, such as Kwame Nkrumah and commended the filmmakers for restoring a sense of African unity and identity. This kind of engagement illustrates how the film acts as a cultural archive, reminding audiences of forgotten historical links and reawakening pride in shared continental struggles and solidarity.

Lastly, the film inspired conversations around gendered historical representation. One user expressed a desire to see similar stories told about women activists from Northern Nigeria who also fought for women's rights. This points to an emerging public interest in broadening the narrative scope beyond Funmilayo's legacy to include other female freedom fighters who have been historically marginalized. It underscores a collective call for more inclusive storytelling that reflects the diversity of women's contributions across the nation.

In summary, the audience response to Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (2024) demonstrates that the film has served as more than entertainment; it has functioned as a catalyst for emotional connection, political reflection, cultural pride and historical advocacy. The comment section reveals a vibrant discourse that blends appreciation with calls for broader access, deeper representation and stronger links between past and present. These insights suggest that historical

films, when thoughtfully produced, can contribute significantly to public memory, national consciousness and the global visibility of African narratives.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study illustrate the profound transformation that digital theatre and social media have introduced into the Nigerian performance landscape. However, while the shifts offer exciting potential for the democratization of theatre and audience engagement, it is essential to critically examine the dynamics and implications of these changes. Several key issues emerge from the findings, including the accessibility of digital theatre, the tension between traditional and contemporary performance forms and the impact of technological constraints on the engagement experience.

The first observation about modular and episodic storytelling in digital formats is intriguing as it offers an adaptable and flexible form of narrative delivery, particularly for platforms like TikTok and Instagram Reels. However, while fragmentation fosters greater engagement opportunities and participation, it risks distorting the complexity of traditional theatrical narratives. This study aligns with Vincent (2021), who describes digital theatre's inclination toward brevity may lead to oversimplification of complex themes or the loss of subtle narrative nuance that would have been conveyed in a full-length performance. In the case of Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, while the performance is broken into easily consumable portions that resonate with contemporary audiences, the fragmented format may unintentionally overlook the depth of historical context, socio-political struggles and the lived experiences that are central to the full experience of the story. In other words, Levesque and Levesque's (2022) recent study is consistent with this line of thought that short-form content, by its very nature, does not always provide the space needed to unpack these multifaceted issues, which could potentially diminish the educational and reflective aspects of the performance. However, critics argue that such fragmentation may lead to oversimplification, undermining the intricate social and political themes that digital theatre strives to explore (Dovey & Rose, 2012).

Another issue raised in the findings is the role of social media in trigger participatory culture, as evidenced by the use of hashtags like #FunmilayoFilm and #DigitalTheatreNaijaand the subsequent co-creation of meaning by the audience. This affirms the study of Yi (2024) that while there is a significant positive outcome, the reality of digital engagement often involves superficial interactions, such as likes, retweets and brief comments, which may not always

lead to deep, critical discourse. Moreover, the study of Aluko et al. (2023) affirms that the interaction on social media can also be heavily influenced by the algorithms of these platforms, where content that garners more interaction, often sensational or emotionally charged that becomes more visible. This, in turn, can skew the discourse towards surface-level reactions and memes rather than thoughtful critique or nuanced engagement with the underlying themes. Moreover, while the act of recontextualizing and remixing content on platforms like TikTok can democratize performance and meaning-making, it is consistent with Fadeji et al. (2025) as it raises questions about the ownership of intellectual property and the potential for misrepresentation or dilution of the original message. This democratization often comes at the expense of original intent, as the remixed versions can obscure the deeper meanings intended by the creators (Jenkins, 2006).

The distinction between platforms also highlights an important critique. While YouTube allows for long-form engagement and in-depth discussion, Liontas (2023) examination describes TikTok's focus on brevity fosters more creative, quick-witted responses but limits critical reflection. Instagram occupies a middle ground, offering both promotional content and grassroots interaction. However, this mix can blur the boundaries between official production and user-generated content, potentially reducing the legitimacy of the digital theatre as an art form in the eyes of some traditional theatre-goers (Omodan, 2024). The findings suggest that while these platforms have created new opportunities for audience engagement, they also introduce a tension between the authenticity of the performance and the ways it is interpreted or commodified on these digital spaces. As noted by Garson (2024), this can lead to the commodification of theatre, where it risks becoming more of a product to be consumed than an experience to be engaged with.

