TRANSFORMING ART ENVIRONMENTS: ONLINE CLASSICAL GUITAR MEETINGS

Erkan Sülün[a]* iD, Hüseyin Kaya Uzunali[b], Mehmet Özkanoğlu[c]

[a] Near East University, Nicosia 99138, TRNC Mersin 10 - Türkiye
[b] Near East University, Nicosia 99138, TRNC Mersin 10 - Türkiye
[c] Mersin University, Mersin 33100, Türkiye

Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate new approaches arising from the transfer of educational, artistic, and social activities to online environments after the COVID-19 pandemic period, and specifically to examine the "online guitar meetings" designed for this purpose. Guitar Meetings were conducted three times within a three-week period, each lasting 150 minutes, with 15 participants in each session. The nested single-case design of the qualitative research-based case study model was used in the research. The study group comprised artists, artist-scholars, and students. For data collection, a researcher-developed interview form consisting of seven questions was used. Data was collected one-on-one in an online environment. The data was analysed using the content analysis method. Six categories emerged from the analysis: the Positive and Negative Aspects of Online Activities, the Contribution of Online Guitar Meetings to Guitarists, Similarities and Differences Between Online and Face-to-Face Activities, Experiences that Influence Participants, Benefits Obtained by Participants from the Meetings, and Recommendations of Participants. The themes and findings resulting from the research are discussed in relation to the literature.

Keywords: Online, guitar, covid-19, music, music education

*Corresponding author.
E-mail address:* erkan.sulun@neu.edu.tr

1. Introduction

In the early months of 2020, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic led to unprecedented challenges and transformations across various sectors worldwide. Pandemic-induced restrictions on physical gatherings necessitated a swift and profound transition from traditional offline seminars and panels to online platforms in the realms of music education, performance, and academic knowledge exchange. This transition not only revolutionized the ways musicians, educators, and academics engage with their audiences, but also prompted a re-evaluation of the effectiveness and accessibility of virtual spaces for artistic and academic pursuits (Joseph, 2023; Perez-Monteagudo & Curras-Perez, 2022; Swarbrick et al., 2021).

Prior to the pandemic, in-person music seminars and panels were regarded as keystones for disseminating knowledge, artistic exploration, and networking within the music community. However, travel restrictions, social distancing measures, and health concerns compelled the music industry to explore alternative avenues for fostering connections and intellectual exchange (Afifah et al., 2022, Psomadaki et al., 2022). Consequently, numerous music institutions, organizations, and individuals swiftly adopted online platforms as an alternative means to host music seminars and panels (Onderdijk et al., 2023).

The transition to the digital realm was not without its challenges (Biasutti et al., 2021; Martínez, 2021). Concerns arose regarding the ability of online platforms to replicate the immersive and interactive experience characteristic of face-to-face interactions in music seminars and panels. Nevertheless, as time progressed, adaptation to virtual formats became more intricate, giving rise to innovative forms of participation. Enhanced technological capabilities, interactive features, and creative adaptations facilitated the sense of community within music seminars and panels, fostering intellectual exchange despite physical separation.

1.1. Online Music Activities and Their Impacts in the Post-COVID Era

In response to the COVID lock down challenges, musicians, educators, and enthusiasts swiftly adapted to online platforms, transforming the landscape of music engagement. This literature review aims to explore the impacts of online music activities in the post-COVID era, shedding light on the transformative potentials, challenges, and implications for this field.

1.1.1. Rise of Virtual Performances and Concerts

One of the most prominent changes was the rapid proliferation of virtual performances and concerts. Musicians turned to platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook Live to connect with their audiences. Virtual concerts not only provided a means for artists to generate income but also allowed global audiences to participate in performances they wouldn't have personally experienced. Research by Deng and Pan (2023) emphasizes that virtual music events facilitated an increased sense autonomy, relatedness, and engagement which led to a reimagining of concert experiences.

1.1.2. Digital Music Education and Learning

Online platforms also played a significant role in music education. Educational institutions and private tutors swiftly transitioned to online lessons, enabling students to continue their musical journeys from the safety of their homes. However, this shift brought challenges related to engagement and

interaction. Researchers like Calderón-Garrido and Gustems-Carnicer (2021); Merrick and Joseph (2023); and Octaviani (2021) highlight the need for innovative pedagogical approaches to sustain the effectiveness of online music education.

