

Social Media's Efficacy on The Arts Community During Covid-19 Pandemic



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Abstract

The global health crisis in the name of COVID-19, which the whole world is suffering from, had an extreme and substantial impact on all sectors of the economy. Several sectors of the Indian economy, including Education, Hospitality, Tourism, Health care, and the Art community, have been severely impacted. However, the pandemic has also brought to light the significance of artists and social media. During the lockdown restrictions imposed by the government, artists played a crucial role in keeping people engaged and entertained through their art, and social media platforms acted as a medium for them to showcase their work. During this crisis, Social media became a platform for artists to reach their audience because the galleries were shut down. At the same time, a lot of artists couldn't take advantage of this platform because technology imposed a major challenge along with other obstructing issues such as network connection etc. The purpose of this research is to discuss the major challenges that the art community has encountered since the onset of the pandemic by outlining both the positive and negative impacts of social media during the coronavirus epidemic on the art community. However, if used wisely and prudently, technology advancement and social media platforms can create a space for artists to come together irrespective of differences and eventually make all forms of art reach their audience.

Keywords : Art community, Artists, COVID-19, Social media, Traditional Art.

Research Paper

Introduction

We are living in an age where technological change is accelerating at a very fast speed. Each successive change has revolutionized and altered how individuals engage with society. People have moved from traditional to digital platforms. The Internet has connected diverse people without any geographical boundaries and has been largely responsible for this shift. This shift has been fueled by a new computer-based technology—Social media.

“Social media is a computer-based technology that facilitates the sharing of ideas, thoughts, and information through the building of virtual networks and communities. By design, social media is Internet-based and gives users quick electronic communication of content. Content includes personal information, documents, videos, and photos” (Dollarhide). The

way we all interact with each other online has been completely revolutionised after the coming of social media. Every little update about the goings-on in the world is now at our fingertips and we are just a like or comment away from our long-distance friends. It has given us the ability to connect and have access to endless information, making the world seem more open to everyone.

The importance of social media in the lives of individuals and society was realized during the COVID-19 pandemic as it has produced a global health crisis that has had a deep impact on the way we perceive our world and everyday lives. It has impacted every segment of life like commercial establishments, education, economy, religion, transport, tourism, employment, entertainment, food security, sports, creative industry etc. Like all the other sectors, the art community was also hit hard by the

pandemic, with some losing their jobs and some gaining benefits.

Social media has changed the way of experiencing art. Before the pandemic, art lovers would go to art galleries and museums to see the art but now they have it all at their fingertips. Facebook, Instagram and Twitter are the new art galleries now. This new trend has its advantages and shortcomings. On the one hand, it helps the artist to connect with its viewers on a personal level through its social media handle. Still, on the other hand, the feeling of exploring the stories in artwork under the lighting on a framed canvas is very different from that on the screens of mobile phones or laptops.

Although a lot of study has been done on the relevance of social media during the pandemic the role that it has played for the art community has not been studied much till now. So, this matter deserves to be explored further. In this research paper, it has been hypothesized that Social media has a much more positive than negative impact on the art community, which includes- artists and art galleries.

Enlisted below are both the positive and negative impacts of social media on the art community during the COVID-19 pandemic–

Social media Strengthened the reach of the artist

Before the pandemic hit the world, artists' presence on social media was majorly limited to websites only. It was not an easy task to attract art lovers to the website. Using the website for sales or promotions seems to have become a thing of the past. Traditional means of art promotion like radio, newspaper and magazine ads have become almost obsolete with the work-from-home norms because of the pandemic. But with the help of social media, artists have managed to continue working even during the lockdown. Earlier, direct interaction of the artist with their audience was always lacking.

According to Simianer in her blog titled “How Social Media is Changing Our Art Experience”, “today artists use Instagram as their own virtual art gallery, playing both dealer and curator while their fans become critics and collectors”. Art lovers would go to gallery to see an exhibition but they hardly get any chance to talk to the artist about the work. This privilege was mostly given to art curators or potential buyers but now, this pleasure has come to art lovers in the form of Facebook and Instagram and it is not going to change anytime soon. Artists through their social media handles can now talk to their audience about their work and themselves. Artist

followers who are interested in buying the artwork can now enquire directly about the art. Hence, it increases the chances of the artwork being sold.

No Gallery Validation

Art galleries promote both art and the artist. They play a very important role in promoting an artist's talent to a large public. The success of an artist is measured by the size of the crowd drawn to the gallery to see his artwork. Also, it is believed that what's the point of creating art if it is not open to its admirers to see and understand? Not just that, art galleries have always been a source of earning for artists over the years and also a place for artists, art critics and art historians to discuss and learn about a new art form. However, a recent boom in social media during the pandemic has resulted in a situation where the artist no longer solely depends on art galleries to validate their success. Nowadays, not the masses in galleries but the masses following and sharing artists' social media accounts are proof enough.

Social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook have given the power to artists to become the creator, curator and dealer of their work at the same time (Davies). It is therefore no surprise that many artists are now turning to social media to display their work, on these platforms and also have full control over it. This latest trend of exhibiting new art directly on social media has reduced a lot of hustle for the artist and thus limited the reliance on art galleries to launch their work. So, social media has acted as a very powerful medium during the pandemic for artists to showcase their creativity through its new art galleries like Facebook, Instagram etc.

