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ARE SCHOLARS GOING DIGITAL? A GLOBAL STUDY ON THEATRE

OS ACADÊMICOS ESTÃO SE DIGITALIZANDO? UM ESTUDO GLOBAL SOBRE O TEATRO

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Abstract
The introduction of digital technologies into the field of theatre marks a qualitative rupture distinct from previous technical transformations. Digital theatre necessitates not only the adoption of new tools on stage but also a fundamental reconsideration of theatre's core concepts. Today, texts generated by artificial intelligence, virtual performers, and digital design-based practices have become increasingly common. But how do theatre scholars perceive this evolutionary transformation? This study focuses on the scholar perspective on digitalization in theatre and aims to construct a "map of opinions." To this end, a field study was conducted with the participation of 114 scholars from 37 countries, using a 20-item questionnaire. In the study, where the dependent variable was defined as "digital orientations" and the independent variable as "theatre scholars," a five-point Likert scale was employed. The study was structured around four main sections: Beliefs, Expectations, Concerns, and Transformations. All sections were designed to unpack contemporary issues related to digital theatre, including artificial intelligence, liveness, and archiving. In the Beliefs section, the effects of the current digital framework were examined; in Expectations, future possibilities were considered; in Concerns, potential risks were addressed; and in Transformations, the practical changes that digital theatre has produced or is expected to produce were analyzed.

Keywords: Digital Theatre. Scholar Tendencies. Contemporary Theatre Studies.

Resumo
A inserção das tecnologias digitais no campo teatral assinala uma ruptura qualitativamente distinta em relação às transformações técnicas anteriores. O teatro digital não se restringe à incorporação de novos dispositivos cênicos, mas impõe também a necessidade de repensar os conceitos fundamentais do próprio teatro. Atualmente, textos gerados por inteligência artificial, atores virtuais e práticas baseadas no design digital tornaram-se amplamente difundidos. Diante desse cenário, como os pesquisadores e acadêmicos da área teatral percebem essa metamorfose evolutiva? Esta pesquisa concentra-se na perspectiva acadêmica da digitalização no teatro e tem como objetivo traçar um "mapa de percepções". Nesse contexto, foi realizado um estudo de campo com a participação de 114 acadêmicos de 37 países, por meio da aplicação de um questionário composto por 20 questões. No estudo, cuja variável dependente é definida como "orientações digitais" e a variável independente como "acadêmicos de teatro", adotou-se a escala Likert de cinco pontos. A pesquisa foi estruturada em quatro eixos fundamentais — Crenças, Expectativas, Preocupações e Transformações —, concebidos para analisar temas contemporâneos relacionados ao teatro digital, tais como inteligência artificial, presença ao vivo e arquivamento. No eixo Crenças, examinam-se os impactos da atual configuração digital; em Expectativas, as possibilidades futuras; em Preocupações, os riscos potenciais; e, em Transformações, as mudanças prováveis que o

teatro digital tem produzido e/ou poderá produzir na prática teatral.

Palavras-chave: *Teatro Digital. Tendências Acadêmicas. Pesquisas Contemporâneas em Teatro.*

1 INTRODUCTION

The history of theatre is, to a large extent, the history of the reciprocal interaction between technical possibilities and aesthetic forms. From the Ancient Greek stage to Renaissance perspective, from gas lighting to electric illumination, each technological innovation has transformed staging practices and audience perception. However, the entry of digital technologies into the field of theatre signals a qualitative rupture distinct from previous technical transformations. Digital theatre compels a reconsideration not only of the new tools used on stage but also of theatre's foundational concepts: liveness, representation, the body, space, and time.

But what exactly, is digital theatre? Martin Puchner observes that while it is relatively easy to reach agreement on the beginning and end of modern drama, it is far more difficult to determine what modern drama precisely is and what, precisely, makes it modern (Puchner, 2008: 1). The situation is no different when it comes to digital theatre. While it is relatively easy to construct a historical timeline of its development, defining it within clear boundaries proves far more challenging. Indeed, the historicity of digital theatre is clearly manifested in its relationship with technology. Developments such as the emergence of video and projection technologies, the invention of the computer, and the advent of the internet era contribute to delineating its historical boundaries.

Yet digital theatre owes its existence as much to new technologies as it does to new forms of theater. *Post-dramatic theatre* and, by extension, Hans-Thies Lehmann, constitutes one of the principal theoretical frameworks that establishes the aesthetic, dramaturgical, and ontological foundations of digital theatre. Although Lehmann does not explicitly use the term "digital theatre," he articulates the post dramatic ground that makes it possible. Indeed, for Lehmann, post dramatic theatre denotes an aesthetic regime in which the dominance of the dramatic text over the stage comes to an end (Lehmann,

2006). In this context, narrative coherence, character construction, and deterministic structure recede into the background, while staging offers a temporally and spatially fragmented experience. Visuality, sound, the body, and media elements cease to function as components serving the text and instead become autonomous producers of meaning. The autonomization of media on stage, in turn, gives rise to an ontological mutation: video projections, live camera usage, and electronic sound systems become integral components of the dramaturgical structure of performance.

