



Digital Aesthetics, Performance Formats and Audience Engagement of Indian Classical Tabla on Youtube



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Abstract

Aesthetical presentation has always been a key element of any classical tabla performance. For years, artists have been developing new and innovative methods to enhance the stage performances, to connect with the audience and keep them involved. With the advancement of digital platforms like YouTube, digitalization of musical performances has evolved too. The evolution has helped artists reach a wider audience to showcase their talent and gain popularity. Using a qualitative approach involving observational analysis, this study explores how various elements like camera frames, lighting, sound signal chains, editing and platform algorithms play an important role in creating an aesthetical presentation on social media. Through various case-studies of other artists and the author's own social-media uploads on Youtube, this study aims at establishing the importance of digitalization in the field of tabla in classical music and classical fusion music. It also aims to establish, how digitalization has helped artists to focus more on aesthetical presentation, audience engagement with little monetary investment. By reflecting on these points, the study contributes to developing better understanding of how performance patterns change and evolve with technological advancements.

Keywords : Digital platforms, Youtube, video framing, editing, audience engagement, technology and art.

Research Paper

Introduction

Tabla performances in Indian classical music, have gone through change over time, from tabla performances in "baithaks" and in courts, where no amplification was used, i.e., microphones, speaker, etc., just straight acoustics provided by the artist, to full stage performance settings, where creative visual and sound techniques led to a more powerful and effective experience while, at times, producing art to a larger audience. (Adhikari) In the digital space, tabla performances require the use of cameras, audio manipulation, computer editing, and algorithmically recommended material to create new ways to perform and reach a wider range of audience. YouTube functions as a music archive, a platform for tabla performances, and an educational tool where artists are able to reach

a wider audience. The work can be presented outside of the constraints that may exist in traditional concert spaces. (V and P) This shift into the digital landscape of tabla has opened up opportunities for new creative and pedagogical applications but also creates a tension with respect to the ways that these changes will impact on the ideas and practices associated with tradition, authenticity, and the Guru-Shishya Parampara while opening new ways of innovation with technological advancements.

Research Problems

Though in the recent years there has been a major shift towards digital performances which has led to a lot of innovation in terms of recording, editing and broadcasting, there is limited research done on how these platforms have influenced the performance

aesthetics and presentation. Traditional performance concepts majorly focus on live, physical experiences but flourishing in the digital world not only requires physical experiences but also the knowledge of digital elements like videography, sound recording, post production and engagement with the online audience. The online platforms work on automated algorithms made to promote the contents that are original, unique and have good audience retention. (Bilenko) To achieve all this, it is very important for the artists to be well adept with the elements of digital recordings and understand the algorithm for better promotion both of which demand good amount of research work to be done.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to :-

- Understand how the digital platform of Youtube has influenced the performance aesthetics of tabla performances in solo and accompaniment.
- Explore the role of various components of digital performances like- camera angles, lighting, sound signal chains and editing.
- Explore how tabla artists adapt to the digital platform trends and interact with the online audience.

Hypothesis

The study is based on the hypothesis that the digital space of Youtube has maintained the traditional aesthetics while redefining how the performance of tabla is perceived. It has reshaped the performance styles, audience engagement and opened bigger avenues for pedagogical experience of the art and the instrument. The shift to digital stages from physical experiences has helped evolve new presentation techniques and innovative ways to interact with larger audience and get monetary support as well, while maintaining the rich heritage and authenticity of the performance.

Relevance of the Study

This study holds high relevance in today's technology driven world, where performing arts are undergoing drastic change and evolving according to the need of the time, i.e audience engagement in the digital platforms. With digital advancements, classical arts such as tabla face the challenge of preserving the tradition and encouraging innovation. (Mahajan and Dhalia)

To adapt to these technological advancements, an artist not only needs the knowledge of the art but also needs

to be well versed with the various components that are used to create the impact in the digital space of Youtube (V and P). By focusing on the aesthetical presentation of Tabla in classical music and classical fusion music in this space, this study highlights the nuanced transformation in terms of sound aesthetics, visual presentation and audience interaction.

This study also aims at providing a practical framework for tabla artists to enhance their online presentations in terms of sound aesthetics, camera framing, lighting and post-production to reach a global audience. In order to succeed in the digital space of Youtube, one must analyze algorithms' effect to their uploaded content and adapt to the engagement process accordingly.

