

SHORTCOMINGS IN THE ART  
STRUCTURE: AN APPLICATION OF  
VIABLE SYSTEM MODEL

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## Abstract

This article delves into the bureaucratic framework of the art structure in Pakistan, examining the roles of galleries, museums, curators, art historians, critics, and media in shaping and communicating artistic endeavors. It explores how commercial pressures influence art and the complexities of curator-artist relationships within a system often geared towards financial gains. By analyzing the evolving role of curators as intermediaries, the paper highlights the tension between economic interests and the preservation of artistic creativity and integrity. Surveys conducted with various stakeholders, including artists, students, and the general public, reveal divergent perspectives on the commercialization of art. The analysis employs the Viable System Model (VSM) to assess structural deficiencies in communication, coordination, and control within the Pakistani art scene, emphasizing the need for a balanced, collaborative approach to address commercialism's encroachment. Recommendations include establishing a governing guild to represent artists and art curators, fostering horizontal communication, and maintaining a fair balance of power. This study underscores the urgency of reconfiguring the art structure to sustain artistic authenticity and navigate commercial challenges.

In order to understand the art structure's bureaucratic framework one needs to understand its working. Bureaucracy is defined as an organizational framework marked by rules and procedures, hierarchy of authority, specialization and division of labor, separate positions and sitting, highly qualified personnel in there specialized tasks and written communications and records.<sup>1</sup>

This definition allows us to consider the role of the galleries, museums and the curators as the chief part of the art structure that is sourcing the artist's work to the desired audience. While the second part of the of the definition defines a special role for the art historians , writers and the critics who are recording, commenting or communicating to the masses about the art works. Thus this system is working on different levels in the society to cover the art's development, its sourcing, and communication and to cover its financial aspects.

Artists      Galleries / Museums      Curators  
Writers / Art Critics      Media

The role of the art galleries and museums here could be considered as the chief corporate agencies, which are catering between the artist and its audience, in such an international commoditization of art they have been under heavy inspection of academic, corporate, governmental and journalistic sector.<sup>2</sup>

The curator of the gallery here works as an agent for the benefits of the parties, the artist and the gallery (Principal). The curator has to become the one who ensures the principle interests. The concept of curator as a scholarly expert is the old job description of a curator, modern curatorial duties involve him as the guarantor of the artist's point of view, politician's cultural motifs, the gallery and its collection's promotion, bringing economic activity and success to an art work.<sup>3</sup>

The problem lies here where there is contradiction in the approach of the artist and the gallery, when the gallery is acting more as a company, rather than a key part of an art structure.

For any company success it must accomplish its two goals, firstly satisfying customer's needs through identifying, creating and delivering products or services in timely manner and secondly by

selling its products in the rate that is covering their costs and the stakeholder's interest.<sup>4</sup>

The artist's principle interest needs to be guarded here, as when the galleries will act in such manner the only goal for them would be to achieve their financial interests and thus cater the demands of their target groups. Consequently, promoting the work in demand and encouraging in such manner commercialism to art.

The person designated as curator (agent) acts for, on behalf of or as the representative for both and thus he can create a balance between both parties' principle objectives. But often in such a position the curator favors the gallery from where he is gaining maximum advantage rather than the artist.

Gallery or Agency relationship arises between two or more parties (Principal and Agent). The person designated as curator or agent acts for, on behalf of, or as the representative for the other (Principal or the audience or the client), in a particular domain of decision problems. Findings of the study revealed that the solution to the principal's problem implied that the fee-to-act mapping stimulate by the curator or agent if completely known to the principal, then in such a case the principal can asked the agent to perform a particular act. But the problem arises in monitoring the act that the agent chooses.<sup>5</sup>

The curator who is acting as an agent in the art structure may be given a position to explain on behalf of the artist his artwork , yet there is no guarantee as to whose position will he maintain, the artist or the gallery when catering a client.

In the Journal Terry M. Moe (1984, 756) was quoted saying that the Once an Agent(curator) is Hired by the Principal (Gallery or the artist) there is no guarantee on part of the agent (curator) that he will in effect choose to pursue the principal's best interest or to do so efficiently. The curator or the agent in turn has its own interests at back and thus will pursue the principal's objective only to the extent that the incentive structure imposed in the contract renders such behavior advantageous.<sup>6</sup>

The Agents who are the curators in this case are the ones who are supportive to art practices that are tagged with heavy names and are aimed for a larger viewership. There are a few curators who are interested in the real findings of the artist's creativity and conception. They are more concerned with the commercial value and the general interests of their exclusive target groups.

