

Transformational Processes of Cultural Identity in the Context of the Digitization of Museum Spaces: Evolution from Representational Practices to Interactive Formats of Interaction

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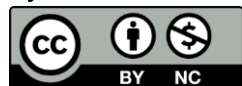
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ABSTRACT

The work demonstrates how the digitization of museums transforms cultural identity and analyzes how digital platforms enable interaction between cultural objects and users. Its relevance is due to the dynamic transformation of cultural identity in the digital museum ecosystem, which not only preserves its best examples but also introduces qualitatively new forms of cultural experience, such as gamified tours, VR exhibitions, interactive archives, virtual reconstructions, and social platforms for discussion. With their help, traditional ideas about cultural identity as “material” culture are giving way to dynamic, networked, and interactive ones. The study aims to identify the mechanisms of influence that shape new cultural identity and develop interactive forms of cultural interaction. It is implemented through the analysis of theoretical approaches to cultural identity and museum communication; characterization of the phenomenon of digital museum space; identification of key technological mechanisms that transform cultural identity; clarification of risks and opportunities for its preservation; development of recommendations for the effective implementation of digital museum practices. The methodological basis of the work is based on systemic, comparative, and cultural approaches, with a separate analysis of the role of digital museum platforms (VR/AR exhibitions, interactive interfaces, digital archives, and gamified tours). Research findings show that digital technologies activate user participation in cultural communication, personalize experiences, and develop a critical perception of cultural heritage. At the same time, digital space poses a challenge due to the fragmentation of cultural content and the marginalization of local communities. It has been found that the interactivity and inclusiveness of digital museum practices provide a balance between cultural integrity and innovation. The conclusion emphasizes that the digital museum space is not only representative but also transforms cultural identity and develops the inclusion of cultural interaction. The digital museum space is a key environment for the development of interactive cultural communication, supporting cultural identity in the digital age and combining technological innovation with humanitarian content and social responsibility.



KEYWORDS

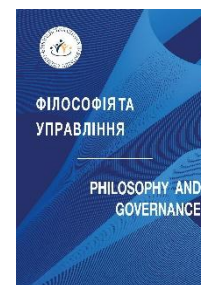
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Трансформаційні процеси культурної ідентичності в умовах цифровізації музейних просторів: еволюція від репрезентаційних практик до інтерактивних форматів взаємодії

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Стаття демонструє, як цифровізація музеїв трансформує культурну ідентичність та аналізує як цифрові платформи забезпечують взаємодію культурних об'єктів та користувачів. Її актуальність зумовлена динамічною трансформацією культурної ідентичності у цифровій музейній екосистемі, що не лише зберігає кращі її зразки, а й продукує знайомство з якісно новими формами культурного досвіду – гейміфікованими турами, VR-виставками, інтерактивними архівами, віртуальними реконструкціями, соціальними платформами для обговорення. З їх допомогою традиційні уявлення про культурну ідентичність як «матеріальну» культуру поступаються місцем динамічним, мережевим та взаємодійним. Мета дослідження – виявити механізми впливу, що формують нову культурну ідентичність та розвивають інтерактивні форми культурної взаємодії. Вона реалізується шляхом аналізу теоретичних підходів до культурної ідентичності та музейної комунікації; характеристики феномену цифрового музейного простору; визначення ключових технологічних механізмів, що трансформують ідентичність культури; з'ясування ризиків та можливостей для її збереження; розробки рекомендацій щодо ефективного впровадження цифрових музейних практик. Методологічна основа роботи базується на системному, порівняльному та культурологічному підходах, окремо проаналізована роль цифрових музейних платформ. Дослідницькі результати показали, що цифрові технології активізують користувацьку участь у культурній комунікації, персоналізують досвід та розвивають критичне сприйняття культурних надбань. Одночасно з цим, цифровий простір провокує виклики через фрагментацію культурного контенту та маргіналізацію локальних спільнот. З'ясовано, що інтерактивність та інклюзивність цифрових музейних практик забезпечує баланс між цілісністю культури та інноваціями. Висновок підкреслює, що цифровий музейний простір є не лише репрезентаційним, а й таким, що трансформує культурну ідентичність та розвиває інклюзію культурної взаємодії. цифровий простір музею є ключовим середовищем розвитку інтерактивної культурної комунікації, що підтримує культурну самобутність в цифрову епоху та поєднує технологічні інновації з гуманітарним змістом і соціальною відповідальністю.

