
REVIEW ARTICLES
ОГЛЯДИ

Forming the Image of Ukrainian Theater in the 21st century

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the process of forming the contemporary Ukrainian theater's image in the twenty-first century. The author analyzes the key aspects that influence the creation and establishment of the theater's image in the contemporary cultural context. The main thematic areas include theatrical experimentation, the use of modern technologies in productions, interaction with the audience, and the role of theater in shaping public consciousness. The article aims to reveal the unique features of contemporary Ukrainian theater and its impact on the cultural image of Ukraine in the twenty-first century. In addition, the article examines the impact of socio-cultural changes, political events, and globalization on the image of Ukrainian theater, focusing on how these factors affect the themes, style, and aesthetics of contemporary performances. The study covers aspects of theater art, from the creative process to interaction with the audience through various formats of performances and performances. Innovative approaches to theatrical art, including the use of modern media technologies, experimental methods of acting and innovative scenic solutions are highlighted. The article also analyzes the reactions of viewers and critics to innovative approaches in theater productions, as well as their reflection in the media and social networks. The article identifies the main trends and challenges that accompany the formation of the image of Ukrainian theater in the twenty-first century and considers the possibilities for further development and improvement of its art in the context of modern challenges and audience expectations.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Стаття присвячена дослідженню процесу формування іміджу сучасного українського театру у XXI столітті. Аналізуються ключові аспекти, які впливають на створення та утвердження образу театру в сучасному культурному контексті. До основних тематичних напрямків відносяться театральна експериментальність, використання сучасних технологій у постановках, взаємодія із глядачем, а також роль театального мистецтва у формуванні громадської свідомості. Стаття спрямована на розкриття унікальних особливостей сучасного українського театального мистецтва та його вплив на культурний образ України в XXI столітті. Крім того, розглядається вплив соціокультурних змін, політичних подій та глобалізації на формування іміджу українського театру, акцентуючи увагу на тому, як ці чинники впливають на тематику, стиль та естетику сучасних вистав. Дослідження охоплює аспекти театального мистецтва, починаючи від творчого процесу та закінчуючи взаємодією з аудиторією через різноманітні формати вистав та перформансів. Висвітлюються інноваційні підходи до театального мистецтва, включаючи використання сучасних медійних технологій, експериментальні методи акторської майстерності та новаторські сценографічні рішення. Аналізуються також реакції глядачів та критиків на інноваційні підходи у театральних постановках, їхнє відображення в ЗМІ та соціальних мережах. У результаті статті визначаються основні тенденції та виклики, які супроводжують формування іміджу українського театру у XXI столітті, а також розглядаються можливості подальшого розвитку та удосконалення його мистецтва в контексті сучасних викликів та очікувань глядачів.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА: імідж театру, сучасні технології у театрі, інновації в театральному процесі, глядацька реакція, розвиток театального мистецтва.

Introduction

Relevance of the topic. In the context of modern global transformations, the formation of the image of the modern Ukrainian theater acquires extreme relevance and importance, because now the theater is not only an artistic phenomenon, but also a key element of the country's cultural and social dynamics. In the context of rapid technological development and globalization, modern Ukrainian theater is at the intersection of traditions and innovations. The use of modern technologies in theatrical productions, experiments with forms and genres open up new perspectives for creative expression, interaction with the audience and solving modern socio-cultural problems. Ukrainian theater is an integral part of the nation's cultural identity. The modern implementation of theatrical art reflects and defines the key values and trends of Ukrainian society, contributing to the formation of a collective cultural image. The relevance of this topic is confirmed by the increase in theater attendance, which indicates the rise of theater's popularity. As noted by the National Union of Theater Actors of Ukraine, the number of spectators definitely increased in 2023, as theaters got used to new conditions, and spectators need emotions and impressions. Theaters became available before the concert activities of pop artists resumed, so during this temporary pause the audience chose the theater and stayed there.

