

## WWE as Performance Theatre: Exploring Spectacle and the Arts of Storytelling in Professional Wrestling

Eziwho Emenike AZUNWO, PhD  
Department of Theatre & Film Studies  
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University  
Nkpolu-Oroworukwo  
P.M.B. 5080, Rivers State, Nigeria.

\*\*\*\*\*

**Abstract:** *The research paper delves into the multifaceted world of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) as a unique form of sports entertainment. This study investigates the historical origins of wrestling, tracing its roots in ancient civilizations and indigenous cultures, and explores how WWE emerged as a dominant force in the entertainment industry. The paper examines the essential theatrical elements that set WWE apart as “sports entertainment,” including storytelling, character development, promos, theatrical entrances, and in-ring psychology. The research emphasizes the paramount role of storytelling in WWE’s success, analyzing how intricate narratives, compelling characters, and dramatic rivalries elicit emotional investment from the audience. Furthermore, the study speculates on the future prospects of WWE as performance theatre, considering emerging trends such as technological innovations, global expansion, and audience engagement. Overall, the paper provides a comprehensive analysis of WWE’s artistry, captivating the hearts of millions with its fusion of athleticism, drama, and storytelling, elevating professional wrestling to an unparalleled form of entertainment.*

**Keywords:** - WWE, Sport, Arts, Storytelling

\*\*\*\*\*

In the realm of sports and entertainment, few brands and/or genre capture the imagination and captivate audiences quite like World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE). Ranking as one of the world’s most prominent professional wrestling organizations, WWE has built an empire of loyal followers, transcending boundaries and cultures to become a global phenomenon. Thus, beyond the realm of traditional sports and entertainment, WWE showcases a unique blend of athleticism,

drama, and larger-than-life characters, creating an unparalleled form of entertainment that has been branded, “sports entertainment” and/or “performance theatre”.

This research paper delves into the intriguing world of WWE, aiming to dissect and analyze the key elements that transform professional wrestling into a mesmerizing theatrical spectacle. Far more than a mere sporting event, WWE productions are elaborate performances

that incorporate intricate storytelling, choreographed action sequences, immersive character development and enthralling spectacle. The fusion of these components has effectively shaped WWE's distinct identity as an art form that creates a link bridge between athleticism and theatricality.

Wrestling has roots that can be traced back centuries, with the modern iteration evolving from carnival sideshows and catch wrestling contests. Stating specifically, WWE's origins can be traced back as far as the 1950s when on January 7, 1953, the first show under the Capitol Wrestling Corporation (CWC) was produced (Tim 2015, p.117). However, the advent of television in the mid-20th century revolutionized the industry, allowing wrestling to reach an exponentially larger audience and transforming it into a bona-fide form of entertainment. Citing Sacco et al. (2011), "WWE is the largest wrestling promotion in the world, with its main roster divided up into two primary touring groups, Raw and SmackDown, along with a developmental roster, NXT, based in Orlando, Florida (referred to by WWE as "brands"). Overall, WWE is available in more than one billion homes worldwide in 30 languages". Reactively, the gradual evolution from wrestling as a competitive sport to be scripted, character-driven theatrics has given rise to a vast and dedicated fan base, establishing WWE as a global cultural phenomenon.

Be that as it may, to appreciate the intricacies of WWE's appeal, this paper will explore the significance of storytelling in professional wrestling. WWE's creative team constructs elaborate narratives and engaging story blueprint that intertwine the lives of its

wrestlers, blurring the lines between fiction and reality. These stylistic storylines create emotional investment among the audience, eliciting reactions ranging from excitement and euphoria to anger and sorrow. Examining the art of storytelling in WWE will shed light on how it manages to retain such a devoted fan base and attract new viewers across generations.

Furthermore, the physical performances of WWE's superstars are an integral part of its attraction. These athletes, more often referred to as "superstars" or "wrestlers," are not only skilled combatants but also actors who embody larger-than-life personas. Investigating the art of in-ring performance will unveil the intricacies of the choreography, stunts, and theatrical moves that contribute to the illusion of competition while maintaining the safety of the participants. By examining the physicality of WWE, it becomes less of a task to understand the balance between athleticism and entertainment, and how it elevates the experience for both the live audience and viewers watching at home.

