



---

## REPERCUSSION OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY ON AUGUSTO BOAL'S THEATRE OF OPPRESSED: AN INVESTIGATION

---

Prateek Kumar

Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, University of Delhi-  
110007

**Corresponding Author- Prateek Kumar**

Email- [prateekdumil7@gmail.com](mailto:prateekdumil7@gmail.com)

---

### **Abstract:**

*Augusto Boal, a Brazilian playwright, developed the aesthetic technique known as "Theatre of the Oppressed" (TO), which encourages critical observation and portrayal of reality while imagining the creation of consciousness and practical acts. Augusto Boal aimed to change the "monologue" of a conventional performance into a "dialogue" between the audience and the stage. Theatre of the Oppressed does not function as either entertainment or political propaganda. It is a type of community-based popular education that is based on Paulo Freire's philosophy and his seminal book on education, Pedagogy of the Oppressed. The community development programme is an initiative created to encourage improved living for the entire community through active community participation and initiative. Since almost everything in today's world depends on computers in some way, the term "digital technology" is rather broad and encompasses a wide range of topics. There is an evolving theatre which is referred to as "digital theatre." Digital Theatre is a sort of performance that combines "live" performers and co-present audiences with digital material to produce a hybrid art form that revitalizes theatre for today's audiences.*

**Keywords:** Digital theatre, Theatre of oppressed, Community development

---

### **Introduction:**

Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is a well-known community-based educational programme that uses theater as a vehicle for change. It was first created as a result of Boal's work with worker and peasant populations, and it is now applied globally for social and political action, conflict resolution, community development, therapy, and governmental legislation. Boal is strongly linked to fellow Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, particularly in regards to the way he employs consciousness-raising methods. Boal's purpose for creating novel theatre techniques was to engage the audience in conversation and to empower those who are marginalized from conventional decision-making. The foundation of Theatre of the Oppressed is the idea that conversation should rule in all human relationships, including those between men and women, races, families, communities, and nations (Morelos, R. 1999). Today, Theatre of the Oppressed

(TO) is utilized on a global scale for social and political action, conflict resolution on an individual and group level, development of communities, therapy and treatment, and the creation of governmental laws. There are five main types of the theatre of the oppressed: Forum theatre, Invisible theatre, Image theatre, Rainbow of desire, Cop in the head, Newspaper theatre and Legislative theatre (Boal, A. 2014). According to Gilchrist and Taylor; three essential elements of community development: Informal education is learning that takes place primarily via active involvement in local activities. utilizing the power of many people working together for their common good or defending the rights of individuals who are unable to speak up for themselves. Organization development refers to assisting groups and bodies create a framework that enables the members to achieve their goals, behave legally, and be accountable to the membership and greater community

(Gilchrist A 1995). Community development seeks to enhance village life on a social and economic level through grassroots efforts. As a result, the community development programme identifies public-participation programmes for social and economic rehabilitation in the villages. It is challenging to define precisely what is meant by "digital literacy," a word that is widely used but has come to signify a variety of things. However, digital literacy is still an issue worldwide (Bieza KE., 2020). According to the research of Dufva T. et al., understanding on a level above simple cognitive comprehension is necessary for involvement in a society that is becoming increasingly digital. In a culture that is becoming more connected and digital, a significant share of daily activities is mediated by computers and algorithms.

It could be challenging to grasp the scope of the phenomena and its repercussions because the majority of people haven't personally encountered digitalization. The abstract and difficult-to-understand nature of digitalization leads to a detached impression of the digital environment. According to Dufya T et al., embodied knowledge of digitalization is required in order to completely understand the nature and promise of a society that has gone digital. Such understanding should question traditional thinking, be founded on sources of knowledge other than logic, and shift focus from anticipating the future to analyzing novelty.

They underline the value of a deeper comprehension of digitalization in the context of education and the necessity of equipping people with the skills they need to engage in a digital society (Dufya T et al., 2019). Social media platforms have encroached on the public sphere due to the development of information technology, which has had a multifaceted impact on society, making information

more readily available. Many government initiatives and programmes have gone digital, therefore the population is changing to become more digital-savvy. Therefore, theatre may also be affected by digital technology. A type of performance known as "digital theatre" blends "live" actors and co-presented audiences with digital content to create a hybrid art form that revitalizes theatre for modern audiences. Digital Theatre is focused on the interactions of people (audience and actors) who are in the same physical space rather than on the timing or real-time aspect of events.

