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தமிழ்

Creating Virtual Platforms to Showcase Undergraduates' Artworks

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Abstract

In today's digital era, the advancement of digital technology has revolutionized arts education and the way artworks are perceived, showcased, and accessed. The need to exhibit student artworks in a public forum, the virtual platforms offer an immersive and accessible alternative to traditional exhibition spaces, enabling undergraduates to showcase their artworks without the constraints of physical location or resources. Therefore, this study aims to explore the benefits, challenges, and best practices associated with creating and utilizing virtual platforms to showcase undergraduates' artworks by examining insights from the stakeholders and existing literature on arts education. A qualitative exploratory research design was employed to achieve the research objectives. The findings revealed the potential benefits of virtual platforms to enhance the visibility and accessibility of undergraduate artworks and their impact in the digital age. Further, it offers valuable recommendations for visual art-related higher educational institutions seeking to support emerging artists.

Keywords: Artworks, Copyrights, Digitization, Institutional Repositories, Virtual Platforms

Introduction

In the digital era, the integration of technology in arts education plays an important role in the way artworks are created, displayed, accessed, and disseminated across the globe. With an increase of virtual platforms, artists specially undergraduates have the chance to exhibit their creative art to a global audience without any physical boundaries. According to Cahyaningrum and Wijaya (2024), the digitization of art allows artists to explore innovative presentation strategies and find new ways of distributing their artwork. Similarly, Lopez-Rodriguez *et al.*

(2024) emphasized that virtual exhibitions hosted via digital media or online give a platform for showcasing artworks to a global audience. In addition to showcasing artworks, these virtual platforms serve as an interactive space where artists are able to collaborate, receive feedback, and experience new artistic representation. As the same, Miracle (2024) stated in his study, that the emergence of virtual art galleries has revolutionized art in the world by raising art's accessibility and connecting with a wider audience. Hence, exhibiting undergraduate artwork in a public forum is an important part of their artistic experience. It allows others to see, appreciate, and recognize student artists in a professional venue (Aman *et al.*, 2014).

Artistically literate individuals are well-equipped with the creativity, communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaborative skills necessary to connect their lives and the world around them through their artistic works. Visual and Performing Arts-related higher education institutions in Sri Lanka were the major contributors dedicated to disseminating artistic knowledge, providing intellectual and creative space for individuals, and empowering the community with a traditional and sustainable livelihood through organized fine arts education. Among these disciplines, visual art is one of the dominant disciplines in higher education institutions that produce many honors degree graduates in diverse visual art fields annually. This programme helps the students improve their artistic style, creative skills, and impressive and innovative approaches to handling materials. It also nurtures their social responsibilities and prepares them to find the right path for their professional careers in drawing, painting, wood carving, modeling, design, ceramic, textile, sculpture, etc... To support this, institutions provide students with a physical platform to showcase their artworks with a limited audience annually for the fulfillment of the honor degree programme.

However, there are challenges faced by Visual Arts graduates when entering the Performing and Visual Arts sector, including difficulties in gaining recognition, securing new opportunities for exhibiting talents to a wider audience, difficulties in exchanging their ideas within society for sustaining as a full-time artist (Institute for Policy Studies Sri Lanka, 2020) and additionally financial challenges hinder their progress.

Further, there is no dedicated platform for undergraduates to display their creative and curative artworks limiting their ability to attract a wider audience worldwide. Furthermore, their unique artworks are not documented as a reference source for future generations in any form. This highlighted the need for displaying undergraduate artistic work to project their talents, excellence, and creativity to the entire world, while simultaneously strengthening institutional collections. Dray (2014) stated that computer-based technology offers a new solution for

displaying student artwork to project their work to the entire world with the development of different virtual platforms by providing a digital space exhibiting their artwork. In addition, the technological advancements of virtual platforms are a crucial element in the redefinition of access, fostering a lifelong connection with heritage, or providing a heritage interpretation to a varied audience.