In conclusion, WWE stands as a testament to the transformative power of performance theatre, where storytelling, athleticism, and larger-than-life characters converge to create an electrifying spectacle. This research paper seeks to unravel the paradox of WWE's success, delving into the intricacies that fuel its enduring popularity. Venturing into the world of WWE will automatically avail valuable insights into the art of creating and sustaining an immersive and emotionally resonant form of entertainment that continues to capture the hearts of millions worldwide.

### **Aim and Objective**

This paper seeks to shed light on the unique blend of athleticism, theatrics, and narrative craftsmanship that distinguishes WWE from conventional sports and traditional theatrical performances. By examining WWE's historical evolution and its transformation into "sports entertainment," the paper aims to contextualize the promotion's prominence in contemporary entertainment culture.

Furthermore, the research endeavors to explore the psychological and emotional connections that WWE fosters with its audience through immersive character development and compelling storytelling. Understanding the impact of WWE's creative narratives on viewer engagement is clearly on the radar hence, the aim to uncover the reasons behind its enduring popularity and devoted fan base.

Ultimately, the research paper aims at contributing to the academic understanding of WWE as a unique form of performance theatre, unraveling its distinct blend of athleticism, storytelling, and spectacle. An attempt at presenting a comprehensive analysis of WWE's artistry and its profound impact on global entertainment culture situates this paper as a tool that shed light on the continuing appeal of WWE and its remarkable journey as a performance theatre phenomenon.

### **Historical Origins of Wrestling**

Wrestling is the name given to the sport or activity that is struggling with a competitor within the rules and trying to hold it and usually throw it on the ground. Throughout history, wrestling has been a rite of passage for gods, heroes and kings (Akinci 2020, p.63). The historical origins of wrestling can be traced back to ancient civilizations and cultures, with

evidence of various forms of wrestling found across different regions of the world. Typically, wrestling is considered one of the oldest competitive sports, dating back thousands of years. While the specific origins may vary in different cultures, the practice of physical grappling and hand-to-hand combat appears to have emerged independently in multiple societies.

### **Traces of Wrestling in Notable Cultures/Civilizations**

**Ancient Egypt:** Ancient Egyptian reliefs and tomb paintings dating back over 5,000 years depict scenes of wrestling matches. These images suggest that wrestling was an integral part of Egyptian culture and may have been practiced as a form of training for military purposes. According to EL-Gammal (2008), the Ancient Egyptians engaged themselves in sports with the intention of training and strengthening their bodies, and also for pleasure and recreation (p.82). It is fondly to state that the Ancient Egyptians are lovers of sports thus, involved in a lot of sports games and events. In the context of wrestling, again El-Gammal (2008) opines that many organized sports games in Ancient Egypt were confrontational. Some of the favoured sports were wrestling, boxing and fencing with sticks, and of these, wrestling was probably the most favored (p.84). In corroboration, Akinci (2020) asserts that in ancient Egypt, sports such as boxing, running, stick fighting, wooden sword fighting are included in the records, but the most important of them is wrestling (p.64).

**Ancient Mesopotamia:** In ancient Sumeria, around 3000 BCE, wrestling was a popular form of physical exercise and competition. Cuneiform tablets from this era mention

wrestling competitions, indicating its significance in society. Michael (1996) situates the foregoing point with the assertion thus:

The Epic of Gilgamesh in Sumerian literature features its hero Gilgamesh establishing his credibility as a leader after wrestling Enkidu. Other sculptures and literature from ancient Mesopotamia show that wrestling was a popular activity (p.1109).

Still in context, Vyasa et al. (1896) reports what the Sanskrit epic *Mahabharata* describes the encounter between the accomplished wrestlers Bhima and Jarasandha:

Grasping each other in various ways by means of their arms, and kicking each other with such violence as to affect the innermost nerves, they struck at each other's breasts with clenched fists. With bare arms as their only weapons roaring like clouds they grasped and struck each other like two mad elephants encountering each other with their trunks (P.51).

Wrestling in ancient Mesopotamia, particularly in the region of Sumer, played a significant role as a popular sport and a form of physical exercise and entertainment. In this ancient civilization, wrestling emerged as an essential aspect of society, and evidence of its practice dates back to as early as 3000 BCE.