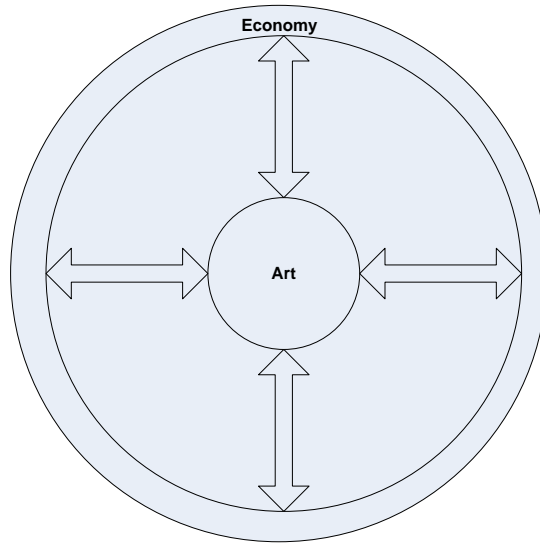
The other important agents that act in this structure are the art critics whose opinion about an artwork adds to its worth or effects the general opinion of the public. This critic is based upon the analysis of the painting and the standards are determined mostly upon the input of intellect and vision inferred in the process of the art piece.<sup>7</sup> Although many personal biases or political interests might tamper the writings of the critics but they are the most liable source in the art structure to provide a balance between the needs of an artist and the galleries.

The most manipulative role played in this structure is that of the media, the newspapers, the media channels, internet and other cyber sources.<sup>8</sup> The whole commercial setup is based upon demand and supply. The artist who is all sold out with higher price range and is accepted by the target groups is mostly appraised or highlighted in the media.

All of these parts are an important part of the art structure but when a part overshadows other, there is Lack of balance and share of power. This happens when the galleries or museums maintain a superior role over the artist fraternity, curators and the writers or critics. This will maintain a more bureaucratic system where the galleries will play as companies and the artist will act as employs that are adhering to the demands of the target group. As a result the insanity generated through commercialism would tarnish the real face of art.

### **Art and Commercialism**

The art galleries being the major link between the artist and the viewer are playing the main role in establishing the chief role in art. The primary interest for these art galleries are based on economical growth of the art sector. This is due to the fact that there are only few art galleries who are supported by the government like the Punjab arts council. The increase in private art galleries has changed the entire structure into a mechanism for gaining economical profits. The galleries are now taking help from other industries and resources in order to popular art in public. Consequently, making art commercial more as a product rather than an expression.



**Figure 1:** Supra structure minimizing the role of art

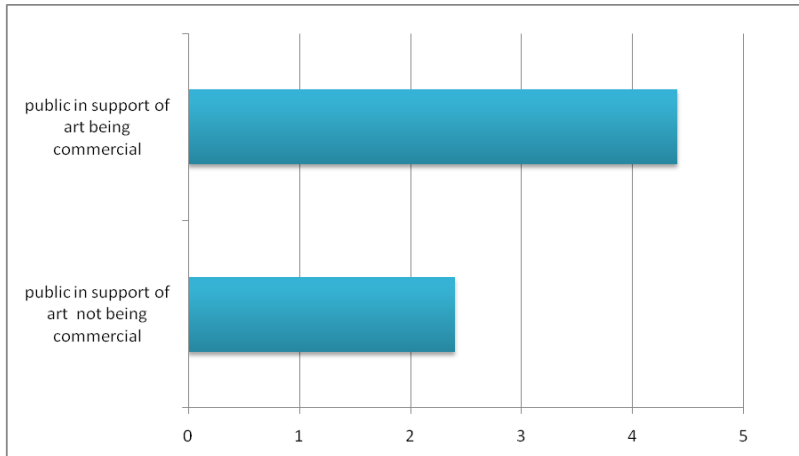
The Economic system is becoming the supra-system of the art structure, minimizing the role of art through smaller sub systems as which media, production, entertainment and politics. For the Art structure the media networks are reducing the value Art which is further justified through the growing demand of the involvement of commercialism by the general population.

But with the growing age of commercialism and artist's name becoming a sales tag, the question rises should art be commercial. If art is commercial it will be more reachable, massively produced and more in demand. Artist these days promote their exhibitions with sponsors, they are tagged with all sold out and promote their work through social websites.

In a survey the same question was raised amongst the following groups and the results were quite contradictory of the artists and the public. These results show how the art in Pakistan is getting rapidly affected through commercialism, in spite of the fact that the artists are not supportive to this commotion.

