

DMS474 Final Paper
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How Has Digital Technology Bridged the Economic Gap?

Over the course of the year, CoronaVirus has changed the way humans interact with each other and the world. Our education systems have been forced to change, and the way we enjoy live entertainment has also changed. In a lot of ways COVID has negatively impacted the way humans live their lives, we have become depressed and more isolated. However COVID forced people to develop new forms of technology in order for us to communicate with each other and have a larger access to streaming entertainment. This new technology has allowed us to bridge an economic barrier between the poor and the wealthy in terms of access to theatre, concerts, and museums, and live entertainment in general.

In Buffalo there are several different museums you can visit to see a variety of different artists. Generally, admission to these museums are affordable for most members of society. However if someone in Buffalo was interested in going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City or the Louvre in France, that would require travel and would be a very large expense. Most people would not be able to afford doing that and as a result, is limited in access to seeing fine art. Especially now with travel bans, art lovers are limited in their ability to see art and broaden their artistic knowledge. However technology has allowed for people to go on virtual tours of art galleries and closed the barrier of people who were able to visit these museums and those who are not. The way the virtual tours work is that you pay a smaller fee for entrance and you are able to click through exhibits and look at pieces of art from the comfort of your home and at your leisure. There are also audio options that explain to you what the artist's intention behind the piece was.

There are arguments that people have shared that it's not the cost of admission or lack of access to travel that is the problem with lower income people and their attendance at museums. In an article written by Jeanne Moore she discusses that there isn't an interest in fine art amongst lower income areas. The article talks about how the government was working toward eliminating admission cost for access to museums, but there were studies done to show that this didn't increase attendance. However they eventually found that in lower income areas there isn't a desire for fine art, this coming from a lack of education. Moore states, "the poorer, less educated and marginalized members of society of access and participation in the arts community" (Moore Volume 8 issue 31). To my understanding from this study I gather that although there is now technology that allows people to access fine art this won't necessarily increase interest in art in lower income areas. However I do think that virtual museum access will

increase admission rates in the middle class and other communities that are interested in art.

In regard to the wealthy and fine art I think that there is a stigma surrounding the art community that it's only socially acceptable for rich people to visit art galleries. Meaning that if poorer people attend art galleries they will be surrounded by pretentious rich people and will be judged by them. I can see where this divide and uncomfortable feeling comes from and I think that there is a lot of resentment from the lower income community towards the wealthy. In the book *Social Forum* written by Peter Blau he discusses the social divide of the art community and that the community is made up of polar opposites-the rich and the poor- and the resentment of the two. In volume 1, *Social Inequality and Art Institutions*, he talks about the history of museums and how they were mostly founded and maintained by rich donors, or even affluent bourgeois donors and audiences. He goes on to discuss that although the rich have maintained these galleries there shouldn't be a divide social class on who is able to attend galleries. Blau states, "Our concern is not with the significance of the person's class position on her or his artistic preference or activities but the impact of a metropolitan population distribution among classes- it's socioeconomic inequality" (Blau page 562). Blau is saying that there is a major divide between social class in the art community and most of it is rooted in self opinions and doubt rather than one class having an issue with the other. I think that his essay helps to bridge the divide between rich and poor and encourages attendance of all people interested in art to attend museums and galleries.

As with many other activities during COVID, live theatre has also been transformed to be enjoyed online. In most cities there is some form of live theatre that people can go see. In Buffalo for example we are extremely fortunate to have several different theatre venues to choose from such as Shea's, the Irish Classical Theatre, and university shows. However due to the COVID pandemic these theatres have been shut down and people are unable to enjoy live theatre. As a member of the UB Department of Theatre I've been a part of a few virtual productions but it's not the same as doing things in person, obviously. In regard to Shea's and other professional theatre companies in Buffalo they are not streaming shows live. However Broadway has been streaming shows since the middle of the pandemic. This has allowed people who were never able to travel to New York to see Broadway productions a chance to stream shows live as they're happening.