**Ancient Greece:** Wrestling played a central role in ancient Greek culture and mythology. The ancient Olympic Games, which began around 776 BCE, included wrestling as one of its original events. Greek wrestling was a brutal and intense form of combat, and the sport held a prominent place in Greek art and literature. According to Miller (2004, p.47), "wrestler's objective (aim, goal) was to throw his opponent

to the ground from a standing position. A point (or fall) was scored when a wrestler's back or shoulders touched the ground. Three points were needed to win a match. Holds were restricted to the upper body". Unlike modern wrestling, there were no weight divisions or time limits. As a result, the sport was dominated by large strong men and boys who could defeat smaller but more skillful opponents.

**Ancient Rome:** Roman wrestling, known as "Lucta" or "Pancratium," was another influential form of the sport. It incorporated elements of both wrestling and boxing and was showcased in various Roman games and gladiatorial contests. Citing Michael (1996), after the Roman conquest of the Greeks, Greek wrestling was adopted by the Roman culture and became Roman Wrestling during the period of the Roman Empire (510 BC to AD 500). By the eighth century, the Byzantine emperor Basil I, according to court historians, won in wrestling against a boastful wrestler from Bulgaria (p.1193).

**Asian Traditions:** Wrestling was also prevalent in many Asian cultures. In India, wrestling, known as "Kushti," has a long history and remains a popular sport today. In Japan, various forms of traditional wrestling, such as "Sumo" and "Jujutsu," emerged and evolved over the centuries. According to Serge (2001, p.1193), the term Jujutsu was coined in the 17th century, after which time it became a blanket term for a wide variety of grappling-related disciplines in Japanese martial arts. Prior to that time, these skills had names such as "short sword grappling", "grappling", "body art", "softness", "art of harmony", "catching hand", and even the "way of softness" (as early as 1724, almost two centuries before Kanō

Jigorō founded the modern art of Kodokan Judo). The systems of unarmed combat that were developed and practiced during the Muromachi period (before 1573) are today referred to collectively as Japanese old-style jujutsu.

Classical Chinese wrestling or jiao li was a public sport in the Qin Dynasty (221-207 BC) held for court amusement as well as for recruiting the best fighters. Competitors wrestled each other on a raised platform called a lei tai. The term shuai jiao was chosen by the Central Guoshu Academy of Nanjing in 1928 when competition rules began to be standardized.

Wrestling existed in other parts of Asia as far as classical history is concerned.

**Indigenous and Tribal Cultures:** Wrestling was also practiced in various indigenous and tribal societies around the world, often as a rite of passage, a way to settle disputes, or a form of physical training for warriors. While the specific practices and rules may vary between different communities, wrestling in these cultures often holds cultural, social, and spiritual significance. In many cultures of Nigeria, wrestling is often associated with rites of passage, symbolizing the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Young individuals may participate in wrestling competitions as part of initiation rituals, demonstrating their physical strength, courage, and readiness to assume adult responsibilities. In the same vein, wrestling serves as a form of community bonding and entertainment in many indigenous societies. Competitions and events draw members of the community together, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity.

In summary, it suffices to state that over time, wrestling evolved and spread to different regions, adopting various rules and techniques specific to each culture. As civilizations interacted through trade and conquest, wrestling also spread, influencing and being influenced by different cultures. These diverse wrestling traditions laid the foundation for the development of modern wrestling as it is known today.

### **World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) in Brief**

WWE, which stands for World Wrestling Entertainment, is a prominent American media and entertainment company primarily known for professional wrestling. Founded in 1952 as Capitol Wrestling Corporation, the company has undergone several name changes before adopting the WWE name in 2002 (Sacco & Michael 2007). WWE is the largest wrestling promotion in the world, with its main roster divided up into two primary touring groups, Raw and SmackDown, along with a developmental roster, NXT, based in Orlando, Florida. Overall, WWE is available in more than one billion homes worldwide in 30 languages. The company's global headquarters is located in Stamford, Connecticut, with offices in New York, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Mumbai, Shanghai, Singapore, Dubai, and Munich.

As in other professional wrestling promotions, WWE shows are not legitimate contests but entertainment-based performance theatre, featuring story line-driven, scripted, and partially choreographed matches; however, matches often include moves that can put performers at risk of injury, even death, if not performed correctly. WWE brands its product

as sports entertainment, acknowledging wrestling's roots in competitive sport and dramatic theatre.

