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Scrolling through culture: Social media, visual communication, and the creative identity of art students in India

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Abstract

Social media has transformed and changed the visual ecology in which emerging artists learn, create and communicate. This shift becomes more complex in India, where art education is equally influenced by its indigenous arts and aesthetics, and the increasingly globalized digital technologies. This study examines social media practices and their impacts on creative identity, cultural expression, and artistic self-efficacy among art students in undergraduate and postgraduate programs from various higher education institutions in India. This study adopted a cross-sectional survey approach, using a structured questionnaire, and a sample of 312 art students from government, private, and university-affiliated institutions across four regional zones in India to identify platform-specific engagement style, perceptions of cultural influence, and associations with creative self-efficacy. Results from multiple linear regression analysis show that indigenous art content in social media ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$), proficiency with digital tools ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$), and frequency of Instagram use ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$) were significant positive predictors of creative self-efficacy. In contrast, perceived pressure to conform to Western aesthetics negatively moderated the above relationship ($\beta = -0.18, p = 0.006$). The results have implications for art education, curriculum developers, and policymakers in the context of India's National Education Policy 2020, which places art education and digital pedagogy at the core of education.

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1. Introduction

Photography and image-making have been profoundly transformed by the proliferation of social media platforms, which have simultaneously become open galleries, informal educational spaces, and professional marketplaces.¹ Platforms such as Instagram, Pinterest, YouTube, and Behance now mediate the process by which young emerging artists negotiate between inherited artistic traditions and globally circulating visual norms.² These platforms are not neutral conduits; they are algorithmic environments that shape which images receive visibility, which aesthetic conventions are amplified, and which creative identities are rendered “legible” in a global visual economy.

In India, this negotiation carries particular significance. Indian art education has

evolved through a diverse historical framework extending from the cave paintings of Bhimbetka to the miniatures of Mughal and Rajput schools, the folk traditions of Madhubani, Pattachitra, and Warli, and the contemporary urban art sphere. Yet, Indian art institutions now operate within a global digital economy in which viral aesthetics, algorithmic amplification, and platform-specific visual grammars determine what is considered visible and successful.³ How art students navigate the tension between indigenous aesthetic memory and enticing global digital trends remains insufficiently studied.

This tension is explicitly acknowledged in India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which foregrounds Art-Integrated Learning across disciplines and emphasizes the preservation of cultural heritage while developing digital competencies.⁴ The National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 further repositioned the arts as a central curricular field (not a peripheral add-on), whose epistemological significance must be foregrounded.⁵ Despite this strong policy direction, there is a dearth of empirical research on the lived realities of Indian art students who simultaneously navigate algorithmically mediated global aesthetics and attempt to sustain culturally rooted creative identities.

This study advances existing literature in three ways. First, it provides the first multi-regional, empirically validated account of social media's effects on creative self-efficacy among Indian art students (a population largely absent from the digital identity literature), which has predominantly focused on Global North or East Asian contexts. Second, it operationalizes algorithmic navigation as a distinct theoretical mechanism through which students strategically engage with platform logics to sustain culturally specific creative practices. Third, it offers quantitative evidence of the moderating effect of Western aesthetic pressure on creative self-efficacy, a relationship that has previously remained largely theoretical in postcolonial digital humanities research.

This study addresses the gap using survey data from 312 art students across four regional zones of India, guided by three research questions:

- (i) Which social media platforms do Indian art students engage with for artistic purposes, and in what ways?
- (ii) How do students perceive social media's influence on their cultural identity and creative practice?
- (iii) What variables predict creative self-efficacy among Indian art students in a social media-saturated environment?

2. Literature review

2.1. Social media, visual culture, and algorithmic curation

Social media platforms function not merely as neutral channels for image sharing but as structuring forces of visual culture. Algorithms are typically optimized to prioritize content that maximizes user engagement, thereby amplifying aesthetics that are internationally recognizable, emotionally immediate, and visually readable.⁶ This algorithmic curation progressively influences what emerging artists observe, internalize, and aspire to. In 2014, Gillespie⁷ argued that algorithms should be understood not as neutral technical processes but as sites of political and cultural power, encoding editorial judgments about what counts as relevant, visible, or valuable. In 2018, Bucher⁸ extended this analysis, demonstrating that platform algorithms operate through "calculated publics" in which users' behaviors are continuously monitored and shaped by the logics of visibility and invisibility.

The consequences of algorithmic curation for diverse artistic traditions are particularly salient. In 2018, Noble⁹ documented how algorithmic systems systematically disadvantage non-dominant cultural expressions, raising important questions about whose aesthetics are amplified at scale. In postcolonial settings, research on Instagram has shown that digital platforms simultaneously enable self-expression and recreate inherited cultural hierarchies, as users navigate between authentic identities and algorithmically prioritized aesthetic frameworks.¹⁰ Research on Gen Z art consumers in Southeast Asia demonstrates that social media exposure to cultural art forms not only raises awareness of diverse traditions but also exerts a gravitational pull toward globally dominant aesthetic registers.¹¹ The phenomenon of "Instagrammable culture" (the curation of visual experiences for social media legibility) has been identified as reshaping younger generations' perceptions of art and aesthetics.^{11,12}

India's large and youthful social media audience makes it a critically important, yet under-studied, context for examining these dynamics. The dominant platforms (e.g., Instagram, YouTube, Pinterest) were not designed with India's rich visual traditions in mind, and the aesthetic grammars they reward (minimalist, globally legible, algorithmically optimized) frequently diverge from the ornate, symbolically dense, and culturally embedded visual languages of Indian folk and classical arts. Understanding how Indian art students navigate this algorithmic landscape is therefore both an educational and a postcolonial concern.