КЛЮЧОВІ СЛОВА

цифровізація музеїв, культурна ідентичність, інтерактивність, інклюзивність, культурна комунікація.

1. Introduction

In today's world, the digitalization of cultural heritage is no longer perceived exclusively as a technological tool; it has become a separate cultural space that forms, modifies and rethinks the cultural identity of entire communities and even individuals. Today, many museums have, so to speak, two parallel dimensions: physical and digital, which shape cultural communication in a new logic. The digital environment of the museum allows its visitors not only to contemplate the expositions, but also allows them to interact with them at the level of navigation, communication and interpretation. Thus, the usual static representation of artifacts becomes interactive and even personalized, radically changing the mechanisms that construct cultural identity. Popular digital museums and virtual collections make cultural heritage closer, more inclusive and not subject to geographical borders. However, such innovations can negatively fragment cultural objects, produce superficial perception and the so-called commercialization of memory. Online museum visitors interact with museum exhibition objects using algorithmic systems that independently choose content, build routes, and offer ready-made interpretations of expositions. Such actions raise questions about the expansion of digital influence, the authorship of narratives, and the preservation of the boundary between the memory of the individual and the collective.

The relevance of the study is due to the dynamic transformation of cultural identity in the digital museum ecosystem, which not only preserves its best samples, but also produces acquaintance with qualitatively new forms of cultural experience – gamified tours, VR exhibitions, interactive archives, virtual reconstructions, and social platforms for discussion. With their help, traditional ideas about cultural identity as “material” culture give way to dynamic, networked and interoperable ones. The most acute transformational problems are felt during crises, when wars destroy cultural objects, and migration processes block access to them. Digital museums produce a space that preserves the memory and self-identification of people who are physically detached from their cultural roots. It is extremely important to study the mechanisms that help shape cultural identity and launch interaction with innovative platforms of digital museums, and, therefore, change the experience of communication with their traditional embodiment. We consider the proposed study important and timely, because it will strengthen the understanding of how cultural practices, representational models and the workload on museums as socio-cultural institutions of the digital age can change.

2. Literature Review

The works of O. Barkova, I. Kulchytskyi [2], E. Voinova [20], Y. Kachkovska [7], A. Kozhyna [10], O. Komova [8], M. Kulynyak [11], N. Malyshev, S. Moskalenko [12], S. Rusakov, Y. Pyatkivska [16] prove scientific interest in the chosen topic. According to the website of the Ukrainian Ministry of Culture, “the digitalization of museums in Ukraine became relevant even before the start of the full-scale war, but it was the war that became the catalyst for accelerating this process. In 2022–2024 there were large-scale efforts to create backups, digitize funds, develop online platforms, and train cultural workers in digital skills” [19]. L. Antonova and S. Gololobov call museums key segments of the cultural industry, “where the use of digital technologies can ensure not only the preservation and exhibition of art, but also make them more accessible to a wide audience” [1]. S. Gavryliuk and V. Nadolska analyze the leading trends in the development of modern museums, find out how museum institutions implement educational, scientific and entertainment programs, summarize world experience and highlight the possibilities of applying international museum practices in Ukraine [20]. N. Panas defines the modern paradigms of museum development, explores the leading trends in their development, outlines the problems related to the interpretation of museum funds and proposes to consider museums as effective tools that form the image of an “open society” capable of integrating the public into the world intellectual community [5]. S. Dychkovskyi studies the activities of skansen (open-air ethnographic museums) and concludes that “the peculiarities of the development of tourism in the conditions of post-industrial society influenced conceptual approaches to the museum topos, which initially conveyed a chronological meaning, but with the spread of museums-skansen found itself outside the phenomenological boundaries of time and space. The spread of skansen as interactive open-air expositions became a reflection of changes in the cultural and socio-economic life of modern society” [3, p. 17]. R. Kosarevskaya and O. Levchenko are interested in the digitalization of historical monuments of Ukraine, considering the positive and negative aspects of the introduction of virtual museums and sites, emphasizing the