### **Key Facts About WWE**

The following can be summarized as key facts and elements of WWE:

**Sports Entertainment:** WWE is a unique blend of sports and entertainment, often referred to as "sports entertainment." By this instance, WWE combines scripted storylines, choreographed matches, and larger-than-life characters to create a captivating spectacle for its audience.

**Professional Wrestling:** WWE's core product is professional wrestling, where highly trained athletes, known as superstars, engage in in-ring competitions, showcasing a combination of athleticism and theatricality.

**Weekly Shows:** WWE produces several weekly shows, including "Raw" and "SmackDown," which air live on television and stream on various digital platforms. These shows feature live matches, backstage segments, and ongoing storylines.

**Pay-Per-View Events:** WWE hosts monthly pay-per-view events, such as "WrestleMania," "SummerSlam," "Royal Rumble," and "Survivor Series." These events are grand spectacles, often featuring championship matches and high-profile rivalries.

**WWE Network:** In 2014, WWE launched the WWE Network, a digital streaming service providing access to a vast library of wrestling content, including past pay-per-view events, original shows, and documentaries.

**Developmental System:** WWE has a developmental system called NXT, where aspiring wrestlers undergo training and hone their skills before transitioning to the main roster.

**Global Reach:** WWE has a massive global fan base, and its programming is broadcast in more than 150 countries and translated into multiple languages.

**Iconic Superstars:** Over the years, WWE has produced numerous iconic superstars, such as Hulk Hogan, The Rock, Stone Cold, Great Khali, Undertaker, Steve Austin, John Cena, and many more, who have become household names beyond wrestling circles.

**Community Involvement:** WWE is actively involved in charitable initiatives and community outreach programs, using its platform to make a positive impact.

**Evolution and Adaptation:** Throughout its history, WWE has evolved to adapt to changing trends and audience preferences. It has diversified its content to include reality shows, documentaries, and other forms of entertainment.

Summarily, WWE's influence extends beyond wrestling, with its superstars often making appearances in mainstream media, movies, and television shows. As a dominant force in sports entertainment, WWE continues to entertain and engage fans around the world with its unique blend of athleticism, drama, and storytelling.

### **Emergence of World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) as a Dominant Force**

On May 6, 2002, the World Wrestling Federation (WWF) changed both its company

name and the name of its wrestling promotion to World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) after the company lost a lawsuit initiated by the World Wildlife Fund over the WWF trademark (World Wrestling Federation Entertainment drops the 'F'! WWE.). Sufficing that the company bore many names before eventually retaining the name, "WWE", the entertaining brand clearly has a backlog of history. Granted the foregoing, it is on course to state that the emergence of WWE as a dominant force in the world of professional wrestling and sports entertainment is a fascinating story of perseverance, innovation, and visionary leadership. To clarify the foregoing proposition, below, key factors that supported the transformation and transportation of the company to prominent rise shall be analyzed.

**Visionary Leadership:** There is no way a person would talk about the growth of the WWE without making reference to Vince McMahon. As a matter of fact, one of the pivotal figures in the rise of WWE was Vince McMahon. In the 1980s, Vince McMahon took over the reins of the then-World Wrestling Federation (WWF) from his father and had a vision to transform professional wrestling into a global entertainment spectacle. McMahon recognized the potential of expanding beyond traditional wrestling territories and aimed to make WWE a household name worldwide.

**Expansion and National Exposure:** During the 1980s, Vince McMahon launched an ambitious campaign to expand WWE's reach beyond its traditional Northeastern U.S. territories. He used cable television to broadcast WWE events nationally, reaching a much larger audience. The launch of "WrestleMania" in 1985, a pay-per-view extravaganza featuring

celebrities and top wrestling talent, further propelled WWE into the mainstream.

**The Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection:** WWE's crossover with mainstream pop culture during the 1980s was instrumental in its growth. WWE collaborated with MTV to create "The Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection," which brought wrestlers and popular musicians together, introducing WWE to a broader and younger audience.

**Charismatic Superstars:** WWE's ability to create larger-than-life characters and charismatic superstars significantly contributed to its success. Iconic figures from the 1990s like Hulk Hogan, "Macho Man" Randy Savage, and The Ultimate Warrior became household names and played a pivotal role in attracting new fans.