Another key figure for the theoretical foundations of digital theatre is Philip Auslander. Like Lehmann, Auslander does not explicitly define the term "digital theatre," yet through the concepts of liveness and mediatization, he theoretically enables the ontological grounding of digital theatre. The point of departure for Auslander's theory is his critique of the widespread assumption that liveness constitutes an immutable essence of theatre. In conventional understandings of theatre, liveness has been regarded as a quality grounded in physical co-presence within the same space and time, positioning theatre in opposition to mediated and recorded forms. Auslander, however, argues that liveness is historically produced in conjunction with media technologies. For him, liveness is not the opposite of media but a concept that acquires meaning within a mediatized culture (Auslander, 1999). In this sense, liveness is not opposed to technology; rather, it is a perception produced by media technologies. New technologies have not eradicated the perception of liveness; they have reconfigured its perception. From Auslander's perspective, digital theatre can therefore be understood as a performance form in which liveness is reconstituted under digital conditions.

Nick Kaye's performance theory, particularly his approach to space and site-specific performance, provides an important theoretical framework for understanding how digital theatre operates. According to Nick Kaye, performance is not a closed event confined to a fixed theatrical space but an experience that emerges through specific contexts, locations, and relational dynamics. In *Site-Specific Art*, Kaye emphasizes that the meaning of performance cannot be considered independently of its relationship to the site in which it occurs. Space, therefore, is not the backdrop of performance but one of its constitutive elements (Kaye, 2000). This approach is critical for understanding digital theatre. Particularly in performances that occur in digital environments, space ceases to be a purely physical location and is redefined through screens, interfaces, and networks.

Conversely, Kaye shifts the focus away from Auslander's debates on liveness toward the concept of *site-specificity*. In digital theatre, what matters is not the audience's physical co-presence in the same space but their inclusion within the performative situation. Simultaneity, interactivity, and contextual participation rank among the fundamental characteristics of digital performance. *Multimedia* is another key concept in Kaye's work that positions text, image, sound, and software as equal dramaturgical agents.

Steve Dixon, by contrast, undertakes a clear and systematic attempt to define digital theatre. Whereas Auslander, Lehmann, and Kaye largely offer indirect frameworks, Dixon conceptualizes digital theatre explicitly in its historical, aesthetic, and technical dimensions. Dixon approaches digital theatre, first and foremost, within the broader field of "digital performance," which encompasses theatre, dance, performance art, and installation. For Dixon, digital performance refers to practices in which computer-based technologies transform the processes of production, presentation, and reception of performance. Digital theatre emerges within this field as a specific form grounded in the simultaneous interaction between theatre's live performance tradition and digital media. Dixon emphasizes that digital technologies on stage are not merely auxiliary tools but function as elements that determine the structural logic of performance. Within this framework, the defining characteristic of digital theatre is the coexistence of live performance and mediatic processes. While the performer's body is physically present on stage, it is simultaneously integrated into digital images, sound-processing systems, and virtual spaces. This condition renders the traditional opposition between liveness and embeddedness obsolete. While this approach aligns with Auslander's discussions of liveness, Dixon addresses the issue primarily at a practical and technological level. In digital theatre, liveness is not opposed to technology; rather, it is an experience produced in conjunction with it. A distinguishing feature of Dixon's definition of digital theatre is his positioning of technology as a dramaturgical agent. Digital technologies do not function merely as elements of scenography or visual embellishment; they directly shape the temporal, spatial, and narrative structure of performance. Algorithmic systems, real-time data processing, sensors, and interactive software constitute the dramaturgical framework of digital theatre. Consequently, digital theatre cannot exist without a technological infrastructure (Dixon, 2007).

Within these debates, Johannes Birringer occupies a distinctive position by approaching digital theatre through the relationship between the body and technology. However, this body is no longer merely a biological entity. Through sensors, software, motion-capture systems, and wearable technologies, the body is transformed into an interface that simultaneously produces and processes data. In digital theatre, the body is not positioned as the opposite of technology; rather, it becomes a hybrid structure that operates in conjunction with it. In this context, digital theatre offers a *post-humanist* perspective that questions the anthropocentric understanding of theatre. Performance emerges as a co-production of human and non-human actors. In *Media and Performance* and *Performance, Technology, and Science*, Birringer argues that the corporeal and technological components of contemporary performance have become inseparable. On the other hand, Birringer often interprets digital theatre through a choreographic mode of thinking. Choreography is not limited to the movement of the body; the arrangement of digital images, sounds, and data flows also constitutes a choreographic structure. Within this approach, all elements on stage (body, technology, and media) function as equally performative actors. Consequently, digital theatre blurs the boundaries between theatre and dance, approaching performance as a multilayered process (Birringer, 1998).