There are however people that disagree with public streaming of Broadway productions. Many critics argue that there is a certain degree of class and elegance associated with attending theatre live that is lost when a show is watched online. In an article written by Eleni Trimplalexi, *Theatre and Performance Go Massively Online During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Implications and Side Effects* discuss the effects COVID has had on the theatre community and that the event of streaming theatre has brought it down in value. Trimplalexi states, "The live event used to retain its

distinctiveness and superiority over the recorded one, let alone the streamed or the mediatized " (Trimplalexi page 45). I understand what she's saying in this section of the book. Trimplalexi is explaining that watching theatre is much more than seeing the show. It's putting on a nice outfit, maybe going out for dinner and drinks before or after, and it's overall an elegant social event. She's saying that streaming theatre live in your house wearing sweatpants takes away from the magic of live production. I think that this is a pretentious way of looking at theatre. I think that people from every economic background should be able to see and enjoy live theatre without the social expectation of wearing fancy clothes and fitting in with the wealthy.

Other forms of live entertainment also have severely suffered due to COVID19. Performing artists were forced to cancel all of their concert and tours causing economic disparity for concert venues, crew, and the artists themselves. As with everything else many artists have concluded that they can post their concerts on websites such as Youtube and other free platforms for easy accessibility however that does little to help them financially. Other artists have released content on streaming platforms such as DisneyPlus+ and Netflix in order to gain revenue from their performances. For example Ariana Grande released her documentary *Excuse Me, I love you*, on Netflix in December of 2020 and gained a lot of revenue from this release. Taylor Swift also did this with her newest albums *Lover* and *Folklore*. Since Taylor was forced to cancel the rest of her Loverfest concert tour she sold the Paris show recording to DisneyPlus for their viewers to see. In addition to this after releasing *Folklore* in July of 2020 Taylor recorded her songs from this album live in a studio with her co writers and released this through DisneyPlus as well. *Folklore: The Long Pond Session*, was able to generate a large amount of money for Taylor in addition to allowing her fans to feel like they were in a concert setting without having to be in person.

Although watching concerts on streaming platforms is not the same as seeing them live, there are many positives to being able to watch them online. The first and most obvious positive is the price. Most live concert tickets for high profile artists like Taylor Swift are around \$100-\$200 and these are for seats that are far away from the stage. In these seats you often can't even see the artist that well and have to watch them from a pixelated screen anyway. While streaming full concerts like Taylor Swift's *Reputation* Tour that is on Netflix you're paying \$11 a month for Netflix, which gives you access to thousands of other shows, and you're able to see her full concert in high definition and good sound quality.

There is something to be said about seeing concerts in person. Listening to music we enjoy gives people a large boost in their mental health, and listening to music with a large group that also enjoys this music creates a community and a positive social experience. In the journal *The 'lonely raver': music live streams during COVID-19 as a hotline to collective consciousness?* written by Femke Vandenberg, from the Netherlands, she talks about the impact that streaming concerts has on our mental

health. Throughout the journal she talks about how COVID has impacted the performing arts industry both emotionally and financially. Vandenberg states, “music has a social function (generating intersubjectivity). Live music events in particular often take on ritual characteristics, generating a ‘sonic bond’ which aids in connecting people in the reciprocation of emotions” (Vandenberg page 142). While watching concerts online people aren’t able to experience this ‘sonic bond’ which is basically a feeling of community and friendship that people feel when dancing and listening to music together.

Overall COVID has forced people to redefine technology to adhere to our new lifestyles. In a lot of ways this new technology has allowed people to have access to entertainment and information that they wouldn’t have been able to see, like distant museums or expensive concerts. The answer of whether or not these technologies have bridged the economic gap is unclear in the sense that, yes a wider range of people can see things, but there is also a social divide between the wealthy and the poor. I think that this broad way of streaming has been a good thing for our society. It has allowed people to expand their knowledge on different entertainment forms and cultures. But I would also agree that getting people back together, in person, will be better for our overall mental health.

Works Cited

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