**Storytelling and Entertainment:** WWE's emphasis on storytelling, drama, and entertainment became a hallmark of its product. The company created compelling storylines, rivalries, and theatrical performances, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. This narrative-driven approach resonated with fans, drawing them into the emotional investment in WWE's characters and matches.

**Global Expansion:** In the 1990s, WWE continued to expand internationally, holding events in various countries and tapping into a global fan base. This international expansion helped solidify WWE's status as a global brand.

**The Attitude Era:** In the late 1990s and early 2000s, WWE entered the "Attitude Era," characterized by more serious/touchier content, controversial storylines, and a focus on adult-oriented entertainment. This period saw the rise of iconic stars like Stone Cold Steve Austin,

The Rock, and Triple H, attracting a massive audience and pushing WWE to new heights of popularity.

**Diversification of Content:** WWE diversified its content, branching out into various forms of media, including movies, video games, merchandise, and digital platforms. These ventures allowed WWE to reach audiences beyond traditional television programming.

**Strategic Business Decisions:** WWE's ability to adapt to changing market conditions and embrace technological advancements further solidified its position as a dominant force. Strategic acquisitions, partnerships, and innovative marketing approaches contributed to the company's growth.

Overall, it can be gathered that through the combination of visionary leadership, compelling storytelling, global expansion, and a commitment to entertainment, WWE transformed itself from a regional wrestling promotion to a global entertainment powerhouse. Today, WWE continues to be a dominant force in the entertainment industry, captivating audiences around the world with its unique brand of sports entertainment.

### Content Analysis

This section is preoccupied with analyzing WWE within the context of theatre and its elements, scriptwriting and performance art.

### Theatrical Elements in World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)

WWE is renowned for its captivating blend of athleticism and theatrics, which has transformed professional wrestling into the distinct genre known as "sports entertainment".

Clearly, theatrical elements affixed with WWE play a crucial role in creating the spectacle that captivates audiences worldwide. Theatrical elements in WWE shall be highlighted below.

### Scriptwriting, Storytelling and Narrative:

Clearly, storytelling and narrative are resourceful elements of conventional theatre. WWE places a strong emphasis on storytelling, crafting intricate narratives and ongoing storylines that unfold over weeks, months, or even years. These storylines involve rivalries, alliances, betrayals, and personal conflicts, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. The dramatic narratives add depth and emotional investment to the characters and matches.

**Character/Characterization:** Since theatre and drama has a strong romance with the concept of mimesis, character and characterization has endured a long spell as element of theatre. Characters are imaginary personas created to plays in drama. Characters can be abstract, regular humans, animals etc. Granted the foregoing, WWE superstars are more than just athletes; they are larger-than-life characters with distinct personas, backstories, and motivations. These characters often embody archetypal roles, such as the heroic face (good guy) or the villainous heel (bad guy). The development of these personas is critical in creating compelling drama and generating fan reactions.

**Promos and Mic Skills:** Promos, short for promotional interviews, are crucial theatrical segments where superstars deliver impassioned speeches, taunts, and monologues to advance their storylines and build anticipation for upcoming matches. Mic skills, or the ability to speak effectively on the microphone, are



essential for WWE superstars to convey their characters' personalities and engage the audience.

**Entrance Music and Showpieces:** WWE superstars' entrances are elaborate spectacles in themselves. Each wrestler has unique entrance music that complements their character and sets the tone for their performance. Pyrotechnics, special effects, and lighting add a sense of grandeur to these entrances, making them unforgettable moments for fans.

**Costumes/Attire and Makeup:** WWE superstars' costumes and attire are carefully designed to reflect their characters and enhance their theatrical personas. With makeup, bold colors, distinctive symbols, and eye-catching outfits help create memorable visual identities for the wrestlers.

**In-Ring Psychology and Gestures:** Wrestlers use theatrical gestures, facial expressions, and body language during matches to communicate with the audience and convey emotions. These theatrical elements heighten the drama and enhance the storytelling within the context of the match.

**Commentary and Announcers:** The commentary team plays a vital role in WWE's theatrical presentation. They provide real-time analysis, call the action, and contribute to the storytelling by providing context, backstory, and emotional reactions to the events unfolding in the ring.

**Special Match Types:** WWE occasionally incorporates special match types that add a theatrical twist to the traditional wrestling format. Examples include Hell in a Cell, TLC (Tables, Ladders, and Chairs), and Royal

Rumble matches, which feature unique rules and elements that add excitement and drama to the contests.