1.1.3. Collaboration and Innovation

The online environment fostered unexpected collaborations and innovations. Musicians and composers started collaborating across geographical boundaries, resulting in unique cross-genre and cross-cultural projects. Additionally, the limitations of online platforms inspired creative adaptations, such as interactive virtual choirs and ensemble performances. Such efforts demonstrate technology's ability to transcend physical barriers and encourage artistic innovation, collaborative practice, and use of technology (Fram et al., 2021; Hollander-Shabtai & Tzofi, 2022).

1.1.4. Audience Engagement and Accessibility

The shift to online democratized music consumption. Audiences could easily engage with diverse genres, artists, and cultures. However, this change raises questions about the quality of audience engagement and the potential dilution of the live music experience. Fraser et al. (2021) provide valuable theoretical insights into how participating in rituals and engaging in social learning can promote intercultural comprehension by involving individuals with music on both cognitive and emotional levels. This interaction can subsequently influence both personal and shared identities. Online platforms offer possibilities for both strengthening existing connections and creating new ones.

1.1.5. Technological Challenges and Digital Fatigue

Despite its advantages, the transition to online music activities was not without challenges. Technological barriers, such as connectivity issues and platform accessibility hindered seamless participation. Furthermore, extended exposure to online content led to "digital fatigue" among both creators and consumers (Almahasees et al., 2021; Barrot et al., 2021; Selvaraj et al., 2021), raising concerns about the sustainability of purely virtual models.

Against this backround, the post-COVID era has witnessed a transformative shift in music activities, with online platforms playing a central role in connecting artists and audiences. While the benefits of increased accessibility, innovative collaborations, and global engagement are evident, challenges such as maintaining artistic integrity and addressing digital fatigue remain. As the music industry continues to evolve, striking a balance between virtual and physical engagement will be crucial in shaping the future of music activities in the digital age.

2. Purpose of the Study

In this context, exploring the dynamics of transitioning from offline to online music assumes critical significance in the post-COVID-19 landscape. This study aims to investigate the positive and negative aspects of the transition from traditional physical spaces to online environments by gathering the perspectives of artists, scholars, artist-teachers, and students who participated in three guitar meetings designed specifically for online settings, the challenges encountered during this transition, and the innovative strategies that emerged in response. By delving deeply into the experiences of musicians,

educators, scholars, and participants in this new online environment, this research aspires to provide insights into the evolving nature of music seminars and panels in a digitally mediated world. The problem statement of the research has been identified as follows: What are the experiences and the perspectives of artists, scholars, and students regarding online guitar meetings conducted in the post-Covid-19 era?

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Model

In the study, a nested single-case design based on the qualitative research method was employed. Within a single case, there can be multiple units. (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2008). In the study, the single case is the online guitar meeting, and the nested cases are the opinions of artists, scholars, and students regarding this activity.

Table 1. Research Group

Occupation	n	Meetings Attended
Scholars/Teachers	5	3
Artists	6	3
Students	4	3

Using a random sampling method, a total of five scholars, six artists, and four students from music departments of different universities participated in this study, as shown in Table 1. The participants are scholars/teachers, artists, and students residing in Turkey, the United Kingdom, Cyprus, and the Netherlands.

3.2. Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data was collected through an interview that was conducted face-to-face (online) with individuals participating in guitar meetings using a semi-structured researcher-designed form comprising seven open-ended questions and questions related to personal data. Interviews were used as they are most appropriate for gaining insights into individuals' viewpoints and personal encounters. According to Flick (2009), "Observation is the sole way to access practices; interviews and narratives simply render the descriptions of practices accessible (p. 222)." The research was conducted by 2 educators/guitarists and 1 guitarist. After identifying the sub-problems of the study, they prepared 12 interview questions based on these problems. These questions were developed based on the researchers' experiences participating in or organizing festivals, workshops, and events, both online and in-person. After the questions were prepared, input was obtained from 3 music experts, and the questions were restructured, reducing the number to 7. The final version of the questionnaire was refined with input from a language expert.

The data were analyzed using the content analysis technique, as described by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), which involves a method of subjectively interpreting textual data through the systematic categorization and identification of themes or patterns using coding. Responses to the questions were scrutinized for common themes by arranging them into six categories, themes, and sub-themes. These themes and sub-themes were generated by drawing from prominent ideas and participant viewpoints, as

well as the mentioned categories and topics. Following this categorization, an overall assessment was conducted for each theme and sub-theme, linking the opinions to the outcomes.

