

# THE POWER OF CULTURAL ARTS IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted the cultural and creative industries in the ASEAN region, leading to funding cuts and lack of support for artists and cultural workers. However, digital innovation has allowed for greater access to artistic and cultural content, leading to concerns about the homogenization of culture and impact on traditional business models. Education and literacy are crucial for the development and sustainability of arts and culture, as the region can leverage its good literacy levels to promote the sector. It is important to invest in the arts, not only for economic value, but also for their intrinsic value in promoting cultural diversity, social cohesion, and wellbeing. The industry must adapt to the changing landscape and address challenges while ensuring accessibility and addressing issues such as intellectual property rights and artistic authenticity

## A. INTRODUCTION

The essay provides an analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts and culture sector, with a focus on the ASEAN region. It highlights that the cultural and creative industries that rely on physical experiences at venues and sites have suffered the sharpest economic losses across many different national contexts. Studies at the country level consistently report an overall fall in cultural and creative industries' Gross Value Added in 2020, and the performance of these industries across different countries is consistently worse than the overall performance of these national economies.

The essay further notes that the pandemic has led to several challenges, including losses in revenue ranging from 20 to 40% across different countries and higher levels of income loss and unemployment for self-employed cultural and creative workers. Major urban centers, where these industries are concentrated, have also experienced the biggest absolute falls in the economic contribution of the cultural and creative industries.

However, the essay also highlights the positive impact of the pandemic on the arts and culture sector in the ASEAN region. It notes that the pandemic has forced the cultural and creative industries to innovate and adapt to new circumstances, utilizing digital technologies to reach their audiences. For example, many arts organizations have started offering virtual performances, exhibitions, and workshops, which not only allow them to continue engaging with their audiences but also expand their reach beyond geographical limitations. The use of digital platforms has also created new possibilities for collaboration and networking within the industry, as well as opportunities for new business models and revenue streams.

Additionally, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of community engagement and social impact of the arts. Many artists and arts organizations in the ASEAN region have used their skills and resources to support their communities during the pandemic. For example, by creating public art installations that raise awareness about health and safety measures or by providing free online workshops and performances for vulnerable groups.

Overall, the essay suggests that the pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the cultural and creative industries in the ASEAN region. However, it has also led to innovation and new ways of thinking about the role of art and culture in society. As the region continues to navigate the post-pandemic era, it will be crucial to support and invest in the arts, not only for their economic value but also for their intrinsic value in promoting cultural diversity, social cohesion, and wellbeing.

## Literature Review

### CULTURAL AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the arts and culture sector globally, with some tangible factors that can be measured. Academic research has shown that the cultural and creative industries that rely on physical experiences at venues and sites have suffered the sharpest economic losses relative to other industries. Studies at the country level consistently report an overall fall in the Gross Value Added of cultural and creative industries over 2020, with the performance of these industries consistently worse than the overall performance of national economies. Losses in revenue for cultural and creative industries in 2020 ranged from approximately 20 to 40% across different countries, with the biggest absolute falls in the economic contribution of these industries observed in megacities and other major urban centers. The self-employed have experienced higher levels of income loss and unemployment than other categories of cultural and creative workers.

Despite these challenges, the pandemic has also forced the cultural and creative industries in the ASEAN region to innovate and adapt to new circumstances, often utilizing digital technologies to reach their audiences. Many arts organizations have started offering virtual performances, exhibitions, and workshops, which not only allow them to continue engaging with their audiences but also expand their reach beyond geographical limitations. The use of digital platforms has also opened up new possibilities for collaboration and networking within the industry, as well as opportunities for new business models and revenue streams.

The pandemic has also highlighted the importance of community engagement and social impact of the arts. Many artists and arts organizations in the ASEAN region have used their skills and resources to support their communities during the pandemic, such as by creating public art installations that raise awareness about health and safety measures, or by providing free online workshops and performances for vulnerable groups.

While the pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the cultural and creative industries in the ASEAN region, it has also spurred innovation and new ways of thinking about the role of art and culture in society. As the region continues to navigate the post-pandemic

era, it will be important to support and invest in the arts, not only for their economic value but also for their intrinsic value in promoting cultural diversity, social cohesion, and well-being.