Sarah Bay-Cheng approaches the process from an epistemological rather than an ontological perspective. According to Bay-Cheng, digital theatre does not involve the external "addition" of digital technologies to theatre; rather, it represents an epistemological rupture that fundamentally transforms theatre's understanding of history, dramaturgy, archiving, and liveness. Bay-Cheng specifically frames digital theatre along the axes of media, history, and memory, viewing it as a domain that restructures the modes of thinking about theatre. One of her most significant contributions is her emphasis on the archiving of performance and the writing of theatre history. Digital theatre removes the temporality of performance from being an absolute characteristic, transforming it into a continuously accessible and re-circulating cultural object. This, in turn, reshapes the way theatre history is written. Through digital archives, performances are not merely documented; they are also recontextualized and acquire new meanings. For Bay-Cheng, digital theatre transforms theatre history from a static narrative into a dynamic process (Bay-Cheng, 2015).

In addition to these theorists, numerous scholars, including Matthew Causey, Gabriella Giannachi, Andy Lavender, Helen Freshwater, Shannon Jackson, Marina Grzinic, Josephine Machon, Victoria Keddie, Etienne Le Roy, Marcela Martinez, and Anne C. Shreffler have engaged directly or indirectly with digital theatre. Today, an increasing number of researchers, notably Lauren Palmer, Kelly Oliver, Martin Welton, Isabella van Elferen, Justin L. Sanders, Amber E. Frid-Johnson, and David Wiles, are dedicating their work to this field.

It is evident that scholar interest in digital theatre has been steadily growing. This interest is not limited to an increasing number of articles. Peer-reviewed journals are also dedicating special issues and dossiers to the field. Journals such as *Theatre Journal*, *Performance Research*, *Contemporary Theatre Review*, and *TDR* feature special issues on themes like "digital performance," "online theatre," and "mediated liveness." International conferences have seen not only a rise but also a consolidation of panels titled "Digital Performance," "Online Theatre," and "Post-pandemic Performance." Particularly since 2015 and in the wake of the pandemic, there has been a marked rise in master's and doctoral theses on topics such as "digital theatre," "online performance," and "hybrid staging." On scholar social networks like Academia and ResearchGate, numerous tags such as "digital theatre" and "digitalization in theatre" have been created, bringing together thousands of researchers under these categories.

Despite the prominence of digitalization within contemporary theatre discourse, there is currently no research addressing the general tendencies of scholars in this area. This study may be considered as an initial step toward filling this gap in the field.

2 METHOD

The study, which identifies "scholar tendencies" as the dependent variable and "theatre scholars" as the independent variable, is based on the central question: "What do theatre scholars think about digital theatre and digitalization in theatre?" The participant group is limited to theatre scholars who are actively pursuing their scholar careers and hold the titles of Doctor, Associate Professor, or Professor. Titles such as Lecturer, Specialist Instructor, and Artist-Educator were not included in the participant group.

The research field of the study was defined as university departments offering education under the broad umbrella of theatre, performance, and performing arts. Within this scope, programs such as Acting, Dramaturgy, Directing, Playwriting, and Stage Design were selected as subcategories of the research field. A total of 63 universities from 37 countries meeting these criteria were included in the study. The countries are listed alphabetically as follows: USA, Germany, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Czech Republic, China, Denmark, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, India, Netherlands, Ghana, South Africa, Hong Kong, United Kingdom, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, Italy, Iceland, Japan, Canada, Kenya, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Poland, Russia, Portugal, Uganda, Ukraine, Greece, New Zealand, and Zimbabwe.

The study is structured around four main sections: Beliefs, Expectations, Concerns, and Transformations. Each section was designed to explore contemporary issues in digital theatre, such as artificial intelligence, liveness, and creative practices. The Beliefs section investigates the impacts of the current digital theatre landscape, the Expectations section examines its potential positive contributions for the future, the Concerns section addresses possible negative implications moving forward, and the Transformations section explores the practical changes that digital theatre has produced or may produce.