3.3. Procedure

Online Guitar Meetings designed for classical guitarists were organized weekly, spanning over three weekends. Each session lasted approximately 150 minutes. The participants constituted a diverse group consisting of five scholars, six artists, and four students. The meetings were structured around three distinct themes: i) Career Planning; ii) Performance Anxiety; iii) Becoming a Good Guitarist. The topics were determined based on the answers to questions regarding which subjects the meetings should be about. After identifying the topics, the meetings were discussed again and approved before they were finalized. The priority here has been given to the issues believed to be of primary importance in the education of guitarists in an academic environment but are considered to be insufficiently addressed in the programs. Throughout these sessions, the organization and facilitation of data gathering adhered to a predetermined framework:

Introduction of Topic: The moderator introduced each session's topic, offering a brief overview to establish the context of the discussion.

Perspectives of Scholars and Artists: Scholars and artists were allotted five minutes each to articulate their viewpoints on the designated topic. This segment comprised two rounds, enabling the exchange of multiple perspectives.

Open Discussion: Following the expert perspectives, a 30-minute window was allocated for open discussions. Participants engaged in spontaneous dialogues, sharing their opinions, experiences, and inquiries related to the topic.

Student Interaction: During the final phase of each meeting, the last 20 minutes were designated for student interaction. Students were actively encouraged to partake by posing queries, seeking guidance, and engaging in dynamic exchanges of ideas with scholars, artists, and fellow participants.

The meetings provided an inclusive platform for in-depth deliberations on significant aspects of classical guitar. By involving scholars, artists, and students in an engaging and structured manner, the sessions aspired to cultivate a robust learning environment and stimulate diverse perspectives.

4. Findings

The discussion of the findings are arranged according to the themes that emerged from the analysis.

4.1. Positive and Negative Aspects of Online Activities

Four themes and their respective sub-themes related to the positive and negative aspects of online activities emerged out of the analysis. These themes were easy accessibility; general issues; technology usage; and cost. In general, it is observed that the practicality of participating in the activity and the elimination of distances were highlighted. Participants were observed to engage in communication with guitarists from other countries or cities, free of cost, without leaving the comfort of their homes. The negative aspect touched on participants who experienced internet issues, as an exception, mentioned that

this caused incomprehensibility in sounds. However, it was also noted that this technical issue was not related to the content of the activity.

> *"...organizing an event to bring together participants in this number would have been financially and organizationally burdensome, whereas here, we connected through a screen." P3*

The transition of physical spaces to virtual environments has also necessitated the acquisition of new technology usage skills. In their study, Ünal et al. (2021) cited Oliver who defines readiness for online learning as a framework comprising dimensions related to technological competencies, access to technological tools, technological literacy, and self-regulated learning skills.

4.2. The Contribution of Online Guitar Meetings to Guitarists

Two themes and their respective sub-themes - reaching a larger audience; and sharing - emerged. It was a beneficial experience for the students as esteemed guitarists and scholars/teachers were engaged in conversations and networking during this event. For students, the event offered an opportunity to connect with teachers from different countries or cities and have discussions just a "click" away. The Online Guitar Meeting event, taking place in an open and warm atmosphere where everyone could converse, was observed to contribute to a more intimate and communicative guitar community. It facilitated the introduction and collaboration of individuals practicing the same profession in different countries, fostering connections and cooperation.

> *"I had the opportunity to meet Mr. Participant 1, got his contact information, and we also had a discussion. I hope that we will have collaborations in different projects in the future. This acquaintance was made possible by the online event." P2*

The easy accessibility to the online event has provided significant advantages to participants. As mentioned above, participation in the event was accomplished with a single click from home, within one's comfort zone. According to Boyacıoğlu (2020), the transition from physical to virtual spaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic has elevated new media tools to the primary means of communication, leading to both financial and psychological ease compared to in-person meetings.

4.3. Similarities and Differences Between Online and Face-to-Face Activities

Four themes and their respective sub-themes - lack of differences; live performances; accessibility and cost; and technological issues - emerged. The analysis revealed that generally, online and face-to-face activities have similar effects on participants; hence there were no perceived differences. However, in responses related to content, participants emphasized that under the umbrella of online activities, the "Online Guitar Chats" event was perceived to be more practical and effective than face-to-face events in terms of environment and accessibility. Activities such as concerts, masterclasses, and workshops, which require active participation, were found to be more advantageous in face-to-face events. Due to potential

connectivity issues leading to disruptions, online activities were perceived as being unable to fully replace face-to-face events for activities demanding active involvement.