**Pay-Per-View Events:** WWE's pay-per-view events, particularly WrestleMania, are extravaganzas where theatrical elements are heightened to create epic spectacles. Elaborate set designs, celebrity appearances, and high-stakes matches contribute to the larger-than-life feel of these events.

### Scriptwriting in WWE

Scriptwriting which draws its fiber from playwriting is a foundational and/or fundamental aspect of the theatre and drama. Basically, scriptwriting plays a crucial role in shaping the storytelling and dramatic elements of the products in WWE. It involves crafting engaging narratives, developing compelling characters, and scripting promos and segments that drive the storylines forward. WWE's scriptwriting process is a collaborative effort involving writers, producers, and the wrestlers themselves.

### Overview of Scriptwriting and its Packaging in World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)

**Creative Team:** WWE has a dedicated creative team responsible for developing the overall direction of storylines and characters. This team includes writers, producers, and other creative professionals who work closely with the talent and management.

**Long-Term Planning:** WWE's creative team engages in long-term planning to outline major story arcs and key events that will unfold in coming weeks or months. Long-term planning allows for consistent character development

and builds anticipation for major payoffs, such as at pay-per-view events like WrestleMania.

**Weekly Shows:** WWE's leading weekly shows i.e., "Raw" and "SmackDown," are scripted in advance. Writers create detailed scripts for each episode, outlining the matches, promos, backstage segments, and any other relevant story beats.

**Character Development:** Writers work on developing the personas and motivations of WWE superstars, giving them distinct identities and roles within the storytelling. This helps create dynamic rivalries and alliances that drive the drama in WWE.

**Promo Writing:** Promos, or scripted interviews are essential for building hype and advancing storylines. Writer crafts the dialogue for the superstars' promos, tailoring them to fit the characters personalities and the ongoing storylines.

**Rehearsals:** Usually, before going live on air, WWE talent rehearses their promos and segments with producers to ensure they deliver the intended messages effectively. This process allows for adjustments and improvements before the live show.

**Ad-Libbing:** While WWE heavily relies on scripted content, there is also room for ad-libbing and improvisation, especially during live segments. Talented wrestlers often inject their own personalities and emotions into their performances, enhancing the authenticity of the characters.

**Pay-Per-View Events:** Pay-per-view events receive special attention in the scriptwriting process. These events are the culmination of major storylines, and scripts are carefully

crafted to deliver high-stakes matches and dramatic moments that resonate with the audience.

**Improvisation and Flexibility:** WWE's scriptwriting process is known for its adaptability. Last minute changes and improvisation can occur due to unforeseen circumstances or the need to address fan reactions or current events.

### **The Role of Scripting and Storytelling in WWE**

Storytelling plays a pivotal role in WWE and is at the heart of its success as a form of sports entertainment. WWE's commitment to compelling narratives and engaging storylines distinguishes it from conventional sports and elevates it to the realm of theatre and drama. The relevance of storytelling in WWE can be understood through certain role it plays.

Talking dramaturgy, a good story ought to facilitate emotional investment to its audience. Thus, storytelling in WWE aims to evoke emotions and create connections between the audience and the wrestlers. By developing well-defined characters and engaging narratives, WWE seeks to elicit reactions ranging from cheers and adoration for beloved heroes to boos and disdain for hated villains. Sizing the foregoing, it suffices to say that character development should come next to scripting and storyline. Thus, bearing in mind that WWE's storytelling allows for the development of larger-than-life characters with distinct personalities, backgrounds, and motivations, character development becomes indispensable in this context. WWE characters drive the plots and provide a relatable entry point for fans to plunge themselves in the storylines.

It is of interest to state make the mention that WWE's storytelling revolves around rivalries and conflicts between wrestlers. These conflicts, whether born out of jealousy, revenge, or competition, form the backbone of WWE's dramatic storytelling, leading to highly anticipated matches and events. Similarly, WWE storytelling revolves around long-term story arcs i.e., series. As a matter of fact, WWE excels at long-term planning where story arcs can unfold over extended periods. The suspended storytelling allows for suspense, surprises, and consequently amount to keeping viewers invested in the ongoing narrative. Supplementing this point necessitate the reminder that WWE superstars deliver scripted promos and interviews that help advance their characters and storylines. These verbal exchanges build tension and anticipation for upcoming matches and events. Be that as it may, it is of essence to state that WWE's storytelling also involves cross-platform storytelling. This means that WWE extends its storytelling beyond the ring through various media platforms. This includes WWE Network documentaries, social media interactions, and reality shows; all of which contribute to character development and enrich the overall narrative.

