



Exploring Dialogue and Interactions in Online Art Exhibitions: Perspective from Artists and Visitors

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Abstract. In the context of an art exhibition, artists assume a crucial role as users. This article delves into the significance of establishing a dialogue among artists, viewers, and exhibition spaces. It highlights the complementary nature of online and physical exhibitions, emphasizing that online exhibitions should enhance rather than replace the exhibition experience. The study employs a retrospective and reflective analysis, involving three artists who have participated in online exhibitions. Findings reveal the significance of dialogue for artists' existence, creative process, and relationship-building with visitors. While online exhibitions offer new strategies for presenting artworks, they have limitations in fully conveying artistic quality. The article emphasizes the need to consider artists as key users in the design of online exhibitions and recommends incorporating interactive features to facilitate meaningful engagement between artists and viewers.

Keywords: Dialogue, Artists, Visitors, Exhibitions, Online

1 Introduction

Online art exhibitions have been widely conducted during the pandemic due to large-scale social restrictions. Currently, physical art exhibitions have resumed; however, this does not imply that online art exhibitions no longer have room to thrive. Online art exhibitions serve not only as a substitute for in-person exhibitions, as extensively practiced during the pandemic, but also to enhance the exposure of art exhibitions. Khoon and Ramaiah state that as a complement to physical exhibitions, online exhibitions can prepare prospective visitors before they visit the physical exhibition and fulfill the information needs of visitors after their visit [1]. This strategy can lead to an increase in the number of visitors to art exhibitions, thereby stimulating the transformation and creativity of art institutions in developing both online and physical exhibitions [2].

The direction of development for online art exhibitions thus far involves exploring possibilities for enhancing interactions among the elements within the exhibition, namely the space, visitors, artworks, and technology. Tarasova suggests that art exhibitions are a form of artistic communication that places artworks and visitors as subjects [3], yet behind the artworks are the artists who convey messages. Art exhibitions provide a space for communication between artists and visitors through artworks. This

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indicates that the presence of artists as users' needs to be considered a crucial element in the endeavor to develop the design of online art exhibitions.

This article is part of a research study aimed at developing online art exhibitions with features that can connect the needs of visitors and artists as users with the virtual exhibition space. The research employs a retrospective and reflective method, involving three artists who have previously conducted online art exhibitions. The findings of this research can be utilized to comprehend the needs of artists as users, which constitute a crucial element in the development of online art exhibitions.

2 Literature Review

Several online art exhibitions have focused on the development of bringing the exhibition space into the virtual world, as seen in events such as Art Jakarta 2020, Art Moments Jakarta Online 2022, Virtual Exhibitions by Museum Macan, Virtual Exhibition by Galeri Nasional, among others. In response to this demand, various online exhibition template services have emerged, such as Cuseum, Kunsmatrix, Artstep, Exhibit, and others. Research related to the development of online art exhibitions has largely explored the visitor's perspective, as exemplified by the work of Widjono [4], Cendello [5], Taipale [6], yet there is still limited focus on the artists themselves. Despite online art exhibitions relying heavily on artists, they hold significant importance within the context.

The concept of Bakhtin's dialogism refers to the complexity and dynamic relationship between various interacting elements within a context, resulting in the production of significant and inevitable meanings [7]. In the context of artists participating in art exhibitions, dialogue can occur between the artists and the exhibition event itself. Exhibitions serve as a platform for showcasing artworks, and artists engage in interactions that shape their perception of the significance of art exhibitions in presenting their works. The primary objective for artists in participating in exhibitions is not solely for transactional purposes, such as selling their artworks during the exhibition, but rather for existence and dialogism.

3 Methods

The methodology employed in this section of the research involves a retrospective and reflective analysis based on the experiences of three artists participating in online art exhibitions, as well as the observation of existing exhibition documents. The three artists involved in this study are Antin Sambodo and Evy Yonathan, who are ceramic artists, and Devy Ferdianto, a printmaker. These three artists have previously participated in physical exhibitions and have been involved in online exhibitions with different characteristics and approaches.

4 Results and Discussions

Online and physical art exhibitions have different advantages and limitations. They do not necessarily have to replace each other but rather serve to complement one another, like the presence of online and physical museums. ICOM, as mentioned by Styliani et al. [8], describes online museums as an extension of physical museums that serve three functions based on their categories. The first function is as a brochure museum, which aims to inform potential visitors about the museum and serves as a marketing tool to motivate their attendance. The second function is as a content museum, providing information about the museum's collection, thus focusing on objects. The third function is a learning museum, oriented toward providing context, not just objects, to encourage visitors to further explore the museum's collection.

