

## **DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE THEATRE SECTOR IN UZBEKISTAN: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS**

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### **Abstract**

The article is devoted to the analysis of the processes of digitalization of theatrical art in a global context, as well as to the study of the prospects for the introduction of digital technologies into the theatrical sphere of Uzbekistan. The paper examines effective international practices in the application of digital tools in theatre and identifies the specific features of the digital transformation of theatrical institutions in the context of contemporary challenges and emerging opportunities. Particular attention is paid to the development of recommendations for adapting international experience to the cultural specificity of Uzbekistan and to preserving national cultural identity in the process of implementing innovative technologies in traditional theatrical art.

### **Keywords**

theatre digitalization, digital transformation of culture, digital technologies in art, theatrical art of Uzbekistan.

## **ЦИФРОВАЯ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ ТЕАТРАЛЬНОЙ СФЕРЫ УЗБЕКИСТАНА: ПРОБЛЕМЫ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ**

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**Аннотация**

Статья посвящена анализу процессов цифровизации театрального искусства в глобальном контексте, а также изучению перспектив внедрения цифровых технологий в театральную сферу Узбекистана. В работе рассматриваются эффективные зарубежные практики применения цифровых инструментов в театре, выявляются особенности цифровой трансформации театральных институций в условиях современных вызовов и новых возможностей. Особое внимание уделяется разработке рекомендаций по адаптации международного опыта с учетом культурной специфики Узбекистана и сохранению национальной культурной идентичности в процессе внедрения инновационных технологий в традиционное театральное искусство.

**Ключевые слова:** цифровизация театра, цифровая трансформация культуры, цифровые технологии в искусстве, театральное искусство Узбекистана.

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**Annotatsiya**

Ilmiy maqola teatr san'atining global miqyosdagi raqamlashtirish jarayonlarini tahlil qilishga, shuningdek, raqamli texnologiyalarni O'zbekiston teatr

sohasi amaliyotiga joriy etish istiqbollari o'rganishga bag'ishlangan. Tadqiqotda teatr san'atida raqamli vositalardan foydalanish bo'yicha samarali xorijiy tajribalar ko'rib chiqiladi, zamonaviy chaqiriqlar va yangi imkoniyatlar sharoitida teatr muassasalarining raqamli transformatsiyasi xususiyatlari aniqlanadi. Xalqaro tajribani O'zbekistonning madaniy muhitiga moslashtirish bo'yicha tavsiyalar ishlab chiqishga hamda innovatsion texnologiyalarni an'anaviy milliy teatr san'atiga joriy etish jarayonida milliy madaniy o'zlikni saqlash masalalariga alohida e'tibor qaratiladi.

### **Kalit so'zlar**

teatrni raqamlashtirish, madaniyatning raqamli transformatsiyasi, san'atda raqamli texnologiyalar, O'zbekiston teatr san'ati.

The contemporary era is characterized by the rapid development of digital technologies, which play a significant role in all spheres of human activity, including traditional forms of art. Theatre, as one of the oldest forms of artistic expression, is also undergoing a period of digital transformation today. The digitalization of theatrical activity represents a multifaceted process that involves the introduction of digital technologies not only into artistic and production practices, but also into organizational and managerial aspects, marketing, communication with audiences, and educational programs.

The process of digitalization opens up not merely new technical possibilities for theatrical art, but fundamentally new forms of interaction with the audience, creating a space for cultural dialogue that extends beyond the boundaries of the traditional theatre building.

In Uzbekistan, the first steps toward the digitalization of theatrical art were taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically in 2020, when there was an acute need to support culture and the arts under conditions of nationwide quarantine [1, p. 585]. During this period, leading theatres in Uzbekistan sought new ways to reach their audiences through rapidly developing social networks and virtual platforms. Among the examples of digitalization of theatrical performances known to the author is the active use of the online video platform YouTube by the State Academic Bolshoi Theatre named after Alisher Navoi, accompanied by the publication of existing performances on the platform. Attention should also be drawn to the participation of regional theatres, such as the online performance of the Khorezm Folk Puppet Theatre presented in London and New York [7].