importance of free access to interactive digital platforms that provide active interaction with the historical heritage [9]. Y. Kachkovska conducts a historiographical analysis of the development of digital museums in Ukraine, focusing on their features and classification, pays attention to changing the official definition of the concept of “museum” in the documentation of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), defines the role of digital museums in the culture and education of Ukraine, recording the current discussions on the definitions, structure and functions of digital museums [7], etc.

Despite the diversity of approaches, many aspects related to the transformation of cultural identity in digital museums remain insufficiently researched. In particular, there is a lack of a comprehensive assessment of their practical representations and interactions, which is what we want to improve by publishing our own research.

3. Problem Statement

The purpose of the proposed study is to comprehensively study the impact of digitalization on how museums shape, modify and help to experience cultural identity, as well as to identify mechanisms that replace the traditional representation of cultural heritage with interactive user interaction with the latest digital museum environment. The main attention is paid to theoretical approaches to the study of the concepts of “cultural identity”, “digital culture” and “museum communication”; characteristics of the phenomenon of “digital museum space” (a new format of cultural representation and cultural interaction); identification of transformational mechanisms that modify cultural identity by means of digital museum technologies (VR/AR, digital archives, gamified tours, interactive interfaces, etc.); research of various forms of user interaction and digital museum platforms; and its impact on the interpretation of cultural heritage; identification of risks and opportunities that accompany the preservation of cultural identity in the context of total digitalization; developing recommendations for the successful functioning of museums online and maintaining cultural integrity and inclusiveness of cultural interaction.

4. Methods and Materials

As the material basis of the study, we took digital museum platforms, virtual museum exhibitions, various online archives, multimedia collections and those interactive tools that demonstrate cultural heritage in “digital”. In addition, we use theoretical works of scientists, museum analytics, digital concepts, and empirical data on the online interaction of museum platforms and their users.

The proposed work uses an interdisciplinary methodological approach with a combination of culturological, communication, digital-humanitarian and socio-cultural methods of analysis. The scientific concepts of cultural identity and museum communication are summarized by the analytical-theoretical method. Traditional forms of museum representation and digital models of exhibition are compared using comparative analysis. Content analysis applied to digital museum platforms reveals the specific presentation of cultural artifacts, structures, collections and interactive elements. User online behavior in the museum environment is studied using the method of virtual ethnography, and the systematic approach considers digital museums as a complex ecosystem functioning at the level of technology, culture and society. And finally, the modeling method outlines the mechanisms that modify cultural identity under the influence of digitalization and cultural interaction. Thus, the digital museum space is interpreted as a factor in the formation of a new culture, and its transformation is a natural process in the context of digital interaction.

5. Results and Discussion

Digital museums are an innovative form of museum space that preserves, represents and interprets cultural heritage using digital technologies. It combines traditional museum functions with opportunities for virtual interaction, which provide qualitatively new access to cultural objects and actively acquaint users with the possibilities of cultural communication. Digital museum exhibits are digitized, transmitted through 3D models, multimedia reconstructions and interactive interfaces, expanding the horizons of their perception, explaining and commenting on the primary material context in visualizing data. Digital museums are interactive platforms that provide for the individual formation of a tourist trajectory of acquaintance with exhibition collections, the use of visualization tools,

participation in virtual tours and the study of archival materials that are not available in physical format. Museums of this type democratize access to culture and guarantee inclusiveness and open access at the global level. According to E. Voynova, “the Internet revolution has greatly changed the nature of social, including political, interaction, opening up opportunities for political participation unknown in previous eras. This happened because on the Internet, the physical distance between subjects does not play a significant role in communication; not only are space and time are erased, but there is a convergence of cultures, worldviews, traditions and values. Thanks to the improved speed of online information exchange, people have the opportunity to perceive, disseminate and respond to the situation both in the city of their location and in the world as a whole with much greater speed” [20, p. 12].