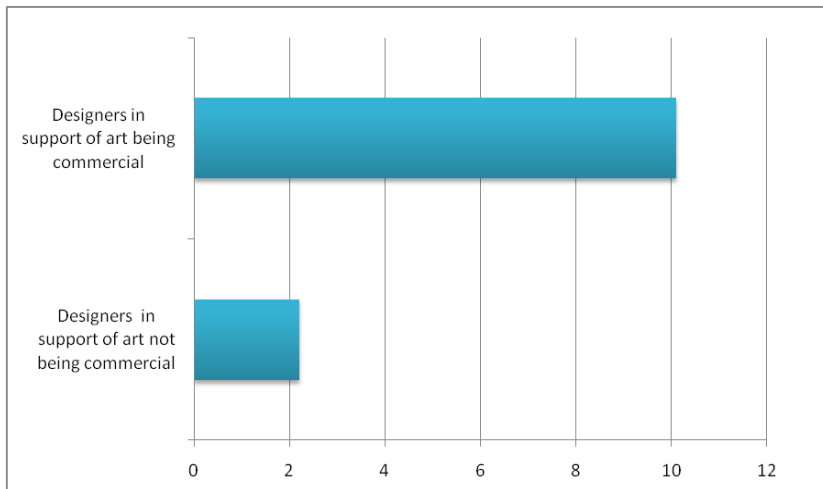
In an exhibition held at a local art gallery Alhamra Arts Council, the following question was raised to the public in the form of a questionnaire. Should Art be Commercial or not?

The majority of the people were in support of art being commercial, as according to them in this manner art in Pakistan could progress and revive in this region.



**Figure 2:** Table depicting the result of the survey conducted amongst public

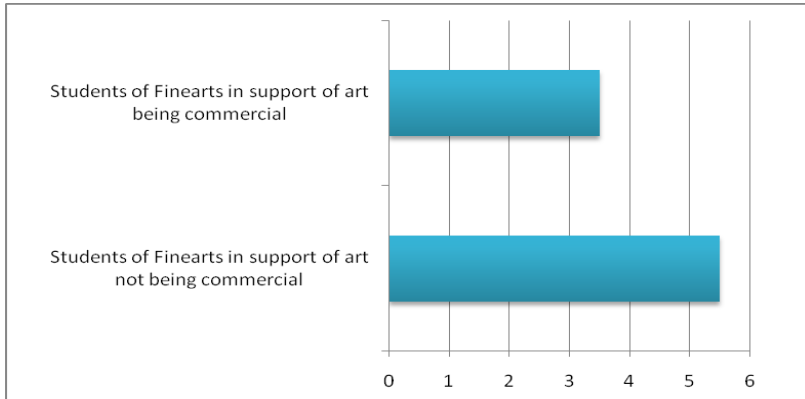
The same survey was conducted at a local Fashion Couture Week that was covering the designed collections of fashion designers from Karachi and Lahore. In the designer's point of view the role of commercialism was considered important in art.



**Figure 3:** Table depicting the results of the survey conducted amongst the designers

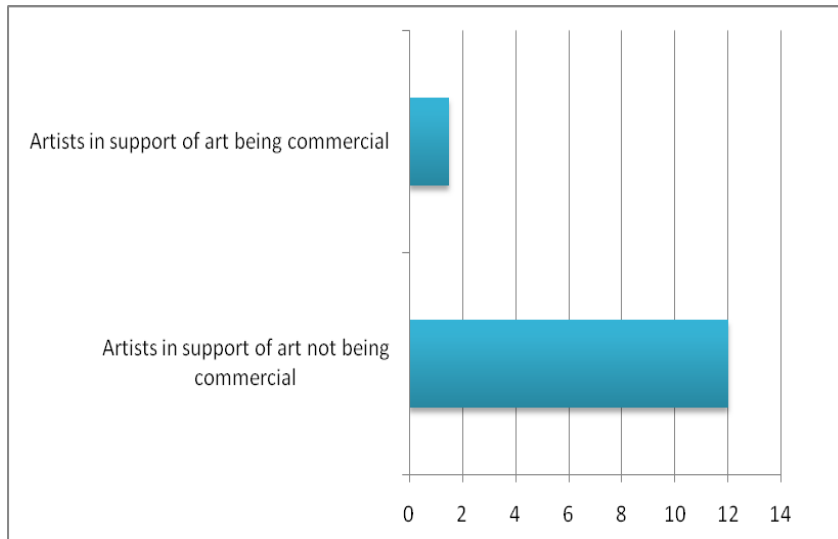
Another survey conducted in the Punjab University, College of Art and Design amongst the students enrolled in the bachelors and master program, showed results that revealed thirty five percent of the students in favor of art being commercial and the other seventy five percent in favor of art not being commercial.