Since the study is based on measuring the orientations of scholars, the primary method selected was a questionnaire. The questions consist of Likert scale–based items. Scales are data collection tools capable of measuring characteristics such as knowledge, emotion, interest, perception, attitude, belief, inclination, risk, quality of life, and behavior (Ulusoy, 2025: 264). To measure the attitudes, inclinations, and opinions of individuals and groups, various scales have been developed, including Bogardus's "Social Distance Scale," L. L. Thurstone's "Equal-Appearing Intervals" scale, L. Guttman's "Cumulative Scaling" technique, and Rensis Likert's "Scaling by Summated Ratings" model (Tezbaşaran, 2008: 5). Among these, the most widely used scale is the Likert scale due to its ease of application, coding, and measurement practice (Cramer and Howitt, 2004: 89). Consequently, it has become a frequently employed technique in many fields such as social sciences, political science, psychology, marketing, and education (Turan *et al*., 2015: 187).

The Likert scale is a widely used rating scale designed to measure latent constructs such as attitudes, opinions, or perceptions through a structured response format (Ankur, 2015: 397). It consists of a series of statements or questions, each accompanied by a symmetrical range of response options that allow participants to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. Likert-type scales are valuable research tools due to their standardized ability to capture human sentiments, enabling participants to express varying degrees of opinion rather than binary choices. By converting subjective qualitative data into measurable metrics, they facilitate detailed data collection and robust statistical analysis. Additionally, combining responses across multiple items provides a comprehensive measure of underlying attitudes or viewpoints (Koo & Yang, 2025: 1–2).

Likert-type questions consist of a statement expressing an attitude or opinion about the topic under investigation, along with response options indicating the level of agreement with that statement. To determine the level of agreement, multiple options are presented between two extremes. These options are typically ordered from "highest to lowest" or "best to worst." During the analysis phase, each option is assigned a numerical value according to its rank, allowing the qualitative data to be converted into quantitative data for analysis (Turan *et al*., 2015: 188).

In the first three sections of the questionnaire, the system developed by Likert was used, employing a 5-point scale. Responses were collected across the range of "strongly agree," "agree," "neutral," "disagree," and "strongly disagree Each item required respondents to express a single evaluative judgment.

In the final section of the questionnaire, titled "Transformations," the closed-ended question format was used. Closed-ended questions limit respondents to a predefined set of answers, providing simple and concise responses. Such questions are typically formatted as yes/no, multiple-choice, or rating-scale items (Sehwail, 2024). "A closed-ended question is a type of question in which the respondent is given possible answer options. In this type of question, also known as structured questions, the respondent can answer quickly and reliably, and the researcher can analyze the responses efficiently" (Büyüköztürk, 2005: 5). As an indispensable tool for effective questionnaires, closed-ended questions require succinct answers. Simplifying the answer options encourages participant engagement and facilitates data analysis. Frequently encountered

in multiple-choice questionnaires, user research, and product evaluations, these questions aim to maximize response rates (Bondaruk, 2025).

Within this scope, a total of 20 questions were asked across the four sections, averaging five questions per section. No questions were included regarding age, gender, race, or religious beliefs.

The relevance, currency, and adequacy of the questionnaire questions for measuring orientations were reviewed in consultation with three different scholars, all of whom provided positive feedback. Subsequently, a legal application was submitted to the relevant unit for ethical evaluation of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was processed after receiving unanimous approval from the Kocaeli University Rectorate Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee, deeming it appropriate in terms of scientific research and publication ethics at its meeting dated 27/10/2025, decision number 2025/15, item 10.

The questionnaire was prepared online via Google Forms application, and each question was designated as “mandatory” within the same digital platform.

Potential participants meeting the study criteria were contacted via their universities’ institutional emails with the “.edu” domain, and the questionnaire link was shared along with an explanatory text outlining the purpose and scope of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was made accessible on 10/11/2025 and remained open to responses until 10/01/2026.

3 FINDINGS

The findings of the study were examined under four subheadings, in line with the structure of the questionnaire.

3.1 Beliefs

In the Beliefs section, scholars’ views on the current structure of digital theatre were investigated. Within this scope, the relationships between playwriting and artificial intelligence, theatre directing and digital technologies, stage design and digital tools,

theatrical performance and robotic actors, and theatre audiences and digital platforms were examined.

For the statement "I believe the use of artificial intelligence in playwriting is a positive development," 7.9% of respondents answered, "strongly agree," 13.2% answered "agree," 34.2% answered "neutral," 23.7% answered "disagree," and 21.1% answered "strongly disagree."

For the statement "Digital technologies provide new opportunities for original artistic expression in theatre directing," 30.7% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 50.9% selected "agree," 10.5% selected "neutral," 6.1% selected "disagree," and 1.8% selected "strongly disagree."

For the statement "I support the use of digital tools such as VR, holograms, and projections in stage design," 37.7% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 48.2% selected "agree," 7.9% selected "neutral," 2.6% selected "disagree," and 3.5% selected "strongly disagree."