Ukraine has become the venue for an increasing number of theater festivals, such as "Festival of Modern Drama", "Shakespeare Festival", "GogolFest", etc. These events attract the attention of not only national, but also international audiences and critics, which contributes to the formation of a positive image of Ukrainian theater on the world stage. Ukrainian theater productions receive international awards and recognition at various European festivals, which testifies to the high level of professionalism and creativity of Ukrainian theater artists. In particular, at the European theater festival Radar OST (an annual theater festival that takes place in Berlin) – The Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro together with the Deutsches Theater (Berlin) presented the play "Ha*!t" for the first time. This confirms the importance of theater as an important element of cultural diplomacy and enhances its image around the world.

The growing importance of the theater's interaction with the audience and the use of innovative approaches in performances actualizes the question of the role and influence of theater art on public consciousness and critical thinking. Modern Ukrainian theater becomes not only a place of entertainment, but also an important tool for highlighting social, political, and cultural issues. The study and reflection of the image of the Ukrainian theater in the 21st century becomes a necessity, as it highlights the transformations in the field of art, the influence of national culture in the global context and contributes to the understanding of the theater's role in the formation of the modern image of Ukraine.

Statement of the problem. The formulation of the problem is determined by a set of key issues arising in connection with the transformation and development of theatrical art in the modern Ukrainian cultural context. There is a fundamental need to identify the main trends affecting the image of modern Ukrainian theater. Uncovering the factors that determine this image, including the influence of technology, socio-cultural changes, political aspects, innovations in the creative process, and interaction with the viewer, is a key task.

In addition, it is important to investigate the interaction of modern Ukrainian theater with the audience and the reaction of the audience to innovative approaches. This is an analysis of the role of social media, global trends in the entertainment industry, and the impact of digital technologies on the theatrical process. The article should solve the task of determining the influence of modern Ukrainian theater on the formation of the cultural image of Ukraine in the world. How theater highlights national characteristics, expresses and perceives social and political ideas, and how its image affects international perception and attracts the attention of audience abroad.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the processes and factors that influence the creation and development of the modern image of the Ukrainian theater in the context of socio-cultural changes of the 21st century. The study is aimed at analyzing the trends, challenges and opportunities that shape the perception of Ukrainian theater both at the national and international levels. Besides, the research aims to identify key elements contributing to a positive image and to develop recommendations for further strengthening the position of Ukrainian theater in the world cultural space.

In addition, the mission of the study is to reveal the impact of theatrical art on public consciousness, cultural identity, and the development of critical thinking in Ukrainian society. The goal of this study consists of three components:

- (1) To understand the role of theater in the modern world;
- (2) To formulate recommendations for the further development of the theater's image;
- (3) To increase the influence of Ukrainian theatrical art as an important factor in cultural diplomacy.

Method

Any period in the history of the theater reflected the spirit of the era, changing and improving together with society. Today, the 21st century theater interacts and actively intervenes in the realities of life, an understanding of facts and the formation of perspectives. The very paradigm of theater as a pure form has significantly changed under the influence of modern visual art, philosophical discourses, digital technologies, and mass media (Teatralna laboratoria. Information). Contemporary visual art brings new aesthetic forms and experimental approaches to set design and costumes, while philosophical discourses, particularly postmodernism, contribute to the emergence of reflective and innovative theatrical productions that question traditional narratives. Digital technologies open up new opportunities for the use of multimedia elements, virtual reality, and interactive platforms, creating new forms of artistic expression. Mass media and social media make theater more accessible and influence ways of interacting with the audience, expanding the boundaries of the traditional theater space. In general, these factors contribute to the dynamic evolution of theater, which reflects and adapts to the modern cultural and technological context. In addition, modern Ukrainian theater is experiencing a change of theatrical generations. This means that the

leaders of the theater process are actively changing, and therefore, the strategies for the development of theaters are changing, too (7 tendentsiy u teatralniy haluzi Ukrainy).