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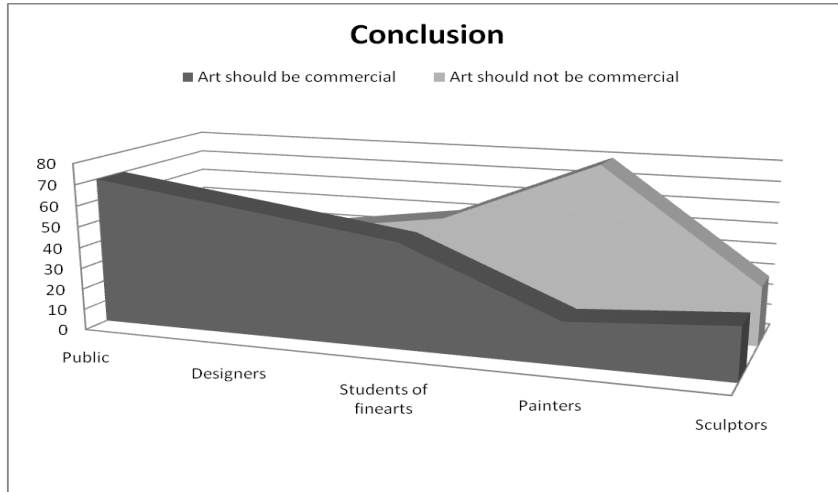
**Figure 4** Table depicting the results of the survey conducted amongst the students of fine arts

Another survey held at the same exhibition in Alhamra showed that the maximum number of artist community was in favor of art not being commercial.



**Figure 5** Table depicting the results of the survey conducted amongst the artists





**Figure 6:** An overview of the total results conducted through this survey

Hence it is proved that true art in Pakistan is shrinking in the overall capacity. The art structure is not only lessening because of its internal weaknesses but also the external pressures specially coming from the rage of commercialism. Technological advancement in media networks such as sharing through social networking has shifted the customers of Pakistani Art to other visual experiences.

### **Vacuity in the Art Structure of Pakistan in light with Viable System Model**

VSM (Viable System Model) proposed by Stafford Beer has mentioned five basic elements for the sustainability of any organization.

System 1 are the systems and the sub systems that the art structure are partially covering as they have an existing setup comprising of finance, operations, development, planning and marketing etc handled by the artists, art historian ,critics, curators, media and the social interests.

But the second stage that is coordination is lacking. As one of the negative aspects of the bureaucratic structure is that communication flow is from top to bottom, not horizontal that is in between cross departments leading to its decline. As they all are catering the same need that is to improve the role of Art in Pakistan, they should all be working from a common forum. A forum could be a platform for discussion and debate where everyone associated from the art circle could participate and bring forward their concerns.

The third system is the controlling body that is unavailable in the present art structure. The major conflict arises when the segregation of duties is not done from a head department. The controlling body monitors the whole systems as well as plays an active role in the communication of the departments. The controlling body has to control and see to it that the artist is not deprived of its much needed free expression and his economic interests are not exploiting by the other bodies intentionally or unintentionally. For this purpose as well as to keep the flow of information in the whole structure a governing body in the form of a guild is needed. A guild should have representatives from the artist fraternity and the art curators who know how to create a balance of power between the art structures and be able to determine the problems and find their solutions. They can coordinate with different art forums to determine problems and find suggestions to resolve conflicts.

The Stage 4 that is the decision making body that is the galleries who should basically be seeing to it that what role commercialism can play within their structure and draw limits to its intervention in the whole structure. Definitely the person who is controlling if also part of decision making may lead to misuse of powers as well as one sided decision making which may be harmful for the organization, so there should be always a fair managerial participation and a democratic behavior maintained within the structure.

The system 5 is the direction i.e. is the artist itself who has to give the vision for the viewer to seek.

### **Conclusion**

Through the analysis of the structure of the Pakistani art we come to a conclusion that the bureaucratic system leads towards inefficiencies resulting in mal practices. The formation of the structure should be a mixture of both vertical and horizontal connectivity as the scenario of the today world has altogether changed. As previously the individual working through galleries and museums was supportable for the artist's true identity, as the systems were less complex but now because of technological advancements causing the systems to interact with each other has added complexity into the systems and thus the whole system has to work together to generate good performance overall. In the scenario of Pakistani art, it is needed to make urgent changes in the board structure as well as to develop a vision so that it could show

good performance in the coming years and to sustain pressures like commercialism in the long run. Further studies are to be made by drafting out a proper board structure for the Art based organization, because of the lack of time and in sufficient information available to my side it was not made.

## Notes and References

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