For the statement "I believe that robots and virtual actors enrich the art of theatre," 10.5% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 22.8% selected "agree," 27.2% selected "neutral," 20.2% selected "disagree," and 19.2% selected "strongly disagree."

For the statement "I see no problem with a play being watched only on a digital platform," 8.8% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 24.6% selected "agree," 10.5% selected "neutral," 40.4% selected "disagree," and 15.8% selected "strongly disagree."

Table 1

Beliefs

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Avg.
I believe the use of artificial intelligence in playwriting as a positive development.	24 (21.1)	27 (23.7)	39 (34.2)	9 (28.1)	9 (7.9)	2.42
Digital technologies provide new opportunities for original artistic expression in theatre directing.	2 (1.8)	7 (6.1)	12 (10.5)	58 (50.9)	35 (30.7)	4.02
I support the use of digital tools such as VR, holograms and projections in stage design.	4 (3.5)	3 (2.6)	9 (7.9)	55 (48.2)	43 (37.7)	4.14
I believe that robots and virtual actors enrich the art of theatre.	22 (19.3)	23 (20.2)	31 (27.2)	26 (22.8)	12 (10.5)	2.85
I see no problem with a play being watched only on a digital platform.	18 (15.8)	46 (40.4)	12 (10.5)	28 (24.6)	10 (8.8)	2.70

Strongly disagree: 1, Strongly agree: 5

3.2 Expectations

In the Expectations section, scholars' positive, future-oriented expectations regarding digitalization in theatre were investigated. Within this scope, the themes examined included new target audiences, more accessible theatre, an increase in theatre practitioners, digitalization in theatre education, and career opportunities in the digital realm.

For the statement "Digitalization can make it possible to reach new audiences in theatre," the rates were 48.2% for "strongly agree," 39.5% for "agree," 5.3% each for "neutral" and "disagree," and 1.8% for "strongly disagree."

For the statement "Digitalization can create a more accessible theatre for everyone (more economical, more widespread, etc.)," the rates were 35.1% for "strongly agree," 47.7% for "agree," 8.8% each for "neutral" and "disagree," and 2.6% for "strongly disagree."

For the statement "Digitalization can help more artists emerge," 16.7% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 37.7% selected "agree," 24.6% selected "neutral," 18.4% selected "disagree," and 2.6% selected "strongly disagree."

For the statement "I believe that digitalization (the use of digital tools, etc.) will play an increasingly important role in the future of theatre education," the rates were 39.5% for "strongly agree," 50.0% for "agree," 8.8% for "neutral," 1.8% for "disagree," and 0% for "strongly disagree."

For the statement "Digitalization offers new opportunities in my personal research/practice area," 42.1% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 39.5% selected "agree," 13.2% selected "neutral," 4.4% selected "disagree," and 0.9% selected "strongly disagree."

Table 2

Expectations

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Avg.
Digitalization can make it possible to reach new audiences in theatre.	2 (1.8)	6 (5.3)	6 (5.3)	45 (39.5)	55 (48.2)	4.27
Digitalization can create a more accessible theatre for everyone.	3 (2.6)	10 (8.8)	10 (8.8)	51 (44.7)	40 (35.1)	4.01
Digitalization can help more artists emerge.	3 (2.6)	21 (18.4)	28 (24.6)	43 (37.7)	19 (16.7)	3.47
I believe that digitalization will play an increasingly important role in the future of theatre education.	0 (0.0)	2 (1.8)	10 (8.8)	57 (50.0)	45 (39.5)	4.27
Digitalization offers new opportunities in my personal research/practice area.	1 (0.9)	5 (4.4)	15 (13.2)	45 (39.5)	48 (42.1)	4.17

3.3 Concerns

In the Concerns section, scholars' future-oriented anxieties regarding digital theatre and digitalization in theatre were investigated. Within this scope, issues such as the "problem of liveness," potential copyright infringements, employment challenges, the possibility of artificial intelligence harming creativity, and the risk of theatre drifting away from art were examined.

For the statement "I believe that digital theatre weakens the element of liveliness inherent in theatre," 23.7% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 36.8% selected "agree," 20.2% selected "neutral," 17.5% selected "disagree," and 1.8% selected "strongly disagree."

For the statement "I believe that the use of artificial intelligence could lead to copyright infringements," 56.1% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 28.1% selected "agree," 14.0% selected "neutral," and 0.9% each selected "disagree" and "strongly disagree."

For the statement "I am concerned that the increasing digitalization and use of artificial intelligence in theatre could lead to employment issues," 28.1% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 43.0% selected "agree," 13.2% selected "neutral," 14.0% selected "disagree," and 1.8% selected "strongly disagree."

For the statement "I'm concerned that the use of artificial intelligence in theatre has the potential to cause harm to creativity," 26.3% of respondents selected "strongly

agree," 36.0% selected "agree," 17.5% selected "neutral," 14.0% selected "disagree," and 6.1% selected "strongly disagree."