Results

In addition, scientific research is of great importance. Features of theater management are reflected in the works of the following authors: I. Bezgin, S. Bozhuk, A. Borisov, L. Kovalik, N. Fedotova; the problematic of the existence of theatrical art as a social artistic production in the era of industrial dominance was investigated by S. Bezklubenko. The stages of formation of modern domestic theaters are reflected in the works of M. Voronoi, S. Vasylieva, I. Vivsyana, N. Kravets; features of theater management based on the experience of foreign countries were studied by S. Langley, F. Colbert, J. K. Crimmins, T. R. Leavens, H. Olek; multimedia technologies and their use in modern theater were explored in the works of A. H. Reiss, U. Reinhard, and N. Reva; activities of independent theaters abroad were analyzed by M. Reason, S. Johnson, and J. Thomson.

Modern theater is not only stage performances and acting skills, but also a set of images that affects the perception of the audience and forms the cultural identity of the nation. It is in the context of the image of the theater that the key vectors of its development are revealed: transformation of the stage space, interaction with the audience, actualization of themes and ideas of images that become symbols of the era. Artists of modern Ukrainian theater use not only words and acting, but also the latest technologies to create extraordinary impressions and immerse the audience in the depths of artistic self-expression.

The introduction of modern technologies into the theatrical process has become an integral aspect of the image of the modern Ukrainian theater of the 21st century. As M. Causey, the author of the study "Theatre and Performance in Digital Culture" reminds us, the achievements of modern technologies – cyberspace or virtual reality – do not contain anything that was not already presented in the theater; it has always been a virtual space where the voluntary suspension of disbelief created the illusion of reality (Causey, 2006, p.15). Through the integration of multimedia elements such as projections, soundscapes and lighting effects, the theater has become more exciting and attractive to the audience. These technological advances have also allowed the reach of theatrical performances to expand, with live broadcasts and online performances becoming increasingly popular. The introduction of modern technologies allowed the Ukrainian theater to keep up with the changes of the times, attracting a more diverse audience and creating a more dynamic theatrical landscape. One of the most noticeable aspects of modern technology in the theater is the use of visual effects. Projection technologies, video mapping and animation have become common tools for creating impressive stage images. Theater "DAH", under the leadership of Vlad Troitskyi, actively uses video projections and interactive screens in its performances, which allows the audience to immerse themselves in new realities.

The image of modern Ukrainian theater also shapes its ability to respond to socio-cultural changes in Ukraine. As the country undergoes significant military interventions and transformations, the theater has become a crucial platform for reflection and commentary on these changes. Ukrainian theater has been able to address issues such as political corruption, social inequality, and cultural identity, providing space for dialogue and critical thinking. Dealing with these urgent problems, the theater became a vital component of the cultural landscape of Ukraine, forming the cultural image of the country in the 21st century. It is worth recalling the performance "Green Corridors" based on Natalka Vorozhbyt's play, directed by Maksym Golenko. This is a joint project of the Munich Theater "Kammerspiele", commissioned by which the text was written, and the Kyiv Theater on the Podil. The premiere of "Green corridors" in Munich (dir. Jan-Christoph Gockel) was shown on April 14, 2023. The play tells the stories of four Ukrainian women from Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Bucha, and Kyiv who left for Europe through the "green corridors". In addition, we must mention the play "Bread Truce" based on the play by Serhiy Zhadan, directed by Stas Zhyrkov, at the Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro. This is a play that

reflects the historical realities of the situation in Ukraine against the background of the war and tells about the lives of people from the “gray zone” in the summer of 2014.