Sedon *et al.* (2021) found that an art exhibition serves as a platform for artists and artworks to be recognized by the community to shape their own identities and profiles and enhance an artist's reputation to sustain in an artistic field. In a line, Burton (2010) stated that the virtual art gallery is a web-based art gallery that helps to display the students' artworks attractively to take the attention of people around the world. Also, Jaiswal (2018) mentioned that it is virtually limitless, the display allowed for a longer time to view artwork and was available for a wider global audience. The virtual art gallery is easily linked to other art-related features or sites and brings artists' creative talent to the next generation (Kieling, 2009; Wilke, 2009). Lin (2020) also suggested the current prevailing situation would likely accelerate the virtual online space for displaying artistic works. Further, these platforms are not only to facilitate exciting artworks but also to make effective coordination between the institution and society. It is frequently updated with the latest collection to view the collection of students' artworks from anywhere in the world.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the benefits, challenges, and best practices associated with creating and utilizing virtual platforms to showcase undergraduates' artistic style, excellence, and talents beyond the institutional level through their creative artworks. These findings provide valuable insights and recommendations for higher education institutions to enhance support for showcasing undergraduates' artworks in the digital era, help to increase the visibility of creative art collections by providing a permanent uniform resource location for wider public accessibility, and increase the global connection of artists and career professionals and helps to maximize the impact of their work in the community. Additionally, it helps to strengthen the institutional resources for the betterment of students' needs as used as a reference source.

Objectives

The objective of the study is to investigate the benefits, challenges, and best practices associated with creating and utilizing virtual platforms to showcase undergraduates' artworks by examining insights from the stakeholders and existing literature on arts education and to

provide recommendations for higher educational institutions on how to support undergraduate artists showcase their creative works through virtual platforms.

Methodology

A qualitative exploratory research design was employed in order to achieve the research objectives. The study population consisted of 30 undergraduate students and 15 faculty members from the selected three visual arts-related higher education institutions in Sri Lanka. A sample was selected by using a purposive sampling technique who have experience and interest in handling virtual platforms. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted either in person or via Zoom. The interview mainly focused on the benefits challenges, and best practices for the improvement of creating virtual platforms based on the participants' experiences. The interview was recorded and transcribed for analysis. The collected data were analyzed by using thematic content. The initial codes were generated after multiple readings of transcription. Then the codes were grouped into themes to capture the participants' experiences. Finally, the findings were presented in words, phrases, and sentences in narrative form aligned with the construct themes.

Findings

The survey received thirty-nine (35) responses out of a total of forty-five (45). The majority of respondents (77.14%) were undergraduate students, while 22.86% were faculty members. The findings were categorized into three major themes: Benefits, Challenges, and Best Practices.

Benefits

Both groups of respondents considered that showcasing undergraduates' creative artworks through virtual platforms offers numerous benefits. They pointed out that key benefits such as accessibility, collaboration, visibility, overcoming financial and geographical barriers, adaptability, learning enhancement, recognition, flexibility, and sustainability were significant outcomes for utilizing virtual platforms for this purpose (Table 1).

Table 1. Benefits of Showcasing Creating Artworks on Virtual Platforms

Coded Benefits	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Accessibility	29	82.8%
Public visibility	27	71.1%
Collaboration	21	60.0%
Recognition	16	45.7%
Overcoming financial and geographical barriers	15	42.8%
Adaptability	13	37.1%
Flexibility	13	37.1%
Learning enhancement and Reference sources	10	28.6%
Sustainability	8	22.8%

Accessibility is the most common benefit mentioned by the majority of the respondents. Respondents valued the creative artworks openly available for public access rather than the people in their discipline. Watson and Dworak (2020) support this idea by stating that **institutional repositories are works publicly accessible through online open-access principles to reach a wider audience. Additionally**, faculty members also pointed out virtual platforms give a digital space openly available for students to exhibit their creative artworks without any physical boundaries. It allows the wider audience to see, appreciate, and recognize students' creative works. Further, the virtual exhibitions, tours, and multimedia presentations engage the audience. In a line, Lambaria (2020) pointed out in his study the online environment can easily reach a wider audience and become more accessible to their viewers. Furthermore, one student stated that “ Virtual platforms allow our family and friends can view the artworks who are unable to visit the physical exhibition in person”.