Despite the limited development of digitalization in the theatrical sphere of Uzbekistan, interest in this process is growing within theatrical circles and is finding a positive response among audiences. Theatres in Uzbekistan have always

sought diversity in their repertoire policies, the exploration of new approaches, and innovative forms of performance, as evidenced by contemporary theatrical projects and productions. Examples include the emergence of holographic theatre (link) and the audio performance “*Tashkent Is Speaking*”, which “combines elements of theatre, a quest, and an экскурсия. Participants receive headphones through which they hear the voice of the city, music, and urban sounds. Over the course of 100 minutes, they follow a route of approximately 3.5 km, passing through central streets, parks, and hidden courtyards. All of this is accompanied by sound design that makes the journey as vivid and emotionally engaging as possible. The project is based on real memories of Tashkent residents, archival materials, and literary works, including Dina Rubina’s novel *On the Sunny Side of the Street*, which conveys the unique atmosphere of old Tashkent. The performance begins in one of the city’s iconic locations and leads the listener along a carefully designed route, revealing little-known stories and secrets” [5].

Uzbekistan, possessing rich theatrical traditions and actively modernizing its cultural policy, currently faces the need to develop its own strategy for the digitalization of theatrical activity, taking into account international experience and national specificity. For the country, it is important to find a balance between technological innovation and the preservation of unique cultural heritage, so that digitalization becomes a tool for development rather than for the homogenization of national theatrical art.

The main objective of this article is to analyze international practices of theatrical digitalization and to assess the prospects for their adaptation to the conditions of Uzbekistan, taking into account sociocultural, economic, and technological factors.

The digitalization of theatrical activity is a complex process of integrating digital technologies into various aspects of theatre functioning. According to foreign theatre critics, theatrical digitalization is not merely a technical upgrade or an addition to existing practices, but rather “a rich and diverse form of art that develops through the interaction of performers gathered together in one space and the constantly expanding flexible reach of digital technologies” [2, p. 305].

Several levels of digitalization in theatrical art can be identified:

- **Technological level** – the introduction of digital technologies into the production process (projections, mapping (projection design), interactive scenery);
- **Organizational level** – digitalization of managerial and marketing processes;
- **Communicative level** – the creation of new formats of interaction with audiences;

- **Content level** – the development of specific digital theatrical content.

It is important to emphasize that digitalization is not limited to the simple digitization of existing content or the remote broadcasting of performances, but rather represents a search for new theatrical forms and audience experiences that cannot be achieved within the framework of traditional theatre.

An analysis of international experience makes it possible to identify the following key directions in the digitalization of theatrical activity:

**1. Digital and streaming platforms.** The spread of digital online platforms is no longer a novelty in Uzbekistan. Their development began about a decade ago but initially affected primarily cinema and television rather than theatre. The application of digital technologies to theatrical productions began to be actively discussed shortly before the pandemic and became even more pronounced afterward. The opportunity to watch renowned performances not only from national theatres but also from leading international productions undoubtedly enriched and diversified the spiritual culture of theatre enthusiasts during a difficult period. The development of digital platforms for broadcasting theatrical performances significantly expands access to theatrical art and potentially attracts audiences that may not have previously been interested in this art form. Prominent examples include National Theatre Live (UK), Metropolitan Opera HD Live (USA), and Digital Theatre Plus (an international platform). Unfortunately, the theatrical art of Uzbekistan still requires further transformation and development. The implementation of similar online theatre projects could represent a new stage in the evolution of national theatre, enabling a rethinking of traditional forms and the discovery of new points of contact with contemporary reality.

**2. Virtual and augmented reality (Virtual Reality, Augmented Reality).** Virtual and augmented reality technologies open new horizons for the creative development of theatrical art. VR theatre enables immersive audience experiences in which the boundary between observer and participant is blurred and the spatial limitations of physical theatre are overcome. Successful examples of the use of VR in theatrical practice include *“The Tempest”* by the Royal Shakespeare Company (UK) and *“The Seagull”* by the Alexandrinsky Theatre (Russia).