Innovations in the theatrical process also played a significant role in shaping the image of modern Ukrainian theater. The introduction of new forms of storytelling, such as immersive theater and specialized performances, challenged traditional theatrical conventions, resulting in a more diverse and experimental theater landscape. It is worth recalling the one announced in Ukraine at the conference at the Les Kurbas Center, a report by the French researcher B. Picon-Valin (Picon-Valin, 2010) “Video equipment in the theater: history and relevance”, where the problem of modern theater went beyond traditional boundaries due to digital technologies. Thanks to the work of the video operator, the theater’s desire to expand its boundaries is embodied in the work of Ukrainian director Andrii Zholdak, who trained at the Kastorf Theater. However, Zholdak’s camera, which follows the actor, does not work in real time. In fact, the viewer sees previously filmed events. However, a movie filmed as a reality becomes an organic continuation of a theatrical action.

There are dozens, if not hundreds, of examples of using video in the theater not for additional illustration, but for solving unique artistic tasks. However, we are witnessing a real revolution with the expansion of digital media with the arrival of 3D technologies in the theater. The premiere of the innovative performative play “Kostrubisms. Kumanovsky” of the “Garmyder” theater. The performance was created at the intersection of genres using the graphic works and texts of the artist Mykola Kumanovsky from his “Book of Kostrubisms” and poems from the collection “Trace in the Track”. The performance synthesized a live physical theater and the artist’s graphics animated on a 3D stage (“Costrubisms. Kumanovsky” – is a landmark event in art life...).

These innovations not only attracted a younger and more diverse audience, but also led to a more active involvement in the theatrical process. Audience response has been overwhelmingly positive, indicating a growing appetite for new and complex forms of theatrical expression. The ability of the theater to accept these innovations contributed to the development of theatrical art in the country, creating a brighter and more dynamic cultural landscape.

The image in the modern theater environment plays an important role and has a meaning that affects various aspects of theatrical activity. Visual representation and perception are an integral part of any art form, and theater is no exception. Let’s consider some aspects of the role and importance of the image in the modern theater environment.

First of all, the image in the theater helps to attract and retain the audience. The appearance of the theater hall, actors’ costumes, scenery, posters and other elements decide whether people will be interested in attending performances. If the theater employs a team of professionals who are well versed in trends and are able to create a memorable and attractive appearance, the image of the theater will be successful, which will make it attractive to the audience.

The second aspect of the role and importance of the image in the modern theater environment concerns the repertoire itself and the program of performances. When deciding which plays to put on, the theater management should combine all possibilities to draw attention to themselves and distinguish themselves within the decorative sphere. Along with classic works, the theater should be able to solve important issues reflected in art and modern trends, attracting the younger generation of viewers.

The third aspect tells about the role and importance of image in the modern theater environment for actors and other theater workers. Highly professional actors, choreographers, directors and other members of the theater team try to create their own image, which complements their talent, uniqueness and professionalism. A player’s image can be redefined as a result of a play or film, both artistic and commercial, because the very image of the player affects his career and success in society.

In addition, it is worth noting that another important aspect of the image formation of the theater is the encouragement of the audience to prepare for the performance. As the former director and artistic director of the Kyiv Academic Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro, Stas Zhyrkov, emphasized,

when you go to the cinema, the majority of the audience still tries to read something about the film, but you can't say the same about the theater. Unfortunately, we still do not have such a tradition of preparing for a performance. I would like people to prepare for performances and understand which performance they are going to, which director and which theater it is in general, because each theater has its own concept. General knowledge of the play you are going to greatly facilitates the process of perceiving the story – it is easier for you to read and understand the meanings embedded in the play. (Radzihovska, O. Yak zrozumity suchasnyi teatr?)

In conclusion, the role of image in the modern theater environment is extremely important. The image of the theater determines its appeal to the audience and their desire to attend performances. Also, the image affects the choice of repertoire and programs presented in theaters. Equally important, the image of players and members of the theater team makes a significant contribution to their success and career. Therefore, the path to the discovery and creation of new images and durable ideas of the theater industry will pass through the image of the actor, the theater and his partner in the production (spectator).