> *"In online meetings, discussions about music tend to take a more prominent role, while live music-making activities can be more limited compared to in-person gatherings." P5*

4.4. Experiences that Influence Participants

Four themes and their respective sub-themes - questions and answers; life stories; freedom of expression; and the birth of an idea - emerged. The intended purpose of the Online Guitar Meetings aimed for all participants to share their experiences with each other and gain insights from these experiences, was achieved. The objective of providing awareness of positive and negative aspects that young participants may encounter along their career paths through the shared experiences of invited experienced instructors and artists have proven to be invaluable and motivational as perceived by the student participants who were observed to have connected with and benefited from the invited experienced instructors and artists. Additionally, witnessing the challenges experienced by like-minded colleagues has led individuals to realize that they are not psychologically alone.

> *"...hearing the diverse experiences of my guitarist friends, with whom I've gathered countless times, about different subjects on this platform, has greatly impacted me." – P6*

4.5. Benefits Obtained by Participants from the Meetings

Two themes and their respective sub-themes - meeting people, gathering, networking, and knowledge exchange - emerged. In the events, it has been observed that teachers and scholars generally enjoy meeting new people and engaging in conversations, while students benefit from learning new things and gaining experiences. The interaction of various artists, teachers, scholars, and students from different cities/countries in one environment, where everyone mingles and even shares their contact information, serves as an indicator of the event's productivity. Additionally, it was noted that young and promising artists, as well as prospective teachers, find it valuable to hear firsthand about the pros and cons they might encounter in the future. This direct interaction helps address their existing uncertainties. Thanks to these gatherings, young individuals are motivated and informed, enabling them to take more conscious steps towards their future.

> *"I had the opportunity to meet people like P1, P2, P3, and P5, and benefit from their knowledge. As I mentioned, as someone from Cyprus, I greatly enjoyed conversing with the musicians there... I also formed a special friendship with the organisers during this process." P7*
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> *"I learned about new names, improved in guitar music, gained insights into who to listen to, and most importantly, I connected with people I can ask questions to and seek advice from when needed." P11*

4.6. Recommendations of Participants

Three themes and their respective sub-themes - addition of different types of guitars and genres; advertisement of the meeting; duration; and applying fee – emerged. The "Online Guitar Meetings", which overall left participants satisfied, prompted us to seek suggestions for further enhancing the project. It was

recommended to incorporate more activities within the discussions, support the discussed topics with visual aids, and, if necessary, demonstrate or work on the conveyed information or ideas on the instrument. Furthermore, the inclusion of both active and passive participants in the project and corresponding fee structures were mentioned. Using the generated revenue to invite foreign instructors was suggested to foster more acquaintances, communication, and knowledge exchange. With the participation of these instructors, it was proposed to include educators from different guitar disciplines, and even to have joint discussions between classical and jazz guitarists. Finally, constructive recommendations were provided regarding the event's duration. Primarily, imposing time constraints on speakers and adjusting the frequency of the event to once a month instead of every week was recommended.

5. Conclusion

Upon analyzing the perceptions of guitarists, educators, and students regarding online activities as conducted in the "Online Guitar Meetings", it can be concluded that the activities were found to be very practical, useful and convenient in terms of cost and accessibility due to the digital format which removes the elements of travelling time and costs as well as distance. Participants can connect with individuals from distant locations without leaving their comfort zones by simply pressing a button from their homes. On the other hand, the negative aspects of online activities include technological issues such as slow connections, poor microphone usage, and inadequate lighting, which are found to lower the quality of the activities. It must, however, be noted that these results are not due to technical issues related to the content of the activity but are rather exceptions caused by some participants' equipment and/or connectivity-related problems.

It can be concluded that the online activity facilitates the gathering and networking of educators, artists, and students from various cities/countries in an environment where everyone can bond, express their ideas and opinions, share experiences and knowledge, collaborate among fellow educators, and benefit from mentors for students. New friendships and collaborations can take place, and knowledge exchange occurs in the presence of well-known guitarists and educators for mutual benefit and the benefit of students within a single environment. The answers to questions sought by students are shared by experienced figures in this activity, leading to inspiration and motivation for everyone. These experienced individuals can impact participants, particularly the youth, by sharing the challenges they faced in their lives and the adversities they encountered while striving for success.

However, despite the convenience of exchanging ideas from experienced individuals without the need to go anywhere, it must be noted also that such online activities cannot replace topics that require active participation, such as concerts, masterclasses, workshops, etc. Hence, although the online activities such as these have many positive repercussions, it must be accepted that they can never replace face-to-face interaction essential for certain types of teaching-learning activities.

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