Another significant challenge highlighted in the study is the digital divide, which continues to persist in Nigeria and globally. Ibironke (2023) argues that access to the internet and social media tools can engage deeply with digital theatre, large segments of the population remain excluded due to the prohibitive costs of data, inconsistent electricity and limited technological infrastructure (Olayiwola, 2023). In many ways, Fadeji et al. (2025) reflects the social and economic inequalities inherent in the digital landscape. Although social media can democratize access to cultural content, it simultaneously amplifies the gap between those who can afford technological participation and those who cannot. This critique challenges the assertion that digital theatre inherently democratizes the art form. The accessibility of digital content must be tempered by an awareness of the barriers

that still exist for many potential audiences in Nigeria, particularly in rural areas or economically disadvantaged communities (Ofosun-Asare, 2025).
Moreover, digital theatre provides a space for activism, education and cultural expression, it introduces new pressures for performance creators. The constant need for virality and algorithm-friendly content can sometimes overshadow the artistic intent of the work (Ortiz, 2023). The reliance on views, likes and shares can reduce the theatre experience to a form of entertainment designed to maximize engagement rather than one rooted in complex storytelling or cultural critique. The analysis of the Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti production illustrates how digital platforms can help elevate critical themes such as gender equality and political resistance, but it also highlights how easily these serious discussions can be reduced to soundbites or repackaged for mass appeal (Geddes, 2021). This raises the question of whether digital theatre, by nature of its engagement mechanisms, risks compromising its original integrity or message.

Therefore, the study posits that digital theatre is reimagining the relationship between audiences and performers by promoting hybrid roles where audiences act not just as viewers but as critics, participants and cultural contributors. This represents the effort of Hamzat et al. (2024) which reveals that a fundamental shift from traditional performance models, which were typically more hierarchical and passive. However, it also underscores the complex dynamics at play within digital spaces. The democratization of theatre comes at a cost namely, the potential for cultural appropriation, misinterpretation and oversimplification of the narratives presented. In the case of Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the remixing of scenes and the reinterpretation of the story by audiences may help enhance cultural accessibility, but it also risks altering the original meaning, especially if performed by individuals who lack the contextual understanding of the narrative (Schiappa, 2019).

Insofar, the findings of this study demonstrate the dynamic and transformative impact of digital platforms on Nigerian theatre, they also highlight the complexities of this convergence. The interplay between digital theatre, social media and audience engagement creates new opportunities for creative expression and cultural dialogue. However, Lawhead (2022) contends that these shifts also bring forth challenges, such as the potential for oversimplification, the tension between critical discourse and popular engagement and the exclusion of certain segments of the population due to the digital divide. These critiques point to the need for further reflection on the future of digital theatre and its role in both shaping and reflecting society's evolving communication practices.

Implications

This study advances the discussion on digital theatre and its relationship with social media by contextualising its development within Nigeria's cultural and technological landscape. The primary implication for literature is the redefinition of performance boundaries, offering a nuanced understanding of how traditional theatrical narratives adapt to new media contexts. The findings highlight that digital platforms, particularly short-form media like TikTok and Instagram Reels, necessitate modular and episodic storytelling formats. This transformation challenges earlier theoretical frameworks that emphasised the holistic and immersive nature of theatre. This study contributes to existing scholarship by documenting the ways in which brevity-oriented digital formats may reduce narrative complexity, thus analysing the impact of digital fragmentation on cultural texts. This provides a unique viewpoint for evaluating the evolution of African historical narratives, as illustrated by Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti, in the context of digital performance, thus substantially advancing African performance studies and postcolonial media scholarship.