Ukrainian researchers D. Vasylenko, P. V. Skryl, and V. D. Titova especially emphasize work with the viewer:

Cultural and leisure activity is perceived as the process of creating conditions for motivational choice by the individual for certain activity, which is determined by his needs and interests. With the development of market relations, cultural, and leisure activities have come close to marketing technologies, the basis of which is the problem of finding and meeting the needs of individual citizens or public groups. The issue of improving the system of promoting theater services in the form of marketing and PR communications is gaining particular relevance, which makes it possible to focus the available limited resources of organizations on the main strategic directions of gaining target market segments under conditions of increased competition. At the same time, the task of promoting the theatrical product comes to the fore, which today is one of the most promising types of business activity for institutions in the theater sector among those that strive to remain on the socio-cultural market" (Vasylenko et al., 2022).

The influence of the image on the perception of the audience in the theater is of great importance for the success of the performance and the theater itself as a whole. The image includes all visual elements and associations that are created in the process of human perception of a work of art. It can be actors' costumes, scenery on the stage, lighting, make-up, architecture of theater buildings, advertising materials, and many other elements that affect the audience's perception. The image of the performance has the ability to immediately attract audience attention and create a first impression. For example, when a spectator enters a theater for the first time, he immediately imagines what he will see on the stage, as part of what he has seen before and the impression he has created. This will help hold attention of the viewers on the farthest rows. Thus, it is important that the image of the performance corresponds to its content, atmosphere, and ideas that the author or director wants to express.

Tools of image formation in the Ukrainian theater are important elements of the creative process. They help create a special atmosphere, convey emotions, and feelings to the audience. In this article, we will consider some of the main tools used in Ukrainian theater to create an image, as well as provide examples of their use.

One of the most common tools of image formation in the Ukrainian theater is a costume. Costumes help actors embody the image of their character, reveal their character, formation, and development during the performance, and also have a significant impact on the audience's perception. They help create an image of a character, support his character and emotional state, which makes him more relevant and convincing. For example, the performance "Red Ruta" in the Maria Zankovetska Lviv Academic Theater uses costumes that reflect the era in which the play takes place. Namely, it transports us to the early 20th century – the actors wear costumes and hats characteristic of this period.

Another tool is makeup. Makeup allows actors to change their faces and create the illusion of different characters. It helps to show the age, health, emotional state, and other aspects of the character. For example, in the play “Flowers for Algernon” by the Kyiv Wild Theater, make-up is used to create a changed view of the main character on other characters with whom he comes in contact.

Scenography is the next tool for image formation in Ukrainian theater. The scenery also affects the audience’s perception, because it creates atmosphere and visual depth, recreates time and space frames, creating the atmosphere and mood of the performance. They can also be symbolic and enhance the depth of the plot, add a special sound to the play, adjust the viewer to a certain way of perceiving events, and emphasize the mood of the play and the role of the characters. For example, the play “Family Album” in the Kyiv Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro has a scenography that reflects the homely comfort of an apartment in the 90s, despite the different periods of that time.

Music and sound design are also important components of image formation in Ukrainian theater. They help create the right mood and convey emotions to the audience. For example, the melodies in the play “Kitsyun” of the Kyiv Wild Theater are used to create the atmosphere of the place in which the action of the play takes place, namely – Irish songs with the help of authentic instruments – for example – bagpipes.

Light is also one of the tools in the formation of image and expressiveness in Ukrainian theater. Its role goes far beyond the simple function of lighting the scene; it creates an atmosphere, emphasizes the emotional states of characters, defines spatial boundaries and even symbolically interprets dramaturgical concepts. Lighting design in Ukrainian theater often serves as a means of expressing the emotional state of the characters and the general atmosphere of the play. In addition, light allows directors and designers to play with space, highlighting or hiding certain elements of the scene. In addition, the British researcher K. Graham introduces the concept of “scenographic light” into scientific circulation to denote the ability of lighting in a stage production to actively inscribe dramatic meaning in space and time – “light that independently affects the meaning in the production and performs three basic functions that detail its dramatic, and not only aesthetic effectiveness” (Graham, 2016).