71.1% of participants stated that increasing public visibility is one of the outcomes of exhibiting student artworks via a virtual platform. It provides a unique opportunity for student artists to increase the visibility of creative art collections by providing a permanent uniform resource location for wider public accessibility and long-term archiving of publications. It leads to greater recognition for their work available for a longer period to view, download, share, appreciate, and provide constructive feedback for further creation. Additionally, it can serve as

a reference source for future students and increase the institutional reputation by strengthening institutional collections.

Fagan and Willey (2018) highlighted that the inclusion of undergraduate research output into institutional repositories improves the visibility and accessibility of research output by using web search engines. One of the student respondents expressed these values by stating “ The fact that our creative artworks are accessible all over the world increases their visibility”. In addition, the undergraduates expose their talents through the virtual art gallery and virtual exhibition in the community and professional venues before entering the society they work in. It supports them to be recognized by others as artists and attract the audience with their creative and innovative artistic work. Faculty members stated that showcasing undergraduate artworks through an institutional virtual art gallery represents a significant achievement in extending institutional service to the next level. This initiative attracts a broader audience and enhances the institutional reputation within the higher education sector. Further, it will contribute to increasing the visibility of institutions within the community and will develop new ways to get financial support from external funding agencies.

Another benefit pointed out by 60% of the respondents is fostering collaboration among the undergraduate artists and the community. Virtual platforms give a space for student artists to connect, share their thoughts and ideas within them, and also to collaborate with the community by viewing their artworks publicly available and providing constructive feedback. They mentioned that sharing student artwork through the university's online platform allows them to connect with the university rather than sharing them on their websites. Among them, one of the faculty members pointed out that the student artists not only enhance their educational experiences but also to contribute the overall atmosphere of a creative art programme. It also engaged the students' artists to create more innovative works for social engagement in the future. In addition, Cahyaningrum and Wijaya (2024) support this idea by stating these digital technologies not only broaden the method and medium of artistic expression but also offer new avenues for artists to both nationally and internationally interact and collaborate.

Overcoming the financial and geographical barriers has been identified as one of the outcomes when showcasing undergraduate artworks through virtual platforms. Many students come from diverse financial and geographical backgrounds, which often limits their ability to exhibit their creative artworks to a global audience. Even though, offering digital space for students to explore their artworks enables them to overcome these barriers and allows them to

share their talents beyond their immediate community. Publishing undergraduate creative artwork not only enhances their visibility but also provides a chance to financially support them by displaying their work with their profile information.

Lambaria (2020) stated in his study, that some faculty members in the field of fine arts receive financial gain when they publish their artworks outside of the academic environment. A student reported, “As a student, I can publish my creative work through virtual platforms without considering about cost of gallery rent, printing, transportation, and setup of the gallery environment, which enable the financial barriers”.

Adaptability and Flexibility to diverse types of exhibitions, tours, galleries, archives, and repositories are also another key outcomes of virtual platforms stated by thirteen participants. Physical or traditional methods of galleries may limit the physical space, amount of collection, display options, and viewers, while these virtual platforms can accommodate a vast number of art collections, abundant national and international viewers, digital art collections, and 3D multimedia installations. In addition, flexibility in timing as visitors can view the collection at their own pace and at any time convenient for them (Garcia, 2019). Further, he mentioned that a virtual exhibition allows people to access the digital presentation of the collection through electronic devices with an internet connection without needing to physically present the exhibition site. Further, Watson and Dworak (2022), highlighted in their study, that online exhibiting artworks through Institutional Repositories allows repeated viewing and the ability to zoom details of an artwork if the software allows it.