Cumulating the foregoing, it is sufficing to make the inference that scripting and storytelling in WWE is used to create memorable moments. Afterall, by standards, storytelling allows WWE to create memorable moments that leave a lasting impact on the audience. Iconic moments, such as surprise returns, shocking betrayals, and emotional victories, become engraved in WWE history and continue to resonate with fans. WWE's major pay-per-view events such as

WrestleMania and SummerSlam can be brought to view here. The aforementioned big events heavily rely on storytelling to build anticipation and drive audience interest. This very point give rise to the resolve that very fetching storytelling fosters fan engagement and encourages fans to discuss, speculate, and theorize about upcoming events. Fan reactions and interactions become integral to WWE's storytelling process.

Overall, scripting and storytelling is the backbone of WWE's success as a global entertainment phenomenon. By crafting immersive narratives, developing vibrant characters, and delivering dramatic moments, WWE ensures that its product resonates with audiences, maintaining its position as a dominant force in the world of sports entertainment.

### **Blurring the Lines: Fiction vs. Reality**

The concept of "Blurring the Lines: Fiction vs. Reality" in the context of the research topic refers to WWE's unique ability to create a narrative world where the boundaries between scripted fiction and real-life personas become unclear thus, arguable. This blurring of lines is a fundamental aspect of WWE's storytelling and a key element in its success as sports entertainment. Basically, in WWE, professional wrestling matches are choreographed and scripted, making them fictional performances. However, the superstars' characters and storylines are built around their real identities, personalities, and experiences. This interplay between fiction and reality creates a complex and compelling narrative dynamic that draws the audience into the emotional investment of the storylines.

Key aspects of the concept of “Blurring the Lines” can be sensed in several ways. And whereas character authenticity may appeal to come first, it is worthy of note that WWE superstars often incorporate elements of their real personalities and backgrounds into their performance personas. The blending of fiction and reality adds authenticity to the characters, making them more relatable and appreciating. In the same vein, WWE occasionally breaks the fourth wall. By this instance, WWE superstars acknowledge the scripted nature of the performances yet, referencing real-life events and controversies. This level of awareness further blurs the lines between fiction and reality, allowing for a deeper level of engagement with the audience. In addition to this, at times, WWE incorporates “shoot” promos, where superstars deliver unscripted or partially improvised interviews that reveal genuine emotions and frustrations. Situations like this provide indications regarding the real individuals behind the characters and heighten the drama within the storylines. In a related interest, it is on course to make the mention that WWE often constructs storylines around real-life events, controversies, or rivalries between superstars. These elements of reality intertwined into fictional narratives create a sense of verisimilitude and intrigue.

Granted the foregoing, one profound deduction is that WWE is more or less an entertainment brand engulfed with suspense and surprise quality. Given this credit, the uncertainty of whether an event or statement is scripted or genuine not only enhances the suspense and surprise in WWE but, heightens interest as well. By this instance, fans are left speculating about what is real and what is part of the narrative, creating a sense of unpredictability.

## **The Future of WWE as Performance Theatre**

Foremost, the art of WWE as performance theatre lies in its ability to seamlessly blend athleticism, drama, and storytelling into a captivating spectacle. WWE has elevated professional wrestling beyond a mere sport, creating a form of entertainment that engages audiences on multiple levels. WWE’s ability to create a world where fiction and reality intersect, captivating millions of fans worldwide, cements its status as a unique and enduring form of entertainment art. Through its ongoing commitment to innovation and dedication to storytelling, WWE continues to evolve its artistry and captivate audiences for generations to come.