The essay discusses the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the arts and culture sector, with a particular focus on the ASEAN region. It notes that, across many different national contexts, the cultural and creative industries that rely on physical experiences at venues and sites have suffered the sharpest economic losses. Studies at the country level consistently report an overall fall in cultural and creative industries' Gross Value Added in 2020, and the performance of these industries across different countries is consistently worse than the overall performance of these national economies.

The literature review also highlights several key findings related to the pandemic's impact on the arts and culture sector, including that losses in revenue ranged from approximately 20 to 40% across different countries and that the self-employed have experienced higher levels of income loss and unemployment than other categories of cultural and creative workers. The biggest absolute falls in the economic contribution of the cultural and creative industries have been observed in megacities and other major urban centers, where these industries are heavily concentrated.

Despite these challenges, the essay also notes that the pandemic has forced the cultural and creative industries in the ASEAN region to innovate and adapt to new circumstances, often utilizing digital technologies to reach their audiences. For example, many arts organizations have started offering virtual performances, exhibitions, and workshops, which not only allow them to continue engaging with their audiences but also expand their reach beyond geographical limitations. Moreover, the use of digital platforms has opened up new possibilities for collaboration and networking within the industry, as well as opportunities for new business models and revenue streams.

In addition to digital innovations, the pandemic has also highlighted the importance of community engagement and social impact of the arts. Many artists and arts organizations in the ASEAN region have used their skills and resources to support their communities during the pandemic, such as by creating public art installations that raise awareness about health and safety measures, or by providing free online workshops and performances for vulnerable groups.

Overall, the finding from literature review suggests that while the pandemic has certainly had a significant negative impact on the cultural and creative industries in the ASEAN region, it has also spurred innovation and new ways of thinking about the role of art and culture in society. As the region continues to navigate the post-pandemic era, it will be important to support and invest in the arts, not only for their economic value but also for their intrinsic value in promoting cultural diversity, social cohesion, and wellbeing.

#### Prolog 1: What are the arts and cultures

Arts and culture encompass various forms of creative expression that represent human experiences, beliefs, and values. They include traditional and contemporary art forms, such as music, dance, theater, literature, visual arts, crafts, film, television, and digital media, as well as cultural practices like religion, customs, traditions, language, and heritage.

Arts and culture are vital components of society, as they promote social cohesion, diversity, inclusivity, personal expression, creativity, and self-discovery. They also contribute to our emotional and intellectual well-being and play a significant role in the economy by generating income, providing employment, driving tourism, and cultural diplomacy. Additionally, arts and culture help to preserve historical and cultural heritage, ensuring that important traditions, stories, and practices are not lost over time.

The cultural domains include artisanal activities, technologically-intensive media industries, and the design-intensive and born digital creative industries. The economic benefits from the growth of the cultural and creative industries have historically been rooted in advanced economies, but the last two decades have seen more dispersed growth, with many cities and regions in emerging and developing economies also seeing associated economic gains.

Arts and culture are intertwined with each other, and they complement each other very well. Art is a remarkable mode of depicting culture from all over the world, and culture is the collective term for human behaviors, including symbolic meaning, artistic dimension, and cultural values that express cultural identities. Promoting diversity and inclusivity, social cohesion, personal expression and well-being, economic impact, and historical preservation are some of the significant ways in which arts and culture are essential in society. The arts and culture sector plays a vital role in shaping national identity and social progress, as expressed by Andre Malraux, a French novelist, art theorist, and Minister of Cultural Affairs in France.

