

Spotlight

Digital arts engagement



Australians are increasingly engaging with digital technology to connect, share, create and engage with arts and creativity

Technological development is a driving force altering how audiences engage with the arts and inspiring artistic innovation. Artists, creative workers and arts and cultural organisations have continued to innovate and regenerate, building digital capabilities and finding new ways to engage with local and global audiences.

Digital technologies affect many of the ways in which we consume and interact with arts and culture. It is increasingly difficult to separate online and offline activities and many engagement activities include elements of both.

Results from the 2022 National Arts Participation Survey show that Australians are increasingly engaging with digital technology to connect, share, create and engage with arts and creativity. In 2022, most Australians engaged with the arts **online or through digital platforms** (88% up from 82% in 2019).

Almost three quarters of Australians, or 71% of the population aged 15 and over, use **digital platforms to access creative experiences and art or to create art**. Seven in ten Australians use digital platforms to specifically **engage** with creativity, culture and art (69%), with more than half of Australians using **social media platforms** to engage with the arts (54%).

I actually found classical music and that was through just scrolling, YouTube and, and being on YouTube, looking at different types of music that you might not otherwise have had time to, or the need to look around to that level.

– Focus group participant

COVID-19 accelerated digital consumption of arts and culture

The pandemic accelerated digital adaptation – highlighting the creative and access possibilities of working in digital spaces and engaging audiences far and wide.¹⁷⁶

Digital events provided access to a range of cultural experiences that otherwise would not have been possible. The COVID-19 Audience Outlook Monitor research shows digital offerings made arts accessible to new audiences, including those with disability, those who are immunocompromised, and those without access for geographic or financial reasons.¹⁷⁷

China Professional Placements: Art Space for Kids (The A.S.K.), Shanghai, 2018. Courtesy Fiona MacDonald and Art Space for Kids.

¹⁷⁶ Australia Council 2021, *In Real Life: Mapping digital cultural engagement in the first decades of the 21st century*.

¹⁷⁷ Patternmakers 2020 and 2021, COVID-19 Audience Outlook Monitor.

For example, Sydney Dance Company offered accessible online dance classes in their Virtual Studio, supporting the health and wellbeing of those in lockdown.

Over half of Australians *like the flexibility of having an online option* (53%) and agree they *can access a range of creative experiences and activities that they wouldn't otherwise experience* (51%). Almost a third of Australians agree that *engaging with online events is really enjoyable* (30%).

Three in five Australians, however, *miss the atmosphere of a live event/exhibition/experience when viewing online* (60%), and a third don't believe *overall it is better value to attend experiences and activities online* (33%).

Mostly I would watch concerts even overseas. So that was actually good.

– Focus group participant

Australians use digital technology to express themselves

With the innovation of digital technologies, audiences can increasingly play a role in the process of creative production. And while digital inclusion remains an issue, the relative accessibility of digital technology has meant that many more people can make and distribute creative work, removing some of the barriers that once existed in the cultural sphere.

Almost one third of Australians use digital platforms to *create* art (31%). **Young Australians** are the most likely to use digital platforms to create art (62% of those aged 15–24 compared to 38% of those aged 25–49 and 13% of those aged 50 and over), most notably to create videos (29% of those aged 15–24 compared to 13% of those aged 25–49 and 2% of those aged 50 and over).

Further, half of **First Nations respondents** use digital platforms to create art (51% compared to 29% of non-First Nations respondents), and **respondents with disability** are more likely than those without disability (36% compared to 29%) and **CALD respondents** are more likely than non-CALD respondents (48% compared to 26%) to use digital platforms to create art. Half of Australians believe that *online platforms are a great way to sell art/artistic content* (51%)

I was home and doing it, creating what I wanted to create, experimenting with a bit of resin, making coasters from resin and putting different coloured dyes in, different sort of glitters in, creating something, which once I get a bit of stock up, I'm going to put on Etsy and sell it on Etsy.

– Focus group participant

Technology drives artistic experimentation

The tension between digital and offline worlds has inspired artistic experiment.¹⁷⁸ Artists are increasingly exploring concepts involving artificial intelligence and virtual reality in their artistic practice, as well as new forms of digital platforms and technologies to engage audiences both online and in person.

The work of artists in this new and innovative space is recognised by some Australians. One in five Australians prioritise *investment in art that pushes boundaries and drives innovation* (22% ranked this in their top three priorities for public or private investment, down from 26% in 2019). **Men** are more likely than women (27% of men compared to 18% of women) and **younger Australians** are more likely than older Australians to prioritise this type of arts investment (34% of Australians aged 15–24 compared to 25% of Australians aged 25–49 and 16% of Australians aged 50 and over).

¹⁷⁸ Australia Council 2021, *In Real Life: Mapping digital cultural engagement in the first decades of the 21st century*.