Granted the foregoing, it becomes unequivocal to state that the future of WWE as performance theatre holds exciting potential, with several key trends and developments shaping its path forward. As the entertainment landscape evolves, WWE continues to adapt, innovate, and engage with its audience. The evolution of storytelling is key to this service. Thus, WWE is looked to likely continue to prioritize storytelling as the foundation of its product. With advancements in technology and production capabilities, WWE may look in the direction of exploring more immersive and interactive narratives, allowing fans to engage with the storytelling process and influence certain outcomes through digital platforms i.e., social media platforms. In summary, the future of WWE as performance theatre is characterized by a continued commitment to storytelling, technological innovations, global expansion, and a dedication to embracing diversity and audience engagement. As WWE

continues to evolve and embrace new opportunities, it will maintain its position as a dominant force in the world of sports entertainment, capturing the hearts and imaginations of audiences worldwide

### **Conclusion and Way Forward**

This research paper titled “WWE as Performance Theatre: Exploring the Art of Spectacle and Storytelling in Professional Wrestling” sheds light on the fascinating world of WWE as a unique form of sports entertainment. The paper delves into the historical origins of wrestling, tracing its roots across various civilizations, and examines how WWE emerged as a dominant force in the entertainment industry.

One of the key findings is the paramount role of storytelling in WWE’s success. The paper highlights how WWE’s commitment to crafting compelling narratives, developing larger-than-life characters, and creating dramatic rivalries has transformed professional wrestling into a captivating spectacle. By incorporating theatrical elements, WWE elevates its product beyond traditional sports, making it a form of performance theatre that resonates with a global audience.

Given the foregoing credit, it is safe to infer that the future prospects for WWE as performance theatre appear promising. The paper’s speculation on potential directions indicates that WWE will continue to evolve and adapt to changing times. The integration of advanced

technologies along with enhanced digital streaming and global expansion, presents opportunities for WWE to engage fans on new levels. Additionally, as WWE continues to nurture new talents and characters, it will remain a cultural force that captures the imagination of audiences worldwide.

In terms of research implications, the paper opens avenues for further exploration into the psychological and emotional aspects of audience engagement with WWE’s storytelling. It also invites future studies on the societal impact of WWE’s representation of diversity and gender roles, as well as the cultural significance of professional wrestling in various regions of the world. In a related interest, as the entertainment industry continues to evolve, WWE’s role as performance theatre remains a captivating subject for analysis and research. The enduring appeal of WWE lies in its ability to combine athleticism, drama, and storytelling, creating a form of entertainment that transcends traditional boundaries and captures the hearts of millions of fans.

Overall, the research paper serves as a valuable contribution to understanding the intricacies of WWE as performance theatre, offering insights into its historical roots, dominant rise, and the pivotal role of storytelling in shaping its present and future. As WWE’s journey unfolds, its ability to adapt, innovate, and continue captivating audiences will ensure its enduring place in the chronicles of sports entertainment and performance theatre.

### **References**

- Abdullah Yavuz Akinci (2020). Historical Journey of Wrestling from Ancient Egypt to

Today. *International Journal of Applied Exercise Physiology* [www.ijaep.com](http://www.ijaep.com) Vol. 9 (7).

- Hornbaker, Tim (2015). *Capitol Revolution: The Rise of the McMahon Wrestling Empire*. p. 117. ASIN 1770411240.
- Michael B. Poliakoff, (1996). “Wrestling, Freestyle” in *Encyclopedia of World Sport: From Ancient Times to the Present, Vol. 3, pp. 1189, 1193*, eds. David Levinson and Karen Christensen (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1996).
- Miller, Stephen G. (2004). *Ancient Greek Athletics, New Haven*: Yale University Press, ISBN 0-300-10083-3.
- Mohammed El-Gammal (2008). The ancient Egyptian Sports during the Pharaoh dynasties & its relation to the ancient Greek Sports. In book: Youth Olympic Games: Children and Sport (pp.79-92) Publisher: *PROCEEDINGS, the International Olympic Academy and the International Olympic Committee, Livani Publishing Organization*.
- Sacco, Justine; Weitz, Michael (2011). “The New WWE” (Press release). Connecticut: WWE. Retrieved November 25, 2021.
- Vyasa, Krishna-Dwaipayana; Ganguli, Kisari Mohan (1896). “Section XXIII”, *The Mahabharata*, p. 51.

---

Corresponding Author: Eziwho Emenike AZUNWO

E-mail: [emenike.eziwho@ust.edu.ng](mailto:emenike.eziwho@ust.edu.ng)

Received 1 October 2024; Accepted 15 October 2024. Available online: 30 October, 2024

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 International License