As the graphic above shows, cultural domains encompass artisanal activities, technologically-intensive media industries that came to prominence in the twentieth century and the design-intensive and born digital creative industries of the new millennium. While the economic benefits from the growth of the cultural and creative industries have historically been rooted in advanced economies, the last two decades have seen more dispersed growth, with many cities and regions in emerging and developing economies also seeing associated economic gains. This statement has been agreed by many expert, Famous Scholars, Abby Willow root have expressed that:

Culture is a great friend of art “Art speaks the soul of its culture”

**A. CULTURAL AND NATURAL HERITAGE**



**B. PERFORMANCE AND CELEBRATION**



**C. VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFTS**

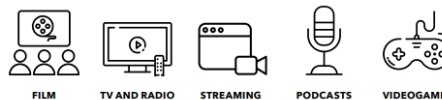


SOURCE: Unesco (2009)

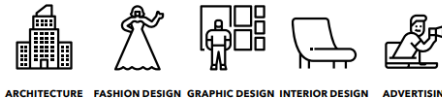
**D. BOOKS AND PRESS**



**E. AUDIO-VISUAL AND INTERACTIVE MEDIA**



**F. DESIGN AND CREATIVE SERVICES**



In a broader sense, arts and culture refer to the creative expression and representation of human experiences, beliefs, and values through various forms of artistic and cultural practices. This includes traditional and contemporary art forms such as music, dance, theater, literature, visual arts, crafts, film, television, and digital media, as well as cultural practices such as religion, customs, traditions, language, and heritage.

Arts and culture are essential components of society as they help us understand and appreciate different perspectives, histories, and cultures, and promote social cohesion, diversity, and inclusivity. They also provide opportunities for personal expression, creativity, and self-discovery, and contribute to our emotional and intellectual well-being. Moreover, the arts and culture sector plays a significant role in the economy, providing employment, generating income, and driving tourism and cultural diplomacy.

Arts and culture play an important role in society, contributing to various aspects of human life. Here are some of the ways arts and culture are significant:

**Promoting diversity and inclusivity:** Arts and culture help to promote and celebrate diversity by providing a platform for different cultures, traditions, and identities to be represented and shared. This can lead to a greater understanding and respect for other people and communities.

**Social cohesion:** Arts and culture can bring people together and create a sense of community by providing opportunities for shared experiences and dialogue. They also provide a space for people to express themselves creatively and share their perspectives.

**Personal expression and well-being:** Arts and culture can be a form of personal expression and creativity, providing an outlet for emotions and experiences. This can contribute to a sense of well-being and personal fulfillment.

**Economic impact:** The arts and culture sector provides employment opportunities and generates income through various industries such as theater, music, film, and visual arts. It

also drives tourism and cultural diplomacy, attracting visitors to experience different cultural offerings.

**Historical preservation:** Arts and culture can help to preserve historical and cultural heritage, ensuring that important traditions, stories, and practices are not lost over time. This can contribute to a greater understanding and appreciation of our shared history and cultural legacy.

Overall, the arts and culture sector plays a vital role in society, contributing to our personal and collective well-being, promoting diversity and inclusivity, and driving economic growth and development. "Culture is the sum of all the forms of art, of love, and of thought, which, in the course of centuries, have enabled man to be less enslaved." - Andre Malraux. Andre Malraux was a French novelist, art theorist, and Minister of Cultural Affairs in France. His work focused on the intersection of culture and politics, particularly the role of art and culture in shaping national identity and social progress.

Therefore, when we talk about the power of arts and culture, we can see how great the role of art is and how art in society's culture becomes a filling of life, starting as a spiritual filling and becoming an economic resource today. One critical aspect of the importance of arts and culture is their ability to challenge and question social norms and power structures. Through their creative expression, artists and cultural practitioners can bring attention to important social and political issues, provide new perspectives, and critique dominant narratives. For example, the #MeToo movement was a cultural phenomenon that started as a social media campaign to raise awareness about sexual harassment and assault. It then spread to different forms of artistic expression, including film, theatre, music, and literature, which helped to further amplify the voices of survivors and bring attention to the issue. This demonstrates how arts and culture can be a powerful tool for social change and activism.

Moreover, arts and culture can also serve as a means of resistance and resilience in the face of oppression and marginalization. Historically, many communities that have been subjected to discrimination and persecution have used arts and culture as a way to maintain their cultural identity, express their experiences, and resist oppression. For example, African American music, literature, and art have been instrumental in challenging racism and asserting cultural pride.