**3. Promotion through social media and closer interaction with audiences.** The promotion of theatre activities through social media has opened new opportunities for audience engagement. Through live streams, backstage videos, interviews with actors and directors, stories, and vlogs, theatres have become closer to their audiences. Viewers have gained a unique opportunity to “look behind the scenes,” observe the rehearsal process, learn more about the individuals involved in productions, and experience the atmosphere of theatrical life without leaving

home. This format not only increases interest in performances but also fosters a stable emotional connection between theatres and their audiences. In this context, it is important to note the experience of the State Academic Bolshoi Theatre named after Alisher Navoi and the initiatives of its new management aimed at attracting audiences, particularly through short video clips that introduce viewers to the backstage life of the opera and ballet theatre's creative team.

**4. Artificial intelligence and generative technologies.** The use of artificial intelligence in the creation of theatrical productions represents one of the most innovative areas of theatrical digitalization. In theatre, artificial intelligence can function not only as a technical tool but also as a creative co-author, offering unexpected solutions and transforming the artistic process. An example of this approach is the production "*AI: When a Robot Writes a Play*" at the Švanda Theatre in Prague, where the text was partially generated by artificial intelligence.

The theatrical art of Uzbekistan possesses rich traditions and a developed infrastructure; however, the level of digitalization in this field remains relatively low.

At the same time, the development of theatrical art in the digital age requires not only the preservation of traditions but also a rethinking of approaches to audience engagement. The modern viewer, shaped by multimedia and interactive formats, presents new demands regarding the content and form of theatrical performances. Under these conditions, the introduction of digital technologies becomes not merely an innovative direction but a necessary tool for ensuring the sustainable development of the theatrical sphere. Digitalization allows theatres to expand their audiences, improve the quality of communication, strengthen the educational potential of art, and simultaneously preserve its national originality.

The contemporary generation of audiences is formed under conditions of global digitalization and is an active consumer of multimedia products, which predetermines changes in models of artistic perception. Consequently, theatrical art faces the need to adapt to new cultural realities and audience expectations. The integration of virtual and augmented reality, the development of interactive forms of audience participation, and the creation of hybrid formats combining elements of theatre, quests, and media installations open new prospects for theatrical art. These processes contribute not only to artistic renewal but also to the expansion of the educational, communicative, and cultural potential of theatre [6, p. 70]. At the present stage, digitalization in the theatrical sphere acts as an objective necessity dictated by general trends in technological and sociocultural development. For Uzbekistan, it has a comprehensive significance, as it enables the development of national theatrical art in several directions:

- digitalization can contribute to the popularization of theatrical art and increase its accessibility;
- it can serve as a tool for preserving authentic national traditions of stage creativity;
- it performs an important educational function, contributing to the spiritual development and aesthetic education of young people;
- it creates new opportunities for training professional personnel in the theatrical sphere (actors, directors, critics, researchers of theatre history and theory) [3, p. 58].

Despite the preference for the enduring traditions of “live theatre” in Uzbekistan, digitalization does not contradict its nature; on the contrary, it contributes to the preservation of the best examples of theatrical heritage. The digitization of performances and the creation of digital archives ensure the preservation of cultural values, while modern recording technologies make it possible to capture visual and expressive aspects of stage action that often remain beyond the viewer’s perception in the theatre hall, since “the camera always exceeds the visual capabilities of the spectator” [4, p. 80]. The creation of a digital recording of a performance using cinematic artistic techniques allows the stage action to be viewed from a different perspective, revealing details and facial expressions that are often impossible to see from a distance. The process of digitalization of theatrical art in Uzbekistan is developing gradually. Many theatres in the country are only at the initial stage of implementing digital tools—online ticket sales, the publication of video materials, and interaction with audiences through social networks. On the iticket.uz website, which provides online ticket sales for various cultural events, 21 out of 41 operating theatres in Uzbekistan are registered. Some theatres opened online ticket sales only in the spring of 2025. Nevertheless, even these steps indicate a transition of the national theatrical art of the country to a new level of organizational and artistic development.

Thus, the digitalization of theatrical art in Uzbekistan represents an important direction in the modernization of national culture and a comprehensive process affecting all aspects of theatre functioning as a cultural institution. It is not limited to technical modernization but becomes a factor in preserving cultural identity, expanding audiences, and integrating national theatre into the global cultural space. The development and implementation of a strategy for the digital development of theatrical activity, taking into account international experience and national specificity, is a necessary condition for the successful functioning of Uzbekistan’s national theatres in the contemporary sociocultural environment.

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