Virtual museums also provide an opportunity to rethink cultural identity through digitalization. Modern humanities considers the identity of culture from the point of view of its perspective and comprehends it as a result of social, communicative and media practices. According to the socio-constructivist approach, identity is interpreted as a product of discursivism, within which social groups try to create narratives about themselves and their past. We are talking about expositions, multimedia stories, thematic selections and user comments that add their own meanings to official museum interpretations. Identity here is constructed through the selection, viewing, and rethinking of content and acquires signs of subjectivity and variability.

Behavioral and performative theories consider cultural identity as repetitive actions and practices that affirm an individual's belonging to the corresponding cultural community. In digital museums, performativity is the interaction between the user and the platform, when their own collections are created, expositions are commented on, virtual tours are attended, and digital representations of artifacts are spread on social networks. Each such activity reaffirms or rethinks the user's cultural position, thereby forming a new identity.

Theories of globalization and postcolonialism in identity also produce a dimension of hybridity and political inscribement. Open access to the world's museum collections online, on the one hand, creates an environment where local narratives and global discourses interact, promoting the inclusion and dialogue of cultures; on the other hand, it provokes risks that can neutralize local values or distort the reproduction of colonial artifacts.

The Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells [20] calls identity a phenomenon formed in the complex structure of digital communication. His train of thought shows that a digital museum is a node of a network in which cultural contexts, institutional meanings, technological algorithms and a wide variety of user practices intersect, and identity in it is the result of their direct interaction.

The space of the digital museum is a key phenomenon of modern culture, formed at the intersection of information technologies, museum communications and new media. It has gone through a difficult evolutionary path from an online collection and an electronic catalog to a comprehensive interface capable of simulating a holistic virtual environment, broadcasting museum content and providing users with multidimensional interaction with it. As a result, the ways of accessing artifacts have changed and the principles of cultural representation, communicative strategy and interpretation of cultural identity have been rethought. The online museum space synthesizes various visual, auditory, textual and interactive dimensions of cultural experience. While traditional museum exhibitions represent exhibits in a limited physical and spatial environment, a digital museum offers dynamics, personalization of the exhibition, which the user can contemplate at their own pace at any time. Its innovation lies in the fact that, unlike a traditional museum, it does not “demonstrate” knowledge, but “generates” experience. Digitalization breaks down the barriers of a traditional museum: it frees you from geographical dependence and time constraints, allows you to inspect museum objects in detail, change the angle of perspective, view reconstructions, etc.

In the digitalized space, modern museums are positioned as active factors that construct, modify and rethink cultural identity, and with the help of innovative tools, they model effective scenarios for experiencing cultural experience, changing not only the form of presenting knowledge, but also the holistic structured cultural interaction. Specific mechanisms for the transformation of cultural identity include:

- *Immersiveness* provided by VR and AR technologies. They offer “time travel” through historical eras, authentic spaces and situations where museum exhibits are presented in their original meaning. You can “visit” reconstructed temples, ancient cities and relics, or become a participant in a historical event, thanks to which the digital museum experience acquires bodily and emotional saturation. identity through a model of “lived authenticity”.

- *Personalization of cultural experience* formed by interactive interfaces and recommended algorithms. This is a popular service of digital museums for building adaptive routes, an individual selection of exhibits and thematic narratives adjusted to the interests of the user.

- *Interactive co-creation of meanings*, which allows not only to passively perceive the finished interpretation, but also to create a new one, commenting, sharing stories, creating personal exhibitions, collections or digital reconstructions. Gamified tours are productive in this regard, offering users of digital museums to go through quests, solve riddles or become direct participants in interesting plots and form their own path of cognition. As a result, each individual becomes a co-author and makes cultural identity a dialogical, open and interoperable process.