In addition, arts and culture can contribute to the development of critical thinking and creativity, which are essential skills in today's rapidly changing world. By engaging with diverse artistic and cultural practices, individuals can develop a broader perspective, learn to appreciate different viewpoints, and develop their own creative potential.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the arts and culture sector faces significant challenges, including funding cuts, lack of support for artists and cultural workers, and the commodification of culture. It is crucial that we continue to support and invest in arts and culture, not only for their economic and social benefits, but also for their intrinsic value as a vital component of human life and society.

Why are the cultural and creative industries and why are they economically important?

The cultural and creative industries encompass a diverse range of sectors, including literature and publishing, visual and performing arts, music, film and video production, architecture, fashion, and design. These industries have a significant economic impact, providing employment opportunities for millions of people worldwide, both as self-employed freelancers and full-time employees. According to a study by LinkedIn and Curator Technologies, 51.2 million people have self-registered on LinkedIn as working within the cultural and creative industries, with 48.4 million full-time equivalent jobs. The sale of cultural goods and services also generates revenue, contributing to the economy.

However, the impact of these industries extends beyond the economy. They have the potential to promote diversity and inclusivity, preserve cultural heritage, foster creativity and innovation, and contribute to community development and social cohesion. As a result, they are increasingly recognized as important drivers of economic and social growth in many countries and regions around the world. The study by LinkedIn and Curator Technologies highlights the importance of these industries, both economically and socially, and underscores the need to continue supporting and investing in them. As stated by UNESCO, "Investing in the creative economy can lead to increased social cohesion, intercultural dialogue, and foster innovation and creativity, while also promoting economic growth and development."

## Prolog 2 : Digital Innovation Across Arts And Cultural And Creative Industries

Digital innovation has had a significant impact on arts, culture, and the creative industries in recent years. The use of digital technology has opened up new opportunities for artists, designers, and creatives to create and share their work with a wider audience. Digital platforms have also enabled greater access to cultural resources, such as art exhibitions, music concerts, and theatre performances, making these experiences more accessible to people from all over the world.

However, there are also some challenges associated with digital innovation in the arts and creative industries. One concern is that the widespread availability of digital content can lead to a devaluation of creative work, as consumers become used to accessing music, films, and other artistic content for free. Additionally, some artists and creators may feel that digital platforms limit their creative freedom, as they must create content that is easily shareable and accessible online. Furthermore, there are concerns about the impact of digital innovation on the traditional modes of artistic and cultural production. For example, the use of digital technology in the music industry has disrupted traditional models of music distribution and sales, which has had a significant impact on the livelihoods of musicians and those who work in the industry.

Overall, digital innovation has brought both benefits and challenges to the arts, culture, and creative industries. As technology continues to advance, it will be important to find ways to balance the potential benefits of digital innovation with the need to protect the livelihoods of artists and creatives, preserve cultural heritage, and maintain the quality of artistic and cultural experiences for audiences.

What is the impact of digital innovation on the arts and cultural industries during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced many organizations and artists to turn to digital platforms to share their work and engage with audiences. Virtual exhibitions, galleries, online concerts, and performances have become common. Digital technologies such as augmented reality and virtual reality have also been used to enhance traditional arts and cultural experiences. Social media platforms and crowdfunding platforms have provided new opportunities for artists and creatives to showcase their work and connect with audiences. In addition, the pandemic has given rise to NFTs, a unique digital asset that can be traded on a blockchain, providing new opportunities for artists and other creators. The digital innovation has allowed the arts and cultural and creative industries to continue to thrive and contribute to the economic and cultural vitality of societies during the pandemic.

There are a number of potential ethical concerns with NFTs, particularly around their environmental impact and the potential for exploitation of artists. The process of creating and selling NFTs requires a significant amount of energy, as it involves solving complex mathematical equations on a blockchain. This has raised concerns about the carbon footprint of NFTs and their impact on the environment. In addition, there are concerns about the potential for NFTs to be used to exploit artists, particularly emerging artists who may not fully understand the implications of selling their work as NFTs. NFTs are a relatively new phenomenon, and the legal and ethical implications of their use are still being explored.