Finally, acting is the most important tool for image formation in Ukrainian theater. Actors, using their voice, gesture, emotions, and other physical means, embody the role of the character, convey his character and feelings. For example, in the play “Lonely Sunset” of the Kyiv Theater of Drama and Comedy on the Left Bank of the Dnipro, the actor uses voice effects and special gestures to show the inner conflict of the character.

In general, the influence of the image on the audience’s perception in the theater is extremely important and helps to create a full and deep aesthetic and emotional quality of the performance. Visual elements – costumes, scenery, lighting, and special effects – play an important role in creating the atmosphere, convincingness and emotional saturation of the audience’s perception, which gives the play brightness and success. Ukrainian theater is constantly changing and adapting to modern trends in image formation in order to remain interesting and relevant for the audience. In addition to traditional elements and techniques such as costumes, sets, and lighting, Ukrainian theaters combine new trends and experiment with different aspects of image to create unique and attractive performances.

Also, in Ukrainian theater there is a tendency to combine different genres and styles, which open up new opportunities for image formation. For example, combining traditional theatrical forms with elements of modern dance and music can create a unique and exciting image that will attract the audience’s attention of the.

On the example of the theatrical productions of the Ukrainian actors’ association “Dakh Daughters”, you can see the modern trends of image formation in the Ukrainian theater. “Dakh Daughters” is a Ukrainian theater and music group that performs in the genres of “freak cabaret” and theatrical performance, the members of the group use 15 musical instruments (Dokumentalniyi film pro hurt Dakh Daughters...).

In addition, Ukrainian theaters actively implement modern trends in the choice of topics and ideologies for image formation. They pay attention to current topics of modern society, such as social injustice, environmental problems, political crises, etc., and try to reflect these topics on stage. For example, plays about the war in the east of Ukraine, social problems of youth, and historical events that have an actual connection with modern times are becoming more and more popular among viewers.

In general, the current trends in image formation in Ukrainian theater reflect the variety of styles, methods and themes used to create unique and exciting performances. Ukrainian theaters continue to experiment and develop new ideas to create interesting and relevant performances that leave an unforgettable impression on the audience.

Therefore, the tools of image formation in the Ukrainian theater are an important component of every performance. Costumes, make-up, set design, music, lighting, and acting work together to create a special atmosphere and convey the story. Using these tools, the theater can captivate the audience, draw their attention and force them to immerse themselves in the world of theatrical magic.

Conclusions

Ukrainian theater of the 21st century actively adapts to modern challenges and changes in the cultural environment. The deep identity and creativity of theater groups contribute to the formation of a unique image and attract the attention of both Ukraine's and international audiences.

The development of Ukrainian theater in the 21st century is taking place in the conditions of significant socio-political changes, and important factors of this process are the gaining of independence of Ukraine, strengthening of national self-awareness and integration into the global cultural space. Key figures and events that influenced the development of the theater also contributed to the formation of its modern image.

In addition, artistic innovations and modern trends play a key role in attracting new audiences and forming a positive perception of the theater. The use of new technologies, experimental forms and innovative approaches in productions make Ukrainian theater more modern and competitive in the international arena.

In addition, the positioning and promotion of the Ukrainian theater as a brand are important components of its image formation. The use of traditional, social media, and other communication channels are effective tools for popularizing the theater and drawing attention to its activities. Thus, the research findings confirm that the formation of the image of the Ukrainian theater of the 21st century depends on many factors, including the historical context, socio-cultural conditions, artistic innovations, international contacts, promotion strategies and audience perception. Understanding these processes and effective use of the acquired knowledge will help strengthen the position of Ukrainian theater in the world cultural space and contribute to its further development.

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