Theatre has always been a hybrid of several art forms. It's crucial for mass transmission that this public space sharing occurs at the main creative event. The next criterion for developing digital theatre is the utilization of digital media during the performance. Instead of the presence of a certain type of technology hardware or software configuration, digital media is defined by its properties of flexibility, malleability, ease of adaptation, and ability to be processed in real-time.

#### **Objective:**

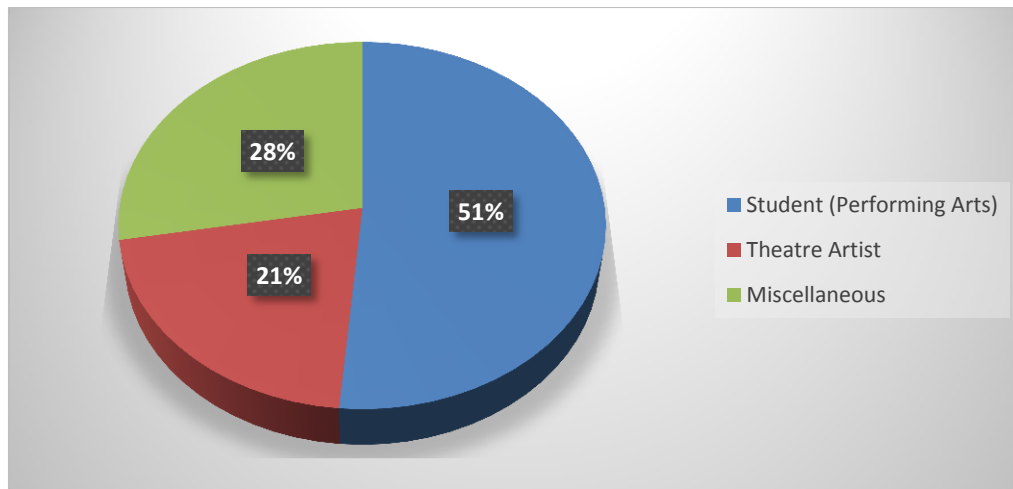
To understand impact of digital technology on Augusto Boal's Theatre of Oppressed.

#### **Materials and methods:**

Content analysis and online closed-end questionnaire survey were used to collect data and further data were analyzed using statistical methods.

#### **Observations/Results:**

To understand how digital technology is affecting the Theatre of the Oppressed for community development, an online survey was conducted. 72 respondents from across India have completed the online survey. There were 20 mixed profession participants, 15 theatre artists, and 37 students studying performing arts. The category of participants is given in table 1 and figure 1.



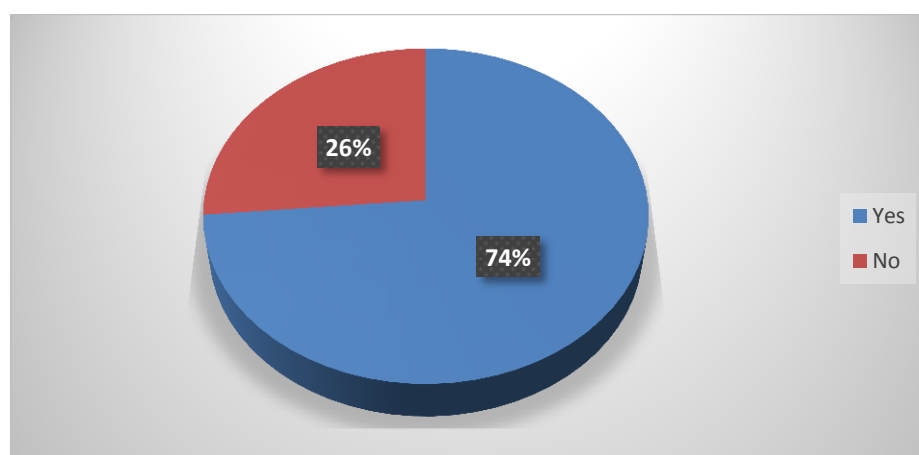
**Figure 1. Represent the occupation of the participants.**

Occupation	No. of the participant
Student (Performing arts)	37
Theatre Artist	15
Miscellaneous	20

**Table 1: Categories of participants of an online survey of digital theatre.**

Live theatre performances were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic because government restrictions forbade them. Nevertheless, artists tried to perform their works online using Zoom, Facebook, and other social media platforms. We questioned respondents about watching theatre online in our online survey. 26 % of participants claimed that they had not watched the play online, while 74% said

they had. This finding demonstrates the public's interest in theatre throughout the pandemic, and digital theatre may present a choice and future opportunities for theatre companies. This information suggested that consumers looked into the possibility of experiencing theatre performances in digital theatre format, with the outcomes depicted in figure 2.