Another potential concern is the possibility of NFTs being used for money laundering or other illicit activities, given their anonymous and decentralized nature. However, it's worth noting that many blockchain platforms, including those used for NFTs, have built-in security measures to prevent illegal activities. Overall, it's important to approach NFTs with caution and to consider the potential ethical implications before buying or selling them. It's also important for artists and other creators to fully understand the implications of creating and selling their work as NFTs, and to seek legal and financial advice where necessary. While it's true that digital innovation has allowed the arts and cultural industries to continue operating during the pandemic, there are also some concerns and criticisms about the reliance on digital platforms.

Firstly, digital platforms are not accessible to everyone, particularly those in low-income communities or those without reliable internet access. This means that those who are already marginalized in society may not have access to the same cultural experiences as those who can afford to access digital platforms. Secondly, there is a concern that the reliance on digital platforms may lead to a homogenization of cultural experiences. With the same platforms being used by artists and organizations all over the world, there is a risk that cultural experiences will become more standardized and less unique to individual communities. Thirdly, while NFTs and other digital innovations may provide new opportunities for artists to make money, there is also a risk that this will further entrench existing power structures in the art world. Wealthy collectors and institutions may be the ones who can afford to purchase and own NFTs, leading to a concentration of power and influence in a small group of individuals and organizations.

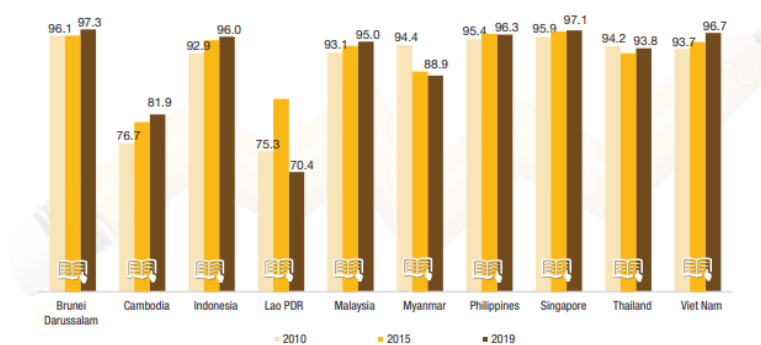
Overall, while digital innovation has certainly allowed the arts and cultural industries to adapt during the pandemic, there are also valid concerns about accessibility, homogenization, and power dynamics that need to be addressed as these industries continue to evolve.



The digitization of the arts and creative industries has brought about both opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, it has allowed for greater access to artistic and cultural content for audiences around the world, as well as new forms of artistic expression and collaboration. On the other hand, it has also led to concerns about the homogenization of culture and the impact of digital platforms on traditional business models. As writer and cultural critic Evgeny Morozov notes, "digitization is not neutral; it favors certain types of content, certain forms of distribution, and certain business models over others." It is important for the industry to navigate these challenges and ensure that the benefits of digital innovation are accessible to all, while also addressing issues such as intellectual property rights and the impact of technology on artistic authenticity.

### Prolog 3 : Education as catalyst for arts and cultures in ASEAN

Figure 1.2.1. Adult literacy rate (%) by ASEAN Member States, 2010-2020



Note: The latest available data for Cambodia, Malaysia and Philippines is 2019, Lao PDR and Myanmar is 2017, Thailand is 2018

Source: ASEAN Secretariat, ASEANstats database

Education and literacy are crucial factors in fully realizing the power of arts and culture throughout the ASEAN region. According to statistics by the ASEAN Secretariat, 90% of ASEAN countries have shown a significant increase in literacy levels, which is a strong indicator of the potential for the sustainable development of arts and culture in each ASEAN country, with the help of technological savvy and local wisdom.

Learning about art and culture is no longer just a practical skill but has become an innovative experience, with blended learning approaches being applied in learning sessions. The current generation is accustomed to combining virtual learning with practical applications, which has led to the discovery of a variety of new innovations in terms of ideas, production techniques, and the promotion of art objects to a global audience. Platforms such as YouTube, Pinterest, TikTok, and others have catalyzed the spread of both formal and informal learning content, with millions of videos and articles about art and culture available.

