

Webinar Brief: 85

Music as a Creative INDUSTRY

Pakistan Institute of
Development Economics





MUSIC AS A CREATIVE INDUSTRY



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VIRTUAL SESSION

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Music is a multimillion-dollar industry the world over, with artists selling out arenas such as the T-Mobile, O2, and MGM Grand on a regular basis – events that hundreds of thousands attend to let loose, dance with friends, and just have a good time. In Pakistan, this phenomenon seems to have slowly been pushed out of the mainstream over the years. PIDE has organized a webinar on “Music as a Creative Industry” to initiate a discussion on the potential of music as a driver of joy, shaper of culture, and catalyst for socioeconomic prosperity – and to debunk myths surrounding the topic, including the notion that those who engage are fools, misfits, heretics, incompetents, etc.

Zahra Paracha

- Music can be approached as an art, or as entertainment – through performing – and the latter is more suited to generating revenues, although lockdowns due to the pandemic have made it difficult and created dependence on corporate partnerships.
- Do we know the individuals involved in producing the music that celebrities like Atif Aslam release? The song writers, sound engineers, etc. – these are people that get sidelined in the process and don't receive the credit they deserve
- The government needs to make it easier to organize events and festivals. Bureaucratic hurdles in the form of security checks and excessive documentation discourage the artists to organize their events. Without networks to bypass these, it is almost impossible to organize festivals like Lahore Music Meet.
- Tax requirements are arbitrary and constantly changing depending on the circumstances, where authorities treat the process as negotiable – this inconsistency from the FBR make the process a logistical nightmare, and most organizers are advised to have a formal team to handle tax payments

Natasha Ejaz

- Pakistan doesn't have an industry; it has a fraternity. It does not have a multilayered nature that could open up options in terms of revenue streams. For instance, performance royalties do not formally exist in Pakistan.
- The music scene in Pakistan is reliant on a specific image and popularity, so those with access to an audience get a major headstart – making it difficult for new entrants. This necessitates the 'wearing of many hats' and having to diversify one's activities as much as possible.
- A lot of artists have talent, and have achieved significant objectives – but they become bitter with time due to all the obstacles they had to face along the way. In Pakistan, you need to be able to pivot and open to different kinds of opportunities.
- Music does not exist in the public sphere as much as it should – the government may help artists organize music festivals by offering subsidized rates and reducing the tax/regulatory hurdles in the way.
- One way to generate revenues is through entry fees to festivals, but it's almost impossible to pay artists involved in the event if ticket charges aren't more than Rs. 3000 which is unaffordable to most.
- Atif Aslam is an anomaly, artists of that sort don't represent the industry – in fact, one of the primary reasons they make it to that 'larger than life' level have little to do with their talent and more about who they know that have helped them along the way.
- Artists don't have to be the best in their industries in order to survive, they should be able to survive and live a fulfilled life regardless of their place in the hierarchy.
- The concept of 'resident performers' is popular in other countries like Malaysia, which allow for artists to set up recurring, periodic performances at the venue regardless of anything else that is going on – Pakistan needs to instill that culture, because it promotes the arts at a broader level.
- Even a small show with 6 artists, for instance, costs around 3-5 lakhs at a minimum depending on the size of their bands, which multiplies the cost manifold – going up to almost one million rupees including sound, lights, management, etc.
- Two kinds of artists: those who have a personal brand, which is a unique approach itself. The other approach is where you try to bridge the gap in social infrastructure and create a facilitative environment for other artists.

Shane Anthony

- It is possible living as a musician in Pakistan, and competitions like Pepsi Battle of the Bands have created opportunities for emerging artists and bringing them into the limelight for further success.
- On the other hand, obtaining access to these is always difficult and most artists are excluded for reasons that don't necessarily have to do with a lack of talent: thus forcing them to see their music as passion projects rather than formal careers. This is made even worse if aspiring artists come from poor backgrounds and need to support their families.
- Venues should be more available and accessible to emerging musicians in particular, which are currently absent. These platforms allow artists to hone their craft and earn revenues.
- Music stores in Pakistan find it incredibly difficult to support themselves, and for artists' access to musical instruments becomes impossible – forcing them to have to import from abroad at high prices that involve customs duties etc.
- The market/demand for music in rural areas of Pakistan – contrary to popular perceptions – is significant, and entire stadiums may be filled up with relative ease. Ultimately it all depends on the organizers and how they execute it depending on the context.
- We don't have a music channel anymore; I grew up listening to songs on channels – which has dwindled with time. In fact, channels demand money from artists themselves to air their music.
- Channels such as Spotify etc. are region based, meaning that the same number of listeners from USA are worth more than those from Pakistan – which creates an uneven playing field on the global level.

Aizaz Sohail

- Revenue depends on the type of concert, for instance, qawwali and sufi music have a presence in Pakistan and people are willing to pay for them as compared to other more marginal areas.
- Music instructors have a tremendous role to play in cultivating talent among the arts community and they are forgotten about (both literally as well as in terms of monetary compensation) once their pupils become successful.

- Once governments find out that events are ticketed, they cut 60% of revenues – leaving a small amount remaining for musicians and the cost of logistics, planning, and salaries, etc.
- People are willing to pay, sometimes through their noses, to see certain artists like Atif Aslam – but again, those are the overwhelming minority.
- Radio is also an unproductive channel because although it plays music it does not pay royalties to artists.

Sana Riaz

- Due to a lack of opportunities, a significant number of musicians need (including myself) need to go into parallel professions such as teaching in order to ensure a steady stream of income: although for me, I've discovered a love of teaching music since I began doing it and it helps me fulfil my passion.
- People are not willing to pay for performances: the maximum venues do is offer to cover logistics/planning costs on behalf of artists but it's always tough in Pakistan to make arrangements for a proportion of the revenues going to artists themselves for their performances at shows and festivals.
- Performing at cafes and restaurants etc. is not socially accepted in Pakistan. It is considered taboo and looked down upon, whereas in other countries it is perfectly normal. The culture is extremely restrictive.

Mehdi Maloof

- During COVID, there were certain SOPs related constraints – but the situation is now a lot better with regards to NOCs, especially in Lahore: we try to be as lax as possible
- When Coke Studio approached me, I was frankly a bit surprised because I have a small niche which says something about the overall accessibility of these giant platforms.
- After joining the civil service, I think I grew as an artist – serving at remote areas and playing with artists there helped me enhance my creative capacities, gave me new ideas for music, and I derive a lot of joy from it.
- It's hard to commercialize music in remote areas, though, due to the cultural differences.
- From the government's side: 1) musicians, writers, and poets from the folk tradition in particular should be facilitated via jobs or representation in departments etc., 2) create an environment to facilitate classical musicians to gain exposure to the international market by sending them to international platforms/festivals, 3) foster conditions for musicians to be able to play in remote, rural areas in order to incorporate the marginalized into the process.



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