Some respondents mentioned that exhibiting student artworks through virtual platforms has enhanced learning in arts education and serves as a reference source for future students when made openly accessible rather than being stored in a cabinet or on the shelf. Liu (2013) emphasized that when student artists receive feedback, arguments, and critiques while publishing their works in professional venues may help them to think, understand, interpret, create, and present their work critically and innovatively, thereby supporting conceptual learning. Further, the process of preparing and presenting their creative artworks on a virtual platform can help student artists develop their digital and communication skills, which are significantly important in the present digital era. Furthermore, these platforms are used as a learning tool by encouraging the students’ artists to refine their skills by receiving critique feedback from professional artists.

Challenges

According to the findings, both groups of respondents reported challenges in showcasing undergraduates' artworks through virtual platforms. The majority of the respondents from both groups identified technical limitations as the major challenge faced by the institutions in exhibiting undergraduates' artworks on these platforms.

The development of virtual platforms typically requires high-quality servers, software, basic hardware, networking, internet facilities, and technical skilled personnel. However, many institutions face budgetary constraints and a lack of field specialists to design and maintain these types of digital platforms. Further, students highlighted that they lack basic needs, such as high-quality devices, reliable high-speed internet connection, and system handling skills restricted to accessing these platforms. Cahyaningrum and Wijaya (2024) noted that adapting new digital technology can be an obstacle for traditional artists.

Barriers to accessibility and usability of these platforms are another significant challenge reported by many respondents. Incompatibilities with assistive technologies, problems in navigation systems, and poorly designed user-friendly interfaces are some of these obstacles that can restrict the access and use of these platforms by individuals with special needs. Furthermore, technical problems such as unresponsive designs, slow loading speed, and inadequate mobile optimisation can frustrate the potential viewers and reduce the impact and reach of the artworks' exhibited. To enhance the visibility of undergraduate creative artworks, these obstacles need to be addressed to ensure the experience of a wider audience.

Digital literacy skills and related training were identified as obstacles for some faculty members and students. Lack the technical skills in many undergraduate students and faculty members who need to effectively utilize these platforms for arts representation. The specialized training that requires creating, editing, and publishing artworks by using advanced tools was not widely available. Furthermore, different socio-economic backgrounds of students contributed to disparities in digital literacy skills among the student artists. Additionally, the students struggled to convert their creative artworks into digital format without comprising their aesthetic essence. The lack of infrastructure and funding of the institutions further limits digital training and access to online platforms.

Fourteen respondents mentioned that privacy concerns and data security are other challenges while personal data and artworks are published through virtual platforms. One of the faculty members pointed out, "Without a full understanding of illegal copyrights and intellectual property rights, the student may share their artworks online leads to illegal sharing

and misuse and fraud action on digital artworks”. Institutions make sure the security of these virtual platforms before publishing students' creative works is shielded from copyright infringement. Failing to safeguard the platforms may lead to stopping trust between the institutional community. Cullen and Chawner (2011) highlighted that visual artist faced larger risks when exhibiting their works through open online platforms, particularly concerning intellectual property ownership, plagiarism, and peer review.

Some of the faculty members stressed that the financial constraint is another challenge faced by the institutions in exhibiting student artworks through high-quality virtual platforms. The high initial costs associated with designing and maintaining these virtual platforms, hiring skilled experts, and purchasing supportive hardware and advanced software, and digital infrastructures create financial barriers. Further, the prevailing limitation in the institutional budget often limits the opportunity of the staff training programme in digital designing and curation which is important for engaging virtual platforms. This leads to, the institutions facing difficulties in providing an adequate number of virtual portals for the students to showcase their artworks to a wider audience, thereby restricting the visibility and recognition of their creative efforts.

Finally, a few respondents emphasized that preserving artistic and creative integrity is a significant challenge faced by artists when showcasing their artworks through virtual platforms. The texture, medium, colour consistency, and overall aesthetic impact of physical artworks could not be effectively translated into a digital medium. Hence it limits the digital representation productively. Additionally, misuse of digital content, illegal sharing, and unauthorized reproduction can affect the authenticity and originality of an artist's creative works. Parkar *et al.* (2024) addressed in their study implementing protective measures to secure digital images and user data while displaying artworks through virtual art galleries.

