

Using digital platforms for deeper and richer engagement with arts audiences

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This research was conducted by **Ben Walmsley** at the **University of Leeds, UK**

Summary

The paper describes a project that used a bespoke online platform to allow the public to commission, interact with and reflect upon two dance performances at Yorkshire Dance in Leeds, a city in northern England. The research was interested in knowing how the platform might deepen audience engagement, break down barriers to attendance, demystify the creative process, and enhance people's appreciation of the work. Overall, they found that the platform was a powerful way to move audience engagement beyond something 'transactional' or momentary into a deeper and more reflective encounter. However, this only worked for a small sample of the participants, as many dropped out of the study, while some others felt that it prevented them from experiencing the more 'instinctive' responses they were hoping to get from the work in its finished form. Overall, the research found that those who might gain most from engaging with the platform were those least likely to use it.

Can an online platform replicate the success of an offline method?

The project sought to discover whether the Critical Response Process (a formalised and well-validated engagement process devised by the American dancer and choreographer Liz Lerman) could be replicated through an online platform. The data presented in the paper comes from a 'combination of audience and participant surveys, discussion groups, depth interviews, content analysis of online discussion and netnography [online ethnography]' of a group of 87 people during the research fieldwork in 2014.

Fostering a 'slow' arts engagement

The research concludes that online platforms have the potential to provide a slower and more reflective and deliberative engagement with art (either while in production or as finished works) but that this requires a different infrastructure from mainstream social media platforms that incentivise little more than a superficial 'like' or 'share'.

Keywords

digital **UK** **dance** **engagement**

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