The three functions of online museums as described by ICOM can also apply to online art exhibitions. However, there is a fundamental difference between museums and art exhibitions, namely the involvement of artists. The importance of artists as key elements in online art exhibitions is often overlooked in the development of online museum designs, as most museum objects are not created individually by artists. The presence of artists as users in art exhibitions needs to be understood to facilitate dialogue between the artists and the audience. This dialogue between artists and visitors is crucial for fostering artistic creativity, as Bakhtin suggests that the creative activities of artists are always connected to others [9]. Bakhtin's concept of dialogue between artists and others extends beyond verbal exchange, encompassing active exchanges that allow for the emergence of new meanings and perspectives. The "others" in Bakhtin's concept can include conversations between artists and curators, visitors, objects, or the environment.

4.1 Dialogue between artists and exhibitions

In a personal interview, Sambodo expressed the significance of art exhibitions in his artistic process as follows: Firstly, it is about her existence as an actively practicing artist since some exhibitions require participants who have actively exhibited within the past three years. The longer the gap between the exhibitions, the narrower the opportunities for an artist to showcase their work. This implies that artists must continue creating artwork to maintain recognition in the art world. Secondly, Sambodo feels challenged to translate a theme into her artwork. Thirdly, the right art exhibition can be used to expand relationships, insights, knowledge, and new techniques in creating art, not only obtained from other artists but also from the audience. This is what Bakhtin refers to as dialogism, where the artist and other individuals engage in a process of understanding and eliciting interpretations of the artwork that can stimulate new perspectives for both parties involved.

Yonathan perceives that online exhibitions offer different strategies for presenting artworks, opening new possibilities for artists. Yonathan participated in the online exhibition *Manifesto VII - Pandemic* in 2020 and observed a different exhibition strategy compared to previous ones. The exhibition space of *Manifesto VII - Pandemic* consisted of several videos, with a main video appearing when the exhibition page first

loaded. Visitors were able to select other videos by scrolling in different directions around the main video. These uploaded videos showcased the artist's creative process, from the search for ideas and actions during the artistic process to the outcomes. Yonathan sees this strategy as fulfilling the need for more indirect and non-verbal dialogue with visitors.

In contrast to Sambodo's emphasis on her existence as an artist and Yonathan's focus on indirect dialogue with visitors through different strategies, Ferdianto views online art exhibitions as superior in showcasing artworks. The freedom and ease of access to online exhibitions provide a broader opportunity for visitors to attend. However, the increased number of visitors does not automatically translate to a higher appreciation of the artworks presented in online exhibitions. This aligns with the findings of Rina [14], stating that visitors may not be able to fully appreciate the artistic quality of artworks in online exhibitions, only reaching the stage of observing their forms. This can be understood considering that in any transmission of information, there is no guarantee that the recipient will have the same experience as the communicator [11].

Considering the limitations of online art exhibitions in terms of their capacity to transform and convey information, Ferdianto believes that online exhibitions cannot replace physical exhibitions. The process of transforming physical artworks into digital screens for presentation to viewers often results in the loss of many detailed pieces of information, rendering the artworks unable to be fully experienced. This is especially true for printmaking works that possess intricate details. Yonathan also acknowledges that while online exhibitions allow for the presentation of the artist's creative process, viewers are unable to fully grasp the entirety of the artwork, particularly for three-dimensional works that require viewing from various angles and appreciating the intricate details.

4.2 Dialogue between artists and visitors

Marsh suggests that artists should consider the audience and the broader information ecosystem, including other artists' works and the meanings generated by visitors, before engaging deeply with exhibition materials [12]. Marsh's advice essentially indicates that dialogue should be facilitated in an art exhibition. Physical exhibitions are more conducive to facilitating this dialogue, allowing both parties to understand each other's perspectives. These perspectives are shaped by the experiences, views, and cultural backgrounds of both artists and visitors, thereby enabling the creation of new meanings and experiences. However, in some art exhibitions that have taken place, the facilitation of dialogue between artists and visitors has been limited, although dialogue between other elements may occur, such as between artists or visitors and the virtual space, visitors, and artworks, and so on.

Sambodo draws attention to the absence of interpersonal interaction between visitors and artists in online art exhibitions. The significance of such interaction during the exhibition is paramount to her, encompassing both the engagement between the artist and the audience and the interplay among artists themselves. Sambodo perceives these interactions as opportunities to broaden perspectives, encompassing both tangential and relevant insights about ceramics, ultimately fostering novelty in terms of inspiration,

knowledge acquisition, and technical proficiency. Likewise, Ferdianto derives satisfaction from the interpersonal exchanges transpiring between artists and visitors in physical exhibitions, recognizing their potential to amplify the likelihood of artwork sales. Ferdianto underscores that the interaction between visitors and artists forms the foundational basis upon which art purchases are deliberated. Regrettably, this essential element is absent in online exhibitions, wherein the lack of interactive features hinders meaningful engagement between both parties. Consequently, based on Ferdianto's experiences, it becomes evident that most art sales predominantly occur within the realm of physical exhibitions.