Research Methodology

This research used a qualitative methodology involving observational analysis to explore how YouTube, especially its short-form and long-form video formats, has affected performance aesthetics, technology use, and teaching methods in the digital presentation of tabla. The methodology included the following components for thorough data triangulation and context:

Selection Criteria of the Sample: A sample of 25 YouTube videos related to Tabla in classical music and classical fusion music were selected, featuring solo and accompanied performances. "Search Filter - Popularity" option of Youtube was used to shortlist "Top 25 Tabla Videos" based on viewership and audience engagement. Most of the sources regarding youtube video selection criteria, suggested shortlisting 20-50 videos minimum. (Sui, Sui and Rhodes) (Google) (Malik and Tian) It was observed that after search result of 25 videos, the genre of videos shifted from classical to light. Since this paper focuses on videos related to tabla in classical music or classical fusion, only top 25 videos were selected. The majority of the videos were YouTube Shorts, due to their dominance gaining views from the audience.

Analysis of Viewer Feedback: For every video, audience responses and comments were observed. In order to comprehend audience preferences and the efficacy of instruction, both quantitative elements, likes and view counts, and qualitative elements, audience retention, engagement depth, and comment trends were examined.

Video Component Analysis: The camera angles, lighting, sound design, mixing, and editing of every video was carefully examined. In order to ascertain how technical decisions affected musical perception, this involved frame-by frame observation, especially



for close-ups, multi-angle shots, and post-production adjustments on the basis of various sources.

Review of Literature: The observational findings were supported by studying the existing research on digital music presentation, youtube algorithm promotion, and shifts in performance methods in Indian classical music.

Literature Review

“From Vinyl to Digital: A Century of Technological Advancements in Indian Classical Music,” (V and P)- The study explores how technology has transformed Indian classical music over the past century. This research used a historical analysis, case studies, and content analysis to provide an overview of the potential impacts of technology and proposes that, to achieve this goal, we must find ways to balance our use of technology with the preservation of the rich history of Indian classical music.

“Role of Digital Platforms in Promoting Indian Classical Music: A Study of Social Media, Online Music Platforms and Digital Marketing Strategies” (Mahajan and Dhalia) – This paper investigates how digital platforms have revolutionized Indian classical music promotion, consumption, and preservation, focusing on social media, online music platforms, and digital marketing strategies. It identifies the strengths—like global connectivity and innovative teaching—and limitations of these tools in advancing the tradition.

“The new Stage of development with E-music classes and E-concerts” Naad-Nartan Journal of Dance & Music (Singh) – The post-pandemic virtual education landscape is analysed in the paper, with a comparison of both the live guru-shishya traditions to those conducted online. There has been increase in enrolment through several apps used for online instruction. This article is relevant to researchers exploring music education in the current climate; however, no statistical data on retention rates for online learners were provided in the article.

“What is a classical baithak,” Manasukh Dhvani (Adhikari) – This article advocates for intimate mehfil style classical "baithak" and the need for raw acoustic sound to create a feeling of soulful improvisation within different forms of classical music. The article also discusses modern hybrids with elements of both live streaming and traditional presentation.

Written with clarity and imagery, the article will resonate with musicians and performers; however, the article does not address the issue of scalability within the urban areas of India.

“Decoding the Rhythms of Tabla: India’s Iconic Percussion Instrument,” Historified (Toppo) – This work clarifies the meanings of tabla bols, gharanas (comparing Lucknow gharana with the Farrukhabad gharana), playing techniques, and how this connects to the influence of tabla around the world. It connects the understanding of tabla origins to Pt. Ram Sahai's innovative processes.

“The YouTube Algorithm: How It Works in 2025,” Gyre (Bilenko) – The document provides an overview about watch times, engagement signals, and how Shorts are prioritized. While there are practical applications for artists to improve their upload statistics, no information can be found with respect to music videos, specifically that of tabla.

“40+ Short Form Video Statistics: The Jaw-Dropping Numbers You Must Know in 2024,” Firework Blog (Easdon-Smith) – According to Firework, 70% of Gen Z prefer short-formed videos of under 60 seconds in length, and the music segment (niches) has seen virality of 2.5x with Tabla covers on Reels/TikTok. Additionally, Firework projects that the market for short forms will reach \$100 billion by 2026. Although the data shows how short forms dominate on Youtube, but no reason specific to tabla videos are given.