An important implication involves the redefinition of audience agency. The research supports earlier assertions by scholars like Jenkins (2006) regarding participatory culture, while further examining the paradox of engagement depth. Digital platforms facilitate user engagement through hashtags and remix culture; however, findings suggest that such participation often remains superficial or susceptible to algorithmic manipulation, thereby skewing public discourse towards sensationalism instead of fostering critical analysis. This duality prompts scholars to reassess theories of media convergence and participatory spectatorship by analysing both the democratising and commodifying dimensions of digital theatre. The emphasis on hybrid viewer-performer roles challenges conventional ideas about the audience and offers new frameworks for analysing performance reception in decentralised digital environments. This is particularly significant for research in performance theory, media studies and digital humanities, which seek to redefine concepts of authorship, interactivity and co-creation in the digital age.

The study underscores the ongoing issue of digital inequality, questioning the assumption that digital theatre is universally accessible. This focus on infrastructural and economic barriers, which cover internet access, electricity and technological skills, both aligns with and enhances existing research on the digital divide, particularly in the Global South. This intersectional perspective

underscores the need for inclusive and contextually informed models in cultural production and distribution. The findings urge policymakers and practitioners to prioritise equitable access, while also offering future researchers a robust basis for examining the socio-economic frameworks that affect digital cultural participation. This study offers an essential and localised perspective on the global discussion surrounding digital performance and media democratisation.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the intersection of digital theatre and social media is significantly transforming the landscape of Nigerian performance arts. Using the Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (2024) film as a case study, the research confirms that digital platforms are not only reshaping the aesthetic and narrative structures of theatrical productions but also redefining the roles of audiences. Social media have enabled a shift from passive viewership to active participation, whereby audiences engage through comments, remixes, hashtags and digital discussions that extend the life and meaning of performances.

The integration of digital platforms has introduced new modalities of storytelling; modular, episodic and visually driven that are tailored to platform-specific affordances such as TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube. While these formats increase accessibility and engagement, they also present challenges such as narrative fragmentation, loss of interpretive depth and susceptibility to algorithm-driven sensationalism. Additionally, the participatory culture facilitated by digital theatre often straddles a fine line between democratization and commodification, with user-generated content sometimes distorting or oversimplifying critical socio-political narratives.

Furthermore, the study highlights persistent digital inequalities, especially in the Nigerian context, where infrastructural limitations like high data costs and inconsistent electricity restrict the reach and inclusivity of digital theatre. While urban, tech-savvy audiences are able to participate in this evolving cultural form, rural and economically marginalized communities remain largely excluded.

In essence, while digital theatre and social media offer exciting opportunities for creative expansion, social commentary and cultural preservation, they also demand a cautious and context-sensitive approach. The digital performance space must be curated in a way that preserves artistic integrity, fosters critical engagement and addresses the structural barriers to equitable access.

Recommendations

i. Government and cultural institutions should invest in expanding affordable internet access and reliable electricity, especially in rural and underserved communities. This would ensure equitable participation in digital theatre and reduce the digital divide.
ii. Initiatives aimed at improving digital and media literacy should be promoted through schools, community centers and cultural institutions. Viewers need tools to engage critically with digital content and understand the socio-political contexts of performances.
iii. Artists and theatre practitioners should be offered professional development opportunities focused on digital storytelling techniques, multimedia editing and platform-specific strategies to retain cultural depth while adapting to new formats.
iv. There is a need to create policy guidelines that protect the intellectual property of performance creators while allowing for creative audience participation. This includes managing remix culture to avoid misrepresentation or cultural distortion.
v. Cultural agencies and institutions should support the development of curated digital archives for Nigerian digital theatre. This will help preserve performances beyond the transient nature of social media and support scholarly and cultural referencing.
vi. Theatre creators should adopt inclusive practices by featuring diverse voices—especially marginalized communities and women—and engaging audiences across regions. This could be through subtitles, multilingual productions, or regionally themed content.
vii. Platforms and creators should prioritize depth and cultural sensitivity over algorithm-driven trends. Curated content strategies should balance entertainment with educational and activist goals to preserve the richness of theatrical narratives.

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