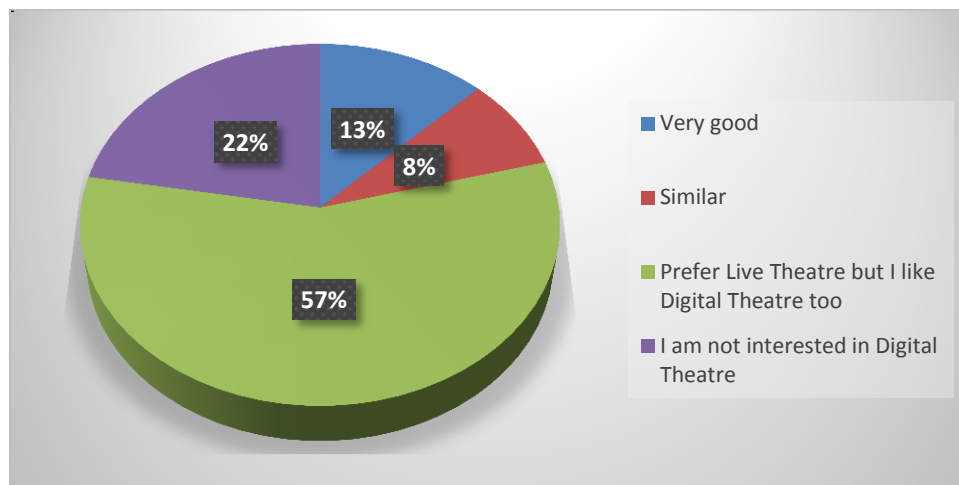
**Figure 2; Represent the participant experience with online Theatre during covid 19.**

Further, we have questioned participants about their experiences in order to conduct a comparative analysis of live theatre

versus digital theatre. Based on data analysis, it was discovered that 57% of participants enjoyed digital theatre, but

that their experiences were not comparable to those of live theatre. According to 22% of participants, they quit watching digital theatre after their initial viewing. In comparison to live theatre, 13% of participants said they would prefer

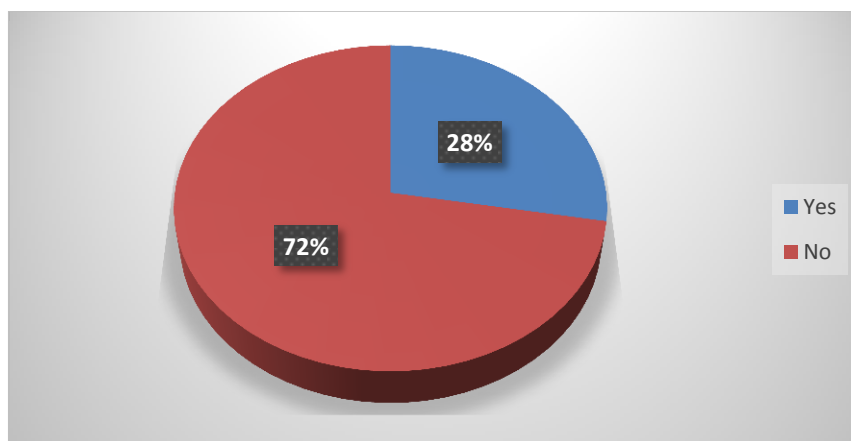
digital theatre. Only 8% of participants believed there was a noticeable difference between live theatre and digital theatre. Figure 3 illustrates the data for comparing the live and digital theatre experiences.



**Figure 3: Representation of comparative experience of digital theatre vs live theatre.**

The theatre of the oppressed by Augusto Boal has been a tool for persuading the public in political, social, and cultural contexts. Therefore, we assessed the level of interest the general public would have in a digital version of the oppressed

theatre. 28 % of participants indicated they did view the Theatre of the Oppressed in a digital mode, whereas 72 percent of participants stated they did not. Figure 4 displays the TO viewership statistics.