Best Practices

As revealed by the findings, both groups of respondents addressed the number of best practices that should be considered when showcasing the students' creative artworks through virtual platforms.

The faculty emphasized that an accessible and user-friendly design is an important consideration when choosing or designing a virtual platform to showcase students' artworks. Since students' digital literacy levels differ, the platform should be designed for easy navigation while uploading, editing, and displaying their artwork. Additionally, undergraduates expect to

ensure the optimum use of these platforms for a wide range of devices to offer seamless browsing and viewing experiences.

The majority of the respondents pointed out, that every institution should develop clear guidelines or policies for protecting the intellectual property rights of the students, privacy regulation, and ensuring that personal data is protected and their artworks are be able to used without the consent of the students. Further, they mentioned that the misuse and fraud action on digital artworks will be avoided by uploading low-resolution images, employing a digital watermark on the artworks, removing the download option, restricting the permission to resize the images, and preventing taking screenshots. Additionally, the policy should make sure all images contained in the system need to be protected under copyright. Parkar *et al.* (2024) also mentioned in their study adding watermarks on the images for copyright protection.

Both groups of respondents highlighted that hands-on training, seminars, or workshops need to be offered periodically for the students and faculty should cover like technical handling, new updating, and file formatting. Further, they requested to maintain the quality of the artworks displayed and continually update and innovate the platform based on the new features and technical advancements. Furthermore, the eight respondents prefer to incorporate interactive features for community interaction and engagement like artist talks, comment boxes, and virtual tours. It allows viewers to interact with artists and their creative works. They expected to collaborate with other higher educational institutions, local galleries, and professional art organizations for the platform's visibility.

Conclusion

Understanding the different aspects of creating and utilizing virtual platforms for undergraduates to showcase their creative artworks is crucial in fine arts-related higher education institutions. These platforms provide wider public visibility, easy accessibility, and recognition while engaging student artists and young educators in the fine arts sector and its art community to grow, sustain, and share their creative works. The continued evolution of such platforms play a vital role in the academic and professional careers of student artists in the future.

Recommendations

Based on this study's findings, certain recommendations can be made for visual arts-related higher education institutions seeking to create and use virtual platforms for showcasing undergraduates' artworks.

- Higher education institutions should take initiative to invest in creating, maintaining, and monitoring virtual platforms for hosting art exhibitions while ensuring access to high-quality technology, compatible software, and hosting online services.
- It is essential to educate or aware the student artists on copyright infringement, intellectual property rights, data security, reliable platforms, and protective online practices to exhibit and share their creative artworks through these platforms.
- Institutions should conduct workshops, tutorials, training programme, and technical support to the user to navigate these platforms, showcase their works through reliable sources, and create metadata for their work.
- Institutions should maintain a continuous monitoring system to regularly evaluate these created platforms and get user feedback for further improvement.
- Created platforms updated frequently to attract the audience, review the upcoming activities, and work out to move the action forward.
- The overall system should be secured by putting protective measures to respond to the copyright concerns of the artists.
- Institutions should ensure the accessibility and inclusiveness of these platforms for all student artists without any circumstances.
- Institutions should encourage students continuously to publish more artworks on these platforms through collaboration with faculty and librarians.

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அரண்

பன்னாட்டுத் தமிழாய்வு மின்னஞ்சல்

அறிவிப்பு / Announcement

அன்பான தமிழ்ச் சொந்தங்களே

வணக்கம்.

வரும் 2025, ஏப்ரல் மாதம் வெளிவரும் அரண் பன்னாட்டுத் தமிழாய்வு மின்னஞ்சலுக்கான ஆய்வுக் கட்டுரைகள் ஆய்வாளர்களிடமிருந்து வரவேற்கப்படுகின்றன.

கட்டுரை வந்து சேர வேண்டிய கடைசி நாள்- ஏப்ரல் 10. அதற்கு பின் வரும் கட்டுரைகள் ஏப்ரல் இதழில் இடம்பெறாது என்பதை தெரிவித்துக் கொள்கிறோம்.

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