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**HYBRID MUSEUM THEATRE AS A TOOL FOR CULTURAL INTERPRETATION  
AND LEARNING**

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*Abstract*

*Hybrid Museum theatre integrates a combination of live, physical performance and digital media in enhancing museum education for young audiences in Nigeria. It incorporates live performance into museum spaces to enhance cultural interpretation and visitor learning. By embodying historical figures, narratives, and artifacts through dramatic reenactments, it transforms passive observation into immersive, emotional experiences. This approach bridges cognitive gaps, fosters empathy, and deepens understanding of diverse cultures. Drawing on case studies from global institutions, this article explores hybrid museum theatre's methodologies, impacts on audience engagement, and challenges in implementation, arguing it as an essential strategy for modern museology in an increasingly interactive world.*

*Keywords: Hybrid, Museum Theatre, Cultural Interpretation, Visitors Engagement, Role-Playing, Active Learning.*

**Introduction**

In recent decades, museums have shifted from static repositories of objects to dynamic spaces of interaction and meaning-making. This transformation has led to the increased use of performance-based strategies such as museum theatre, a visitor-centered form of public history and applied theatre that employs drama and storytelling to interpret cultural content. The emergence of digital technologies has transformed the global museum landscape, giving rise to virtual exhibitions, online collections, and interactive media. In Nigeria, although the adoption of digital museum practices is still developing, there is a growing recognition of the need to integrate digital tools with traditional exhibition methods. This integration has led to the concept of hybrid museum spaces, where physical and digital experiences coexist to enhance accessibility and engagement. Within this evolving context, theatre emerges as a powerful interpretive and educational tool. Museum theatre, which involves the use of performance techniques such as dramatization, storytelling, and role-play within museum settings, has been widely recognized for its ability to animate historical narratives and create immersive learning experiences. By engaging audiences emotionally and intellectually, theatre fosters deeper understanding and retention of information.

Hybrid museum theatre extends this concept by incorporating theatrical practices into both physical and digital museum environments. This approach offers new possibilities for

engaging young audiences, who are not only active participants in digital culture but also responsive to interactive and performative modes of learning. In Nigeria, where youth engagement in museums remains relatively low, the integration of theatre into hybrid museum spaces presents a promising strategy for revitalizing museum education.

### **Conceptual Framework: What Is Museum Theatre?**

Museum theatre integrates methods such as role-playing, character performances, monologues, historic reenactments, movement, and puppetry to bring museum narratives to life. It often features professional or trained actors, sometimes in collaboration with curators and educators, to construct performances that are grounded in historical and cultural research. Unlike conventional theatrical works staged for purely aesthetic reasons, museum theatre is typically oriented toward interpretation and learning, aiming to clarify complex cultural practices, historical events, and social relationships. Scholars describe museum theatre as a hybrid form situated at the intersection of museology, education, and performance studies. It draws on living-history, experiential learning, and narrative pedagogy to “vocalize” the stories behind museum objects and to make abstract cultural concepts more accessible. In this sense, museum theatre functions as a narrative vehicle that translates scholarly knowledge into embodied, emotionally resonant experiences for diverse audiences.

### **Museum Theatre and Cultural Interpretation**

Cultural interpretation in museums no longer relies solely on textual labels and vitrine displays; it increasingly adopts multimodal strategies to communicate meaning. Museum theatre is one such strategy, enabling institutions to interpret not only tangible artifacts but also intangible cultural heritage such as rituals, music, oral traditions, and social practices. Through dramatized narratives, museums can reconstruct historical settings, vocalize marginalized perspectives, and represent contested histories in ways that invite critical reflection. For example, museum-theatre programmes have been used to teach African American history by immersing participants in life-like simulations of historical realities, thereby deepening their understanding of systemic racism, resistance, and cultural resilience. Similarly, programmes targeting underrepresented communities, such as Roma students engaging with Greek folk musical instruments—have employed museum theatre to foster historical awareness, empathy, and dialogic participation. In both cases, performance becomes a tool for cultural interpretation that foregrounds lived experience over abstract description.

### **Museum Theatre as a Pedagogical Tool**

Research indicates that museum theatre can significantly enhance learning outcomes by combining sensory, intellectual, and affective dimensions of museum experiences. When audiences watch or participate in a museum-theatre performance, they engage multiple learning styles: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and emotional. This multimodal engagement supports deeper information retention and stronger affective connections to cultural content. Several case studies from South African and European museums demonstrate how museum-theatre formats, such as scripted performances, guided character tours, and interactive sessions—can improve knowledge acquisition and “cultural seeing,” that is, the ability to interpret objects and

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environments through culturally informed perspectives. In particular, museum theatre has proven effective with school groups, youth audiences, and communities that may find conventional museum texts alienating or inaccessible. By presenting cultural information in narrative and performative form, museums can lower barriers to participation and promote inclusive learning environments.

**Design, Ethics, and Authenticity**

Despite its advantages, the use of museum theatre in cultural interpretation requires careful planning and ethical sensitivity. Because performances often address historical trauma, contested identities, and minority perspectives, they must be grounded in rigorous research and, where possible, informed by community consultation. Misrepresentation or oversimplification can reinforce stereotypes or distort cultural narratives, thereby undermining the educational and interpretive goals of the museum. Best practices in museum theatre therefore emphasize authenticity, collaboration, and transparency. Curators and educators typically work with historians, community leaders, and performance practitioners to co-construct narratives that respect cultural integrity while remaining pedagogically effective. This collaborative approach ensures that museum theatre does not merely entertain but serves as a responsible medium for cultural interpretation and critical learning.