**Figure 4; Representation of the viewership of TO on digital mode.**

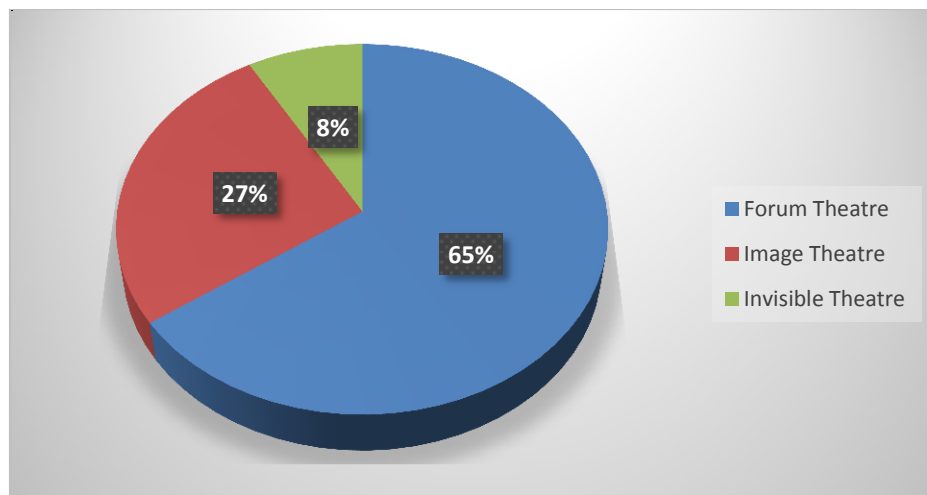
How Augusto Boal used community mobilization in South America to create the theatre of the oppressed, community development is an ongoing process that advances dynamically with shifting circumstances. This study evaluated TO's viability in community development in the Indian environment, and the results showed that Forum Theatre received support from 65% of respondents. A forum

**Prateek Kumar**

theatre is a type of theatre in which the audience is urged to get involved and have an impact on the performance taking place on stage, turning them into "Spect-actors" with the power to interrupt and replace the performance. The Spect-actors have two choices: they may either suggest different actions to the actors or they can enter the stage and perform their own solutions to the issue. 27% of the

respondents selected Image Theatre. Small groups create tableaux or still "photographs" of actual events that one or more group members have experienced through image theatre. The images can depict oppression-related emotions and experiences as well as potential future countermeasures. According to image theatre, actions (or, in this case, images) speak louder than words. It allows for the safe exploration of feelings and potential solutions. The protagonist's belief that it is true and its veracity is the only things that matter. Only 8% of voters selected

Invisible Theatre. Invisible theatre uses scenes that are staged to look like they would naturally occur to bring up important social or political issues that would otherwise be kept under wraps by the authorities. Compared to other forms of the theatre of the oppressed, invisible theatre is typically more meticulously prepared. It is presented without prior notice in public settings, such as a bus station or a downtown area. Figure 5 displays information on optimal TO forms for community development.



**Figure 5; Representation of appropriate form of TO for community development.**

#### **Discussion:**

Over the past 10 years, computer technology progress has been especially rapid in the performing arts. Digital media is being rapidly incorporated into live theatre and dance performances, and new interactive performance genres are developing in participatory installations, on CD-ROMs, and online (Dixon S., 2015). The book *Computers as Theatre* by Brenda Laurel revolutionized the field of human-computer interaction and gave interface and interaction designers concepts that continue to shape the industry today. It dawned on Laurel that great drama, like compelling interface design, must quickly immerse the audience in an experience that includes both thought and emotion. She came to the practical conclusion that a user's delight must be the primary design aspect and that doing so requires having a strong understanding of theatrical theory and

technique (Laurel B., 2013). Based on survey results and content analysis, it can be said that digital technology has significantly impacted theatre performances and helped in the evolution of digital theatre. This research shows that theatre has maintained popularity among the general population despite the pandemic, and digital theatre may offer options and chances for the future for theatre organizations. The research shows that people are interested in the digital mode of theatre performances. Further, in this study, it was observed that people did not enjoy Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed in an online mode. On the basis of an online survey, it can be concluded that Forum Theatre could be a tool for community development. Therefore, it can be summed up that digital theatre has enormous potential for community development.

**Reference:**

1. Biezā, K. E. (2020). Digital literacy: Concept and definition. *International Journal of Smart Education and Urban Society (IJSEUS)*, 11(2), 1-15.
2. Boal, A. (2014). *Theatre of the Oppressed* (pp. 97-104). Routledge.
3. Dixon, S. (2015). *Digital performance: a history of new media in theater, dance, performance art, and installation*. MIT press.
4. Dufva, T., & Dufva, M. (2019). Grasping the future of the digital society. *Futures*, 107, 17-28
5. Gilchrist, A. (1995) *Community Development and Networking*, London: Community Development Foundation.
6. Laurel, B. (2013). *Computers as theatre*. Addison-Wesley.
7. Morelos, R. (1999). *Symbols and Power in the Theatre of the Oppressed*. Ronaldo Morelos.