- *The networking of digital culture*, which, through digital national and international archives, provides access to large amounts of cultural information and forms a globalized identity where it is possible to simultaneously identify with several cultural environments. This is how an open, mobile, integrated and multi-code “transcultural” identity emerges.

- *Rethinking authenticity in digital format*. Digital museums create “digital authenticity”. Through 3D scanning, photogrammetry and digital reconstructions, it is possible to see the internal structure of objects and their original form for a new understanding of cultural identity, for which, along with material presence, the depth of digital knowledge of the exhibition object is important.

- *Inclusivity and expansion of access to cultural heritage*. Online exhibitions overcome barriers of physical accessibility, providing cultural experiences to those who were not previously involved in the museum sphere. For Ukraine, in the conditions of war, the digitalization of museums is a way to preserve cultural memory and an opportunity to support cultural identity in a situation of total crisis.

To summarize, the digitalization of museum collections affects cultural identity. The mechanisms we have described reconfigure the cultural experience, in which identity is a flexible, multi-layered, interactive process built in a common dialogue between users, technologies and cultures.

By changing the fixation, interpretation, and transmission of cultural identity, digital mediation of museum communication simultaneously reveals unique opportunities and dangerous challenges that are easy to face while preserving cultural heritage. According to S. Gavryliuk and V. Nadolska “one of the defining trends in the development of museums was creativity – a powerful tool, the use of which testifies to an effective response to the changing realities of the XXI century. Museums around the world are radically updating the principles of work, museum policy and ingrained practices. In particular, museums are actively introducing interactive technologies, developing a communicative function, interpreting intangible cultural heritage” [5, p. 44]. Let’s first consider the positive aspects of the process of digitization of museum artifacts and exhibits:

- *Expanding access to cultural heritage*. Access to national and world cultural artifacts is provided by digital exhibitions, digitized archives and virtual tours that strengthen identity and allow users to interpret, comment and form alternative narratives.

- *Preservation of vulnerable or disappearing elements of cultural heritage*. Digitized artefacts, customs, oral histories and material environments create sustainable digital copies that exist regardless of the physical condition of the object. process.

As you can see, the positive side of the museum’s digital environment is that the exhibits in it cease to be static, gain unlimited autonomy and become nodes of a network system of meanings, metadata and contexts. With the help of interactive chronologies, maps, digital reconstructions, and AR layers with augmented information, polyphonic models of knowledge transmission are created that can produce multiple interpretations. We are dealing with something similar to digital culture, non-linear, open and hypertextual. That is why the digital museum space acquires the characteristics of an “intelligent navigator” that not only demonstrates artifacts, but also offers to master their content.

The fundamental difference between a traditional and a digital museum lies in interactivity. The physical museum allows you to view exhibits and read accompanying texts; the digital museum allows you to actively create new artifact meanings. Gamification, interactive quests, VR tours turn an online visitor into a co-creator of a cultural narrative, forming a renewed dimension of museum communication – from one-way broadcasting to complicity in dialogue.

Despite the obvious “advantages” of digital museum mediation, N. Panas notes that although “the cultural policy of advanced countries has changed its priorities, the search for new content and image of museums is carried out to please the taste of visitors. But such transformations, the researchers note, also cause negative phenomena – more and more often the choice is made to the detriment of educational and research work” [14, p. 94]. The same opinion is shared by R. Tkachenko, warning that

very digitized “museums do not attach much importance to the chronological and stylistic sequence of exhibits, new meanings that are manifested in the viewer when perceiving artifacts become more important. To surprise and delight is the main goal of a modern museum” [17, p. 162]. The following fundamental points seem risky to us:

- *The threat of superficial reception of cultural content*, when spectacles and entertainment are prioritized, rather than depth and context. Simplification of narratives is trending today, when complex historical phenomena are reduced to visual effects or plot linearities by means of VR/AR formats, interactive interfaces and gamified tours. and not for comprehension.