Meanwhile, the ASEAN region's technological literacy has also contributed to the flourishing of arts and culture. During the 2-year pandemic, virtual applications played a crucial role in exporting content about art and culture, with millions of viewers becoming a measure of the content's popularity. ASEAN countries did not escape the impact of virtual browsers about art

and culture, which was supported by the increased influx of international tourists to the region. Statistics from the ASEAN Secretariat show a significant increase in visitor numbers after the pandemic due to the virtual experience propaganda that has been promoted by arts and culture content creators. Overall, technology has played a critical role in promoting and sharing the ASEAN region's arts and culture globally.

**Figure 3.2.1.** Number of visitor arrivals (000) by ASEAN Member States, 2020



Source: ASEAN Secretariat, ASEANstats database

As mentioned, technological literacy has contributed to the flourishing of arts and culture in the ASEAN region. With the COVID-19 pandemic, many people have had to rely on virtual platforms to access arts and culture content. This has led to a proliferation of online content about art and culture on platforms like YouTube, Pinterest, TikTok, and others. These platforms have become a means for formal and informal learning and discovery of new innovations in terms of ideas, production techniques, and promotion of the visibility of art objects.

Moreover, as pointed out, the increase in technological literacy has also led to the popularity of virtual tourism. With travel restrictions in place, many people have turned to virtual tours and experiences to explore different parts of the world. This has been a boon for the arts and culture sector, as virtual experiences and exhibitions have become a way to promote local cultures and attract international visitors. As a result, we can see a drastic increase in the number of visitors to the ASEAN region after the pandemic, which can be attributed to the popularity of virtual experiences and the promotion of arts and culture content creators.

Finally, as noted, education and literacy are essential for the development and sustainability of arts and culture in the ASEAN region. With the majority of ASEAN countries showing a good increase in literacy levels, it is evident that the region has the potential to leverage this factor to further promote arts and culture. Through blended learning and virtual platforms, more people can access arts and culture content, which can contribute to the growth and

development of the sector. This, in turn, can lead to greater appreciation and understanding of local cultures and traditions, both within the ASEAN region and beyond

#### D. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented both challenges and opportunities for the arts and culture sector in ASEAN countries. On the one hand, traditional forms of cultural expression have been disrupted due to the pandemic's restrictions, forcing artists and cultural workers to adapt and innovate using digital technologies. On the other hand, the pandemic has also highlighted the power of art and culture to bring people together and provide a sense of comfort and connection during times of crisis.

To ensure the sustainability of art and culture in the region, there is a need for continued investment in education and literacy. By providing access to both formal and informal learning opportunities, individuals can develop the skills and knowledge needed to create, appreciate, and preserve cultural arts. Furthermore, the creative sector has an important role to play in keeping people educated, creative, and entertained during these challenging times. By utilizing various mediums such as radio and TV programs, video games, filmed theatre, movies, art, books, music, podcasts, and crafts, the creative sector can continue to engage and inspire audiences.

As we move forward from the pandemic, it is important to recognize the potential of new technologies to enhance and promote cultural arts while also maintaining the authenticity and uniqueness of local cultural expressions. By embracing a blended approach to learning and engaging audiences, the power of art and culture can continue to be harnessed for the benefit of ASEAN countries and their people.

Certainly, while there are opportunities for the arts and culture sector to adapt and innovate using technology, there are also challenges and potential risks to consider. For one, the overreliance on digital solutions may exclude those who lack access to technology or digital literacy skills, creating a digital divide that perpetuates inequality.

Furthermore, the monetization of digital art through NFTs raises questions about the commodification of art and the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few collectors or investors. It also brings up issues of ownership, authenticity, and the environmental impact of blockchain technology. Moreover, while virtual tours and digital exhibitions offer wider access to collections, they cannot replace the sensory and embodied experience of physical visits, which are essential to understanding and appreciating the cultural significance of art and heritage.

Lastly, it is important to consider the potential homogenization of cultural expressions through the global dissemination of digital content, which may dilute or erase the unique identities and histories of local cultures. This highlights the need for balance between the preservation of local traditions and the promotion of cross-cultural exchange and collaboration.

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