Research Gap

There is ample literature about how Indian classical music evolved from analogue to digital recording technologies (Toppo) as well as how social media platforms such as YouTube can promote artists' works globally (Bilenko). However, literature is lacking in some areas, specifically regarding tabla playing or traditional percussion instruments. Although there are several studies that have documented challenges regarding accessing online content (for example, digital divides, authenticity issues, lag time during e-concerts or online guru-shishya education (Singh), and short-form content becoming wildly popular (Easdon-Smith), sources related to tabla's reach and audience retention on digital platforms are very limited. What are the requirements to flourish in the digital world of youtube as a tabla player, what are the challenges, what should be the camera angles, how sound should be recorded, what type of editing works for better audience retention? This paper focus on answering all these questions.

Findings

On analysing the shortlisted videos, these were the findings on how these videos came on top in the priority list as per “Youtube Search Filter”.



Camera Techniques

Close-up shots were frequently used in the videos, that focused on the tabla player's hands and the instrument itself in both solo and accompaniment settings. This technique helps to clearly show the intricate finger movements essential for mastering tabla playing. By zooming in, viewers, particularly students, can see small gestures that would be missed in wider shots, thus improving digital teaching methods. (Fig 1- Fig 1.2)

Multi-angle views are also used, especially in longer videos. Producers include wide shots that capture the performer's facial expressions and interactions with the instrument, as well as targeted close-ups. This combination gives a complete view of the performance, connecting physical expression with technical skill, which aligns with aesthetic values in Indian classical performance that emphasize both sound and visual communication. (Fig 2 – Fig 2.3)

Dynamic camera movements, such as pans, tilts, and rhythmic zooms that match the rhythm's flow help to further increase the audience retention. These techniques are particularly common in short videos. They grab viewers' attention in the crowded space of digital feeds. They also help in enhancing the musical structure and highlight the dramatic sections, increasing audience's focus and engagement. (Fig 3 – Fig 3.4)

Sound Recording Techniques

Sound design has become a primary differentiator relative to digital productions. The most effective videos focus on maintaining clear, noise-free audio, which is often a result of combining internal recordings with digital post-production processing. If we are going to express the tonal aspects of tabla, including elements of resonance, noise cancellation and crisp audio clarity is essential for demonstrating the skill of the tabla player online. (Darbar) (Tabla)

In accompaniment (SpotifyIndia) and cover videos (StereoIndia), the mixing process will balance the tabla to not overpower the lead element, usually the vocalist or melody instrument. This is important from a traditional perspective, as the visual and audio balance reflect elements of traditional balances when experiencing a live music performance, while also meeting expectations from digital audiences who are accustomed to mix quality and standards. Balancing expectations related to tradition versus technology is imperative to support the integrity of the music beyond the digital space.

Another experimental growth of the tabla reflects electronic fusion performances layering either hybrid tabla instruments (StereoIndia), or other electronic sounds with acoustic tabla instruments (Krishnachanddas). The opportunity to blends sounds influenced by different and sampled genres may successful be facilitated by digital means, and continue to expand the sounds of the tabla while achieving high technical standards.

Sound engineering also continues to adapt audio for mobile device function. As more users view content on phones, producers will likely continue to optimize through revision and pressing mixes for clarity, a strong bass response, and minimal noise on speakers or headphones. This ensure that audience interest and attraction is maintained.

Editing and Visual Enhancement

The editing in short-form video includes cuts that are quick and timed to match the rhythm of the tabla's percussive energy. This style of editing matches the aesthetic of the visual tempo with that of the music and conforms to the best practices of effective online engagement in video platforming situations (e.g., YouTube). Well-edited, shorter video durations, encourage audiences to rewatch, raising overall engagement. (Pandya)

Titles or text (such as taal, bol, or the title of the performance) frequently appear on-screen in many of the videos. These on-screen titles fulfill double duty: supporting access for non-experts, while also doubling as teaching tools for students, enabling traditional methods of education to work at scale for wider distribution. (StereoIndia) (Aradhana_School)

Color grading, lighting effects, and sampling heavier vignette usage in post-production adds another layer of interest with more framing- a way to keep the audience focused visually on the artist. (Pandya) Certain videos have taken older archived footage, cleaned it up, made it lighter, or sharper, to bring it up to a level that meets viewers' expectations to attract them, while also engaging a historical performance focused on the present. (jimmy)

Use of editing can also be seen in video edited and uploaded by the author on Youtube (Aradhana_School) (Fig 4) where the same person has been cloned to play both tabla and harmonium on the same screen together. Though the channel has a low subscriber base but the video got good number of views from "Youtube Search". This proves that the algorithm promotes new concepts and hence promoting digital and musical skills. (Fig 4.1 – Fig 4.4)



Conclusion

Performance Format and Audience Engagement –

Solo performances in the digital space often showcase technical skill, with careful attention to camera angles and sound quality. The digital format increases the technical challenge. With the camera's close focus shots and the permanence of videos in the platform, even minor mistakes become noticeable, encouraging artists to improve their craft.