Yonathan's perspective on the interaction between artists and visitors in the context of physical exhibitions exhibits a notable difference. Yonathan observed that most visitors typically ask basic questions and tend to overlook substantive inquiries regarding the artistic process, which holds significant importance for his artworks. Conversely, Yonathan found an opportunity to elucidate his works from her own perspective and discuss aspects that were not typically raised by visitors using videos in the *Manifesto VII – Pandemi* exhibition in 2020. Through these exhibition videos, Yonathan considers that artists and visitors can engage in intertextual dialogue without the need for direct physical encounters, which proves advantageous for her.

4.3 Dialogue between artists and exhibition environment

Dialogue also takes place between artists and exhibition spaces, as well as between visitors and exhibition spaces. However, the primary focus of this article is on the dialogue between artists and exhibition spaces. Sambodo observes that the conditions of physical exhibition spaces are more unpredictable than the display screen in online exhibitions, particularly in terms of arrangement and lighting. Sambodo also expresses concerns regarding inadequate display facilities and lighting, which can potentially impact the presentation of artworks. This differs from online art exhibition spaces where all artworks have uniform display and lighting, placing greater emphasis on the artist's role in presenting photographs and videos of their work to maintain aesthetic quality. Sambodo's concerns are not supported by Pelowski, who, in their study, found that lighting plays only a minor role in the perceived emotions and evaluation of art [13]. However, the uniformity of lighting and display quality can indeed be more controlled in online art exhibitions.

Another aspect of concern raised by Sambodo pertains to the strategic placement of artworks within both physical and online exhibition spaces. The positioning of artworks plays a pivotal role in influencing the frequency with which they are encountered and observed by visitors. Notably, artworks situated in the rear or secluded corners of the exhibition space, distanced from the main entrance or central area, tend to attract fewer viewers. In contrast, artworks positioned near the main area enjoy greater visibility and garner heightened attention from visitors. However, artworks positioned in peripheral or marginalized locations within the exhibition space, particularly in the context of large-scale art exhibitions, experience diminished exposure. This phenomenon extends

to physical art exhibitions, encompassing both those attempting to replicate the ambience of conventional gallery spaces, such as Art Jakarta 2020, as well as those adopting gallery-like configurations, such as Manifesto VII - Pandemic.

4.4 Dialogue between artists and exhibition environment

The dialogue that takes place within physical art exhibition spaces extends beyond interactions between artists and other elements; it also encompasses interactions among visitors. A study conducted by Rina [10] on visitors' behaviour in art exhibitions revealed that visitors rarely attend such events alone, but rather in the company of at least one companion. Rina [10] identified several patterns of interaction observed among visitor groups as follows: Firstly, there is an ongoing dialogue throughout their exploration of the exhibition space. This dialogue revolves around topics related to exhibition techniques and the interpretation of observed artworks. Secondly, visitors collectively navigate the exhibition space, yet dialogues among group members are less prevalent. Dialogues predominantly occur between visitors and the exhibited artworks. Lastly, there are instances where visitors engage in individual exploration before reconvening at a predetermined time.

The dialogue among visitors does not occur in online art exhibitions because these exhibitions are individual in nature. Several exhibitions that have been conducted in Indonesia do not provide features for interaction among visitors, at least until the time of writing this article. Visitors feel that online art exhibitions are more individualistic and make them miss moments of togetherness and discussion, whereas this dialogue is needed as a process for visitors to appreciate art [10].

The absence of dialogue among visitors and between artists and visitors in online art exhibitions highlights the need for the development of exhibition designs that facilitate such dialogues. Essentially, users of online art exhibitions are receptive to new ideas introduced through these exhibitions, and they actively spread these ideas [15]. The involvement of artists as users is also a crucial point to consider, as they have been somewhat alienated from online art exhibitions due to their artworks serving as representations of themselves.

5 Conclusions

Online and physical art exhibitions have distinct advantages and limitations. Rather than replacing each other, they should complement one another, like the relationship between online and physical museums. Online exhibitions can serve functions such as informing and marketing, providing information about artworks, and facilitating learning. However, the involvement of artists distinguishes art exhibitions from museums and highlights the need for meaningful dialogue between artists and visitors.

Dialogue plays a significant role in the existence, creative process, and relationship-building of artists within art exhibitions. It allows artists to showcase their works, challenge themselves, and expand relationships, insights, and knowledge. While online exhibitions offer new strategies for presenting artworks, they have limitations in fully

conveying artistic quality. The transformation of physical artworks into digital formats may result in the loss of details and the inability to fully appreciate three-dimensional works. Dialogue between artists and viewers, as well as artists and the exhibition environment, is crucial. Interactions among visitors themselves are also important, but online exhibitions tend to be more individualistic, lacking the shared experience and discussions among visitors.

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