For the statement "I worry that theatre is moving away from art and turning into a technology show," 29.8% of respondents selected "strongly agree," 16.7% selected "agree," 21.1% selected "neutral," 23.7% selected "disagree," and 8.8% selected "strongly disagree."

Table 3

Concerns

Item	1	2	3	4	5	Avg.
I believe that digital theatre weakens the element of liveliness inherent in theatre.	2 (1.8)	20 (17.5)	23 (20.2)	42 (36.8)	27 (23.7)	3.63
I believe that the use of artificial intelligence could lead to copyright infringements.	1 (0.9)	1 (0.9)	16 (14.0)	32 (28.1)	64 (56.1)	4.37
I am concerned that the increasing digitalization and use of artificial intelligence in theatre could lead to employment issues.	2 (1.8)	16 (14.0)	15 (13.2)	49 (43.0)	32 (28.1)	3.81
I'm concerned that the use of artificial intelligence in theatre has the potential to cause harm to creativity.	7 (6.1)	16 (14.0)	20 (17.5)	41 (36.0)	30 (26.3)	3.62
I worry that theatre is moving away from art and turning into a technology show.	10 (8.8)	27 (23.7)	24 (21.1)	19 (16.7)	34 (29.8)	3.35

3.4 Transformations

In the Transformations section, scholars' views on the practical changes that digital theatre and digitalization in theatre have produced or may produce were investigated.

For the first question in the Transformations section, "In your opinion, which area has been most transformed by digitalization in theatre?" 63.2% of participants answered "Design," 25.4% answered "Archiving," 10.5% answered "Direction," and 0.9% answered "Acting."

Table 4

Transformation-I

Transformation	Frequency	%
Direction	12	10.5
Acting	1	0.9
Design	72	63.2
Archiving	29	25.4

For the question "Which aspect of the theatre experience is digitalization transforming the most?" 44.7% of participants answered "Ease of access," 26.3% answered "Sense of liveliness," 18.4% answered "Participation," and 10.5% answered "Emotional intensity."

Table 5

Transformation-II

Transformation	Frequency	%
Participation	21	18.4
Ease of access	51	44.7
Emotional intensity	12	10.5
Sense of liveliness	30	26.3

For the question "Which form of participation has digitalization changed the most in theatre?" 51.8% of participants answered "Online viewing," 20.2% answered "Hybrid participation," 17.5% answered "Interactive participation (chat, gamification, etc.)," and 10.5% answered "Physical participation of the audience."

Table 6

Transformation-III

Transformation	Frequency	%
Physical participation of the audience	12	10.5
Online viewing	59	51.8
Interactive participation	20	17.5
Hybrid participation	23	20.2

For the question "In your opinion, which interdisciplinary relationship has digitalization strengthened the most in theatre?" 57% of participants answered "Film/media studies," 30.7% answered "Information technology/computer science,"

while “Sociology/cultural studies” and “Philosophy/aesthetics” were both selected by 7% of participants.

Table 7

Transformation-IV

Transformation	Frequency	%
Film/media studies	65	57.0
Information technology/computer science	35	30.7
Sociology/cultural studies	7	6.1
Philosophy/aesthetics	7	6.1

For the final question of the questionnaire and this section, “In your opinion, which question does digitalization in theatre require us to address most?” 31.6% of participants answered “Change in the essence of art,” 29.8% answered “Liveliness,” 20.2% answered “Technological dependency,” and 18.4% answered “Audience engagement.”

Table 8

Transformation-V

Transformation	Frequency	%
Liveliness	34	29.8
Audience engagement	21	18.4
Change in the essence of art	36	31.6
Technological dependency	23	20.2

4 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Highest scores

The item with the highest score in the Beliefs section was related to the use of technology in favour of design. Participants indicated their support for the use of digital tools such as VR, holograms, and projections in stage design, with an arithmetic mean of 4.14.

In the Expectations section, the item examining the correlation between digitalization and target audiences received the highest score. Accordingly, participants

believe, with a mean of 4.27, that digitalization can make it possible to reach new theatre audiences.

Among all questionnaire items, the highest mean score was found in the Concerns section. Participants expressed concern that artificial intelligence could lead to copyright infringements, with a high arithmetic mean of 4.37.

In the Transformations section of the questionnaire, which consisted of closed-ended questions, the item "In your opinion, which area has been most transformed by digitalization in theatre?" stood out. Accordingly, out of 114 participants, 72 (63.2%) believed that design is the area most transformed by digitalization. This response represents the highest frequency point in the questionnaire.