Jugalbandis (duets) and fusion clips use multi-camera editing and stereo sound to express the interplay and dialogue in collaborative performances—a characteristic difficult to capture in traditional concert recordings. The ability to switch perspectives during performances keeps online audiences engaged and offers new avenues for musical analysis and appreciation.

Dominance Of Youtube Shorts – During video shortlisting on Youtube using the “Views” search filter, we also get to know about the algorithm's emphasis on short-form content, i.e YouTube Shorts, which greatly influences how performances are practiced and presented. (Easdon-Smith) The creators of the videos focus more on the “impact in the first few seconds” of the videos. They use visual “hooks” like short, attractive rhythmic patterns, surprising camera movement, bright color schemes, and most importantly, high sound quality to encourage repeats and sharing and thereby expand the performer's audience beyond typical concert attendees.

Educational and Cultural Impact – The presence of on-screen text, slowed clips, and annotations are common in digital tabla production suggesting a meaningful shift in approaches to teaching. Historically, embodied learning relied on oral transmission and observation of live demonstrations, but now digital offerings facilitate a form of sharing in the global community that supports new cohorts of self-taught or remote learners. (StereoIndia) (Aradhana_School) This is especially noteworthy for communities in the diaspora and international students who are able to access expert demonstrations and visual feedback at reduced cost. The accessibility and repeatability of digital lessons, paired with social feedback on platforms such as YouTube (through comments and views), have contributed to a widening openness and accessibility of certain aspects of learning the tabla, which historically would have remained within personal lineages.

This research finds that digital platforms transformed the way the classical art of tabla was perceived but also maintained the traditional acoustics and aesthetics.

Audio-visual presentations, digital post-production programs, and strategies for platforms to interest audiences and create popularity, all represent a new language in terms of presentation. Today's artists are now faced with the challenge of balancing creative integrity, technical skill, and the coexistence of these two elements for the sake of the modern age.

The online platforms have developed algorithms which ensure that original, authentic and unique content gets promoted and recognized. For performing artists, pedagogues, and cultural institutions, understanding and acceptance of the digital aesthetics are important. This research requires further work in platform-specific pedagogy, co-produced content, and archiving strategies to ensure classical music's essence persists in a rapidly evolving digital age.

Limitations

Data scarcity – There was a general lack of resources specifically related to the tabla, such as guides on camera framing, lighting, and sound chains, so reliance was placed on research regarding general studies of classical music. Observational analyses of leading online videos helped confirm these gaps.

Algorithmic opacity – YouTube's undisclosed algorithms did not provide insights into the virality of tabla music on a percussion-specific basis. Viewer feedback could only help identify patterns in the creation of hooks and edits.

Technical constraints – The lack of standardized metrics for measuring resonance during the post-production process of tabla recordings limited the ability to quantify output from the production phase. However, frame-by-frame perceptual analyses were completed according to recognized literature protocols in order to provide comparable data.

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Fig 1 (12)



Fig 1.1 (18)



Fig 1.2 (19)



Fig 2 (9)



Fig 2.1 (9)



Fig 2.2 (7)



Fig 2.3 (7)



Fig 3(14)



Fig 3.1



Fig 3.2



Fig 3.3



Fig 3.4



Fig 4 (13)

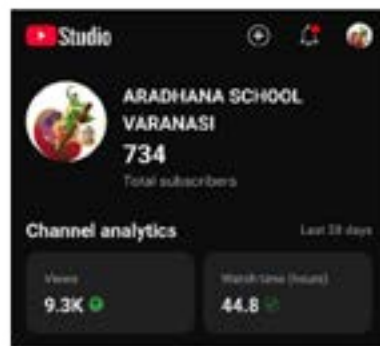


Fig 4.1



Fig 4.2

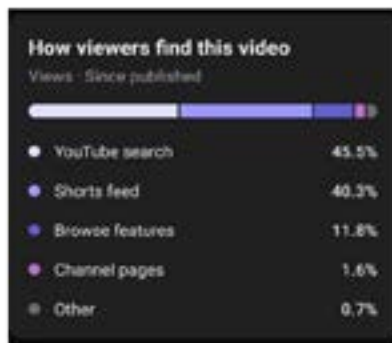


Fig 4.3



Fig 4.4