Accessibility of digital space

As we know, a large number of artists work in their studios only, where all the material required by them is available. But, during the lockdown artists couldn't go to their studios and might have run out of materials at home. So, a lot of artists, especially young ones, switched from paper/canvas to digital space. Canvases were replaced by monitors and tablets. There is no doubt that digital art is very interesting in its ways and is certainly enjoyed by social media users because they find it very modern and thus relate to it. Although art critics might not consider it worthy enough to be displayed in a gallery because of less material, shipping and installation costs, it would be more accessible and affordable to art lovers (Cabacenco). Thus, making an artwork from a gallery reachable to all classes of art lovers and not just the elite ones.

The biggest impact of the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns on the world of art is Probably the huge growth and adoption of digital methods. According to Kiran Nadar, Founder and Chairperson of KNMA, The shift to digital will allow museums, galleries, artists and artisans to reach out to many new audiences. Going forward, digital is likely to be a key part of any outreach plans, rather than just a support system (Sharma). So, the new normal in the art world has realised the importance of digital space as it can be utilised as a tool to keep artists up with their creativity, give them a platform to put up online exhibitions and also a medium to build such a digital experience for viewers that can keep the art appreciation to continue building up.

Impact on Traditional artists

Passed down through generations, traditional art provides a shared experience for the entire community. Traditional art is not just a part of India's culture rather it forms the foundation of the rich heritage of this ethnically diverse country. It's a bitter truth that a vast majority of India's traditional artists don't have regular jobs and usually struggle to earn decent wages even in the best of times. During the pandemic, the situation became even worse for these artists as they almost completely lost their livelihoods. During this time, young and urban artists have taken the lead by taking advantage of the Internet and social media but traditional artists do not have access to such platforms to continue showing their talent and earn money.

Amidst this chaos, one should not underestimate the creative role that artists have been playing in tackling the mental health issues coming across during the pandemic. They can be instrumental in spreading awareness about the virus. For example, Kalyan Joshi, a veteran of Phad Painting, is using his skills to narrate stories about the coronavirus pandemic and the guidelines to be followed (Joshi).



Source: Joshi, Kalyan. "Services provided in Covid-19 times." Gaon connection, 3rd June 2020, <https://en.gaonconnection.com/a-veteran-artist-is-using-traditional-phad-paintings-to-raise-awareness-on-covid-19-in-rajasthan/>

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Looking at the devastating effects that COVID-19 had on all sectors of the economy, it is sure that recovery from the loss would be very slow, especially for traditional artists. Therefore, it becomes very important for the government, art organizations and society to support its art community in these times of crisis.

Financial crisis

Indian artists largely come under the unorganised sector of the Indian economy, and because of this, they don't earn decent money even in favourable times. They have to work hard to make ends meet by selling their work through traditional channels. In times, when the whole nation is facing a financial crisis, the condition of artists is getting even worse. A news article by Pragya Tiwari in "The Hindu" highlights how the aftermath of the Pandemic has impacted the creative economy by stating that "MSMEs, which have taken a beating due to the lockdown, makeup 88% of the creative sector. Of these businesses, 32% are facing a loss of roughly 50% of their annual income in the first quarter. Fifty-three per cent of the events and entertainment management sector saw 90% of their events cancelled, and 61% of organisations established between four and 10 years ago have stopped functioning" (Tiwari). The above statistics demonstrate the struggles that are being faced by the creative sector of the Indian economy. Let's not forget that it takes years of hard work for an artist to attain mastery over a skill which is expressed to the public through national and internationally acclaimed platforms.

In these challenging times, the government must aid artists by providing essential resources and platforms to sustain their work, and in addressing this concern, FICCI has forwarded a set of recommendations to the Ministry of Culture aimed at alleviating the situation, including the release of long-delayed approved grants since 2017, the reallocation of budgets designated for state-sponsored cultural festivals to assist struggling artists, ensuring health coverage through Ayushman Bharat or the Central Government Health Scheme, offering GST payment moratoriums, and investing in digital infrastructure to facilitate artists in taking their work online; however, despite their feasibility, both the Central government and most State governments have been unresponsive, often leaving artists with insufficient support (Tiwari). At this point, when the government's support and encouragement matter the most to the

artists, it seems that the other sectors are being given much importance and are kept a priority which has put art on the back seat.

Discussion

Every technology has its limitations and advantages. If in times of crisis, it is offering us a way of being in touch with others and continuing our work, then it should be utilized to its full potential. But in doing so, let's not discard the artists who are not being able to adapt it. There is no doubt that artists in general are very adaptive. They have their very own style of doing things but right now, they need time to adapt to these technological challenges thrown at them by the pandemic. Before the pandemic, whenever any artist used to put up an exhibition to show his latest creations, the hallmark of the success would be how many visitors he could get into the gallery but today, the scenario has completely changed as it is not possible to gather the physical crowd for any event.

Today's challenge is into how many homes and hearts the artwork now finds its way through the online platform or in the language of social media, and how many likes and shares would it get. Successful artworks or artists would be those whose work is shared and liked even after months of the work being posted online. According to Rashmi Dhanwani, Founder-Director, Art X Company, "It is clear the creative organisations and artists who have explored new possibilities of culture-making in the digital space have come out stronger during the pandemic. There is a gap in levels of digital literacy within the creative community and governments as well as corporates must step up to close this gap so that the sector is ready for future uncertainties" (Awasthi). So, it's high time that we need to empower all artists and associated professionals with the technology and alternatives available.

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