4.2 Lowest scores

The lowest score in the Beliefs section came from the item on the "artificial intelligence–playwriting relationship." Participants supported the use of artificial intelligence in playwriting with an average of only 2.42. This also represents the lowest mean among all items in the questionnaire.

In the Expectations section, the lowest score was for the expectation that "digitalization can help more artists emerge." The arithmetic mean regarding the correlation between digitalization and the number of artists remained at 3.47.

The lowest score in the Concerns section was for the possibility that theatre might drift away from art due to digitalization. Accordingly, the concern that theatre could lose its artistic qualities and turn into a technology show had a mean of 3.35.

In the Transformations section, only 1 out of 114 participants (0.9%) considered acting as the area most transformed by digitalization. This response also represents the lowest frequency within the Transformations section.

4.3 Abstainers (Neutral Responses)

Across the questionnaire, neutral responses were not highly concentrated, indicating that participants tended to provide clearer positive or negative answers.

However, in some items, participants remained more reserved, and the frequency of neutral responses increased.

The item with the highest frequency of neutral responses in the questionnaire was in the Beliefs section. A total of 34.2% of participants (39 out of 114) refrained from expressing a positive or negative opinion regarding the use of artificial intelligence in text writing and selected "neutral." As a result, the "neutral" response reached a higher frequency than any other option for this item.

The item with the second-highest frequency of neutral responses came from the field of acting, also within the Beliefs section. Accordingly, 27.2% of participants (31 out of 114) remained undecided regarding whether robotic actors contribute to the art of theatre. Here too, the "neutral" response reached a higher frequency than the other options.

4.4 Consensus

In the Beliefs section, participants appeared to reach a consensus that digital technologies offer new opportunities in theatre directing. Accordingly, 93 out of 114 scholars (81.6%) fell on the positive side of the neutral midpoint. Similarly, 98 out of 114 participants (85.9%) supported the use of digital technologies in stage design.

The Expectations section appears to be the most agreed-upon section of the questionnaire. In total, 100 out of 114 scholars (87.7%) believe that digitalization can help theatre reach new audiences. Additionally, 79.8% of participants (91/114) believe that digitalization can create a more accessible theatre for everyone (more economical, more widespread). A total of 102 out of 114 scholars (89.5%) think that the role of digital tools in theatre education will increase in the future. Likewise, 93 out of 114 participants (81.6%) believe that digitalization offers new opportunities in their own research areas.

In the Concerns section, out of a total of 114 participants, 96 (84.2%) expressed concern that the use of artificial intelligence could lead to copyright infringements. Thus, there is broad consensus regarding the issue of copyright violations.

In the Transformations section, the highest level of agreement was among the 72 participants (63.2%) who believed that digitalization has most transformed the field of design. Another area of consensus was the item examining the relationship between

digitalization and interdisciplinarity in theatre. Here, 65 participants (57.0%) believed that digitalization has strengthened the connection between theatre and "Film/media studies" the most.

4.5 Significant divergences

The most notable divergences in the questionnaire were observed in the Transformations section. In particular, the distribution of responses to the final question, "In your opinion, which question does digitalization in theatre require us to address most?" was fairly homogeneous. Thirty-six participants (31.6%) answered "Change in the essence of art," 34 (29.8%) answered "Liveliness," 23 (20.2%) answered "Technological dependency," and 21 (18.4%) answered "Audience engagement."

For the item in the Beliefs section, "I believe that robots and virtual actors enrich the art of theatre," out of 114 participants, 12 (10.5%) selected "strongly agree," 26 (22.8%) selected "agree," 31 (27.2%) selected "neutral," 23 (20.2%) selected "disagree," and 22 (19.2%) selected "strongly disagree." As previously noted, this item is one of the two with the highest frequency of "neutral" responses and exhibits a relatively even distribution. Therefore, the differences between responses are small, indicating a high level of disagreement among participants.

4.6 Other phenomena

Regarding the idea that watching a play on a digital platform is sufficient, a total of 64 out of 114 participants (56.2%) fell on the negative side of the neutral midpoint. In other words, scholars largely tend to believe that theatre should be experienced in a theatre setting.

The total number of participants who believe that digitalization weakens the element of liveliness inherent in theatre is 69 (60.5%). Those who think otherwise are limited to 22 participants (19.3%).

A total of 71 participants (62.3%) believe that artificial intelligence has the potential to harm creativity in theatre.

The phenomena specific to the Transformations section can be summarized as follows: for the question of which "audience experience" digitalization transforms the most, 51 participants (44.7%) responded "Ease of access"; for the question of which form of participation digitalization has changed the most in theatre, 59 participants (51.8%) responded "Online viewing."