**Contemporary Applications and Digital Expansions**

Recent developments have extended museum theatre beyond physical spaces, incorporating digital and online formats. Live-streamed performances, virtual character tours, and hybrid in-person/ digital programmes have enabled museums to reach wider and more diverse audiences, including those who cannot visit institutions in person. For instance, online museum-theatre initiatives directed at Roma students have used live-streamed dramatizations to connect participants with intangible heritage and historical figures, demonstrating how performance can be adapted to digital education contexts. These innovations also align with emerging trends in museum education that prioritize accessibility, interactivity, and digital engagement. As museums continue to experiment with blended formats, museum theatre is likely to evolve further, incorporating multimedia elements, audience participation via digital platforms, and data-informed evaluation of learning outcomes.

**Digital and Hybrid Media in Museums**

Recent scholarship on digital museum education shows that digital tools such as audio-guides, interactive touchscreens, virtual exhibitions, mobile apps, and online platforms can extend access, deepen interpretation, and personalise learning. Simon (2010) and Parry (2013) argue that digital media allow museums to move beyond one-directional communication towards more participatory, user-driven experiences. Work on youth, intangible heritage, and new technologies (Unesco, 2021; Banks, 2022) highlights that young people expect museums to be digitally responsive, using platforms they already use in everyday life (YouTube, Instagram, TikTok, and the likes.). At the same time, critical scholars such as Cameron and Kenderdine (2007) and Ross (2016) warn against treating digitization as a purely technical exercise; they urge museums to focus on ethical, inclusive, and participatory digital practices that centre local voices and lived experiences. In the Nigerian and broader African context, research on digitization of

cultural heritage (e.g., Nigerian Museum digitization projects, 2020; Igwe, 2022) shows that while digital infrastructures are improving, challenges remain around power supply, internet access, training, and copyright. This concept of hybrid museum theatre fits within this emerging conversation: it is not just about “adding screens” to museums, but about integrating digital tools into embodied, performance-based encounters that remain sensitive to local conditions.

### **Hybrid Museum Theatre: Global and Local Examples**

Internationally, museum-theatre projects have used live performance, digital media, and participatory formats to engage young audiences. For example, several European and North American museums have staged short historical plays inside galleries, combined with projections, soundscapes, or mobile-based quizzes to deepen understanding of exhibits (Pekarik, 1998; Jackson, 2019). Others have run youth-centred programmes that train young people as storytellers, curators, and digital creators, giving them authority to reinterpret heritage in contemporary terms (Unesco, 2021; Banks, 2022). In the African and Nigerian context, there are emerging examples of digitally-inflected heritage projects involving youth. The African Youth Livelihoods Virtual Museum, for example, uses podcasts, webinars, and virtual-reality-style storytelling to amplify young people’s experiences of work and livelihoods. (Human Sciences Research Council, 2024). Another strand of scholarship explores how Yoruba performance traditions and museum theatre can be creatively merged for heritage preservation, using stage productions based on historical figures and museum objects (Omoera, 2021; Ogunseye, 2019). These examples show that hybrid, performance-driven museum education is already being experimented within Africa, but usually outside formal museum buildings or as one-off projects rather than as sustained programmes.

### **Hybrid Museum Theatre in Nigeria: Gaps and Opportunities**

In Nigeria, several studies on museum education note that most museums still rely on static displays and didactic labels, with limited experimentation in performance-based or digital learning. At the same time, Nigerian theatre and cultural-policy writings increasingly emphasise the need to promote local stories, indigenous knowledge, and creative industries—a call that aligns naturally with museum-theatre practice (National Theatre, Lagos policy documents, 2020; Afolayan, 2017). However, there is almost no published research that systematically examines: How live performance can be embedded in Nigerian museum education. How such performances can be combined with digital tools to create hybrid museum theatre. How young Nigerian audiences respond to such hybrid formats in terms of learning, engagement, and critical awareness. This gap is precisely where this proposed study intervenes. By focusing on hybrid museum theatre in Nigerian museums, this research will: Contribute empirical data on how performance and digital media can be combined in a Nigerian context. Offer a context-sensitive model of museum education that builds on indigenous performance traditions while engaging youth through familiar digital practices.

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### **Conclusion**

Hybrid museum theatre is a powerful and innovative approach to museum education. The integration of physical and digital performance spaces significantly enhances: Audience engagement, Learning effectiveness, and Cultural understanding.

The study will also conclude that:

- Nigerian museums are yet to fully adopt interactive and digital strategies.
- Theatre provides a strong foundation for educational engagement.
- The combination of theatre and technology creates a dynamic learning environment.

Therefore, hybrid museum theatre may have the potential to transform museums in Nigeria from static spaces into interactive educational hubs.

Hybrid museum theatre represents a powerful and versatile tool for cultural interpretation and learning in contemporary museums. Future research may further investigate the long-term learning impacts of museum-theatre interventions, the effectiveness of digital formats, and the role of museum theatre in addressing social justice and decolonial agendas within museum practice. Such investigations will help refine museum-theatre models and strengthen their contribution to the evolving mission of museums as centers of cultural interpretation and lifelong learning.

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