- *Loss of authenticity during digitization*. Each digital representation involves interpretation, selection and technical processing, which can alter cultural meanings. The choice of the object of digitalization often depends on technical capabilities, commercial priority, or the ideology of the digital museum. Therefore, cultural memory risks becoming selective, turning some of its elements into over-representation, while others are marginalized or forgotten.

- *Algorithmic control of cultural narratives*. Algorithms can reinforce users’ already known cultural preferences, minimizing their contact with “other” aspects of cultural heritage. This creates a “cultural bubble” effect, when limited interaction with various segments of digital culture inhibits the development of a holistic cultural identity.

- *Commercialization of digital museum practices*. To attract a larger audience, profitable formats are preferred, and educational and cultural formats are leveled. There is a danger of shifting emphasis from memory and identity to entertainment and media effectiveness.

These risks do not detract from the prospects can forming new models of cultural identity. The integration of different types of data, the creation of multisensory environments, the involvement of communities in content creation, and the intensification of dialogue between different cultural groups are the basis for increasing inclusive, dialogical, and critical reflection on identity. This is how the transition from passive consumerism to the active formation of cultural meanings occurs, and therefore, the strengthening of the connection between personal and collective levels of cultural memory.

To optimize digital museum practices as much as possible, it is worth following the recommendations below:

- *integrate multi-sensory and inclusive technologies* (VR/AR exhibitions, interactive interfaces, gamified tours) into the digital museum business to form a personal experience of cultural interaction and a new interpretation of authentic cultural heritage;

- *to ensure multi-level digital communication between the museum and the user* by commenting on exhibitions, participating in virtual discussions, creating personal digital collections and exchanging impressions in social networks;

- *apply digital mediation strategies* that inhibit cultural disintegration through standardization of documentation, representation and online communication of cultural objects for informational authenticity and contextualization;

- *develop interactive educational programs* to combine digital technologies and cultural competencies of users, using virtual workshops, thematic quests and learning platforms;

- *evaluate the effectiveness of digital museum practices* by examining user experience, behavioral data analytics, and feedback from visitors.

Interactivity, inclusiveness, authenticity and educational value are the basic principles for the development of digital museum practices. They preserve cultural identity in the digital environment, and form new, flexible and multidimensional forms of cultural interaction between modern museums and their users.

6. Conclusions

It has been established that the digital space of the museum is not just a new format for the representation of cultural heritage, but also a powerful tool that transforms the identity of culture. It ensures active user interaction with cultural content and forms the possibility of new interpretation and personalization of the cultural experience. Modern cultural identity has been transformed by VR/AR exhibitions, digital archives, interactive interfaces, and gamified tours, which have enriched visual and sensory perception, forced online users to develop critical thinking, and actively create personalized cultural narratives. The ability to comment and discuss what you see online demonstrates the inclusive

cultural communication of the digital environment and democratic access to the cultural heritage of digital museums.

Potential risks to preserving cultural identity lie in the simplified or fragmented representation of cultural objects, the marginalization of local communities, and the need to control the authenticity of digital content. They can be blocked by digital mediation strategies that balance innovation and cultural integrity.

It is necessary to develop digital museum practices by integrating multi-sensory and inclusive technologies, developing multi-level user interaction, implementing educational programs, and evaluating the effectiveness of digital platforms. This will not only preserve cultural identity in the context of digitalization, but also form new, flexible and multidimensional forms of cultural interaction that can meet the needs of the modern user.

To summarize, the digital space of the museum is a key environment for the development of interactive cultural communication, which supports cultural identity in the digital age and combines technological innovations with humanitarian content and social responsibility.

Further research should focus on developing new methods for assessing the effectiveness of social services during crises, as well as improving the model of access to these services, taking into account current challenges, including the reduction in the capacity of institutions due to the consequences of war and migration.

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