5 CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to understand the fundamental orientations of scholars working in the field of theatre regarding digital theatre and digitalization in theatre. Within this scope, 114 scholars from 37 countries were consulted. A questionnaire method, constructed through a collage of mixed techniques, was employed, and responses were sought to 20 questions grouped into four sections. The study aimed to establish a foundational reference as the first investigation of its kind in the field.

In the Beliefs section, which constituted the first part of the questionnaire, scholars' fundamental views on the current structure of digital theatre were examined. Although those who remained neutral about the use of artificial intelligence in playwriting had the highest frequency with 39 participants (34.2%), the total number of those with negative views reached 51 (44.8%). This item also had the lowest mean in the questionnaire, with an arithmetic average of 2.42. Therefore, it can be concluded that scholars maintain a conventional orientation regarding playwriting. On the other hand, the total number of participants who believe that digital technologies provide new opportunities in theatre directing is 93 (81.6%), while 98 participants (85.9%) support the use of digital tools in stage design. These items, which have the highest arithmetic means in the Beliefs section (4.02 and 4.14), indicate a positive attitude toward the use of digitalization in stage practices. Those who remained neutral regarding the use of robotic and virtual actors on stage again constituted the highest frequency (31), while the totals of negative (45) and positive (38) responses were close to each other. This indicates significant divergence of opinion regarding the digitalization of the performer. A total of 64 participants (56.2%) believe that watching a play only on a digital platform is not sufficient. In other words, scholars largely tend to believe that theatre should be

experienced in a theatre setting (or at least also in a theatre setting). This, too, can be interpreted as a conventional orientation.

In the Expectations section, which constituted the second part of the questionnaire, scholars' positive, future-oriented expectations regarding digitalization in theatre were examined. With a mean score of 4.03, this section emerged as the most positively oriented among all sections. Within the section, the item examining the correlation between digitalization and target audiences received the highest score. Accordingly, a significant proportion of participants, 100 out of 114 (87.7%), hold the expectation that digitalization can make it possible to reach new theatre audiences. In addition, 91 out of 114 participants (79.8%) hold the expectation that digitalization can create a more accessible theatre (more economical, more widespread). The proportion of those who believe that the role of digital tools in theatre education will increase in the future reached the highest frequency at 102 out of 114 (89.5%). Likewise, 93 out of 114 scholars (81.6%) believe that digitalization offers new opportunities in their own research areas. The expectation that digitalization will increase the number of artists, however, became the item with the lowest mean in the Expectations section, at 62 out of 114 (54.4%) and an average of 3.47.

In the third section of the questionnaire, Concerns, scholars' anxieties about the future of digital theatre and digitalization in theatre were examined. With a mean score of 3.75, this section emerged as the most negatively oriented among all sections. Out of 114 participants, 69 (60.5%) stated that they were concerned that digitalization could weaken the element of liveliness inherent in theatre. A total of 96 participants (84.2%) expressed concern that artificial intelligence could lead to copyright infringements. This item also had the highest arithmetic mean in the questionnaire, with a score of 4.37. In addition, 81 participants (71.1%) stated that they were concerned that digitalization and the use of artificial intelligence could lead to employment issues. A total of 71 participants (62.3%) expressed concern that the use of artificial intelligence has the potential to harm creativity. Concern that theatre may move away from art and turn into a technology show was the least frequently expressed concern, with 53 participants (46.5%).

In the fourth section of the questionnaire, which consisted of closed-ended questions, the views of scholars regarding the possible changes that digital theatre and digitalization in theatre have created or may create in practice were examined. 72 of the 114 participants (63.2%) believe that digitalization has most transformed the area of

"design." This was followed by "archiving" with 29 participants (25.4%), "direction" with 12 participants (10.5%), and "acting" with 1 participant (0.9%). In response to the question of which "aspect of the audience experience" digitalization has transformed the most, 51 participants (44.7%) selected "Ease of access." This was followed by "Sense of liveliness" with 30 participants (26.3%), "Participation" with 21 participants (18.4%), and "Emotional intensity" with 12 participants (10.5%). In response to the question, "Which form of participation has digitalization changed the most in theatre?", 51.8% of the participants answered "Online viewing," 20.2% "Hybrid participation," 17.5% "Interactive participation," and 10.5% "Physical participation of the audience.". In response to the question, "In your opinion, which interdisciplinary relationship has digitalization strengthened the most in theatre?", 57% of the participants answered "Film/media studies," 30.7% "Information technology/computer science," while "Sociology/cultural studies" and "Philosophy/aesthetics" each received an equal rate of 7%. In the final question, considered one of the most important in the questionnaire, participants were asked: "In your opinion, which question does digitalization in theatre require us to address most?" 31.6% of the participants answered "Change in the essence of art," 29.8% "Liveliness," 20.2% "Technological dependency," and 18.4% "Audience engagement."

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All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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