2.2. Digital art education and creative identity

The integration of digital tools and social media into art education has been associated with increases in students' creative self-efficacy, exposure to diverse artistic practices, and digital literacy.¹³ Socially interactive and media-based pedagogical approaches have been shown to shift students from passive engagement with artistic traditions toward active co-production of visual culture, while fostering critical thinking alongside technical skill development.¹⁴ Digital drawing software has been identified as a significant facilitator of artistic skill development in higher education art contexts.¹⁵

However, the relationship between digital platform engagement and creative identity development is not straightforwardly positive. Research on social media use in higher education indicates that, alongside enabling peer feedback, inspiration, and professional networking, these platforms also create aesthetic conformity pressures that can constrain authentic creative exploration.¹⁶ For students whose artistic traditions fall outside dominant Western visual conventions (as is the case for many Indian art forms), these pressures carry postcolonial resonances. Moran¹⁷ argues that creative identity is inherently contextual and socially negotiated; when the social context is algorithmically mediated, the norms encoding creative "success" may systematically favor certain cultural frameworks over others.

The intersection of digital mediation and creative self-efficacy is a key theoretical space for this study. In 2006, building on Bandura's¹⁸ self-efficacy construct, Beghetto¹⁹ demonstrated that creative self-efficacy (a student's belief in their capacity to produce creative work) is influenced by observational learning, peer feedback, and social validation. Social media platforms can facilitate access to all three of these inputs simultaneously, making them significant but complex environments for creative identity formation.

2.3. Art education in India: Policy and practice

Art education in India is characterized by considerable institutional diversity across regions, institution types, and resource levels. The 2024 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization State of the Education Report for India, produced by the Srishti Manipal Institute of Art, Design and Technology, underscored the centrality of arts and culture to holistic educational development, calling for the systematic integration of cultural heritage into curricula alongside creative and critical thinking skills.⁴ This vision aligns with the NEP 2020 mandate for Art-Integrated Learning and the NCF-SE 2023 repositioning of arts as a full-fledged curricular field.

Despite this strong policy thrust, empirical research documenting Indian art students' digital engagement and its implications for creative identity remains scarce. The Indian art market has witnessed substantial growth (auction volumes rising from approximately 2,000 to 3,500 artworks between 2019 and 2023, partly driven by e-auction platforms), yet the relationship between marketplace dynamics, platform visibility, and students' creative identity formation remains undertheorized.²⁰ This study addresses this gap by providing a systematically collected, multi-regional empirical dataset examining these dynamics.

2.4. Algorithmic mediation, postcolonial aesthetics, and platform identity

The intersection between postcolonial identity and digital platform logics has emerged as an important site of inquiry in contemporary media scholarship. Carah and Angus²¹ demonstrate how social media platforms operate as "brand culture" machines, continuously extracting and monetizing user-generated content while encoding corporate aesthetic preferences. For users from non-Western backgrounds, this encoding may contribute to forms of aesthetic hierarchy, rendering certain visual traditions less visible within dominant platform ecosystems.

Postcolonial scholarship has long theorized the ambivalence of cultural contact: neither pure accommodation nor simple resistance, but complex hybridity. Bhabha²² introduced the concept of the "third space" to describe the liminal site of cultural negotiation in which colonial and indigenous logics collide, contest, and recombine to generate new hybrid identities and expressions. Indian art students navigating global social media platforms may be understood as inhabiting such a third space by bringing indigenous aesthetic traditions into contact with algorithmically mediated global visual norms.²³ The qualitative evidence in this study (Section 4.4) suggests that this navigation is not passive but actively strategic, with students developing sophisticated code-switching behaviors to manage multiple aesthetic registers simultaneously.

2.5. Artificial intelligence-mediated digital ecosystems and algorithmic content dynamics

A growing body of research has examined how artificial intelligence (AI) systems mediate content dissemination, visibility, and credibility judgments within digital platforms. Recent studies on AI-driven fake news detection across multi-domain social media contexts—including work on benchmarking active learning techniques for fake news detection²⁴ and supervised classification approaches for COVID-19 misinformation—have illuminated the

mechanisms through which algorithmic systems evaluate, rank, and filter content at scale.^{24,25} While this work originates in computational social science, its implications extend to understanding how all content, including culturally specific creative work, is evaluated and circulated within algorithm-governed platforms.

For art educators and researchers, these findings underscore a critical point: the algorithmic mediation of creative content is not merely an aesthetic question but also a technical and political one. Platforms employ AI systems that may reduce the visibility of niche, culturally specific, or non-mainstream content in favor of content with broader engagement signals. Understanding the architecture of these systems is therefore relevant to postcolonial critiques of platform aesthetics, as it offers a mechanistic account of how Western aesthetic norms are perpetuated through apparently neutral algorithmic processes. Integrating this awareness into art education pedagogy (helping students understand not just “what” algorithms promote but “how” and “why”) represents a pedagogically significant frontier.

2.6. Theoretical framework

This study draws on three interrelated theoretical orientations to explain the multiple layers of social media, visual culture, and creative identity among Indian art students.

The first is Bandura's¹⁸ Social Cognitive Theory and the construct of self-efficacy—a person's confidence in their ability to execute behaviors to achieve specific outcomes. Artistic self-efficacy shapes students' willingness to take creative risks, persevere through challenges, and ultimately form enduring artistic identities. Social media functions simultaneously as an observational learning environment, a feedback system, and a performance space, making it a structurally significant source of self-efficacy information. Positive peer feedback on culturally grounded work, along with exposure to other artists successfully operating within indigenous traditions on digital platforms, constitute vicarious learning pathways through which creative self-efficacy can be established and strengthened.

The second framework is Appadurai's²⁶ theory of global cultural flows and the concept of the mediascape, defined as the globally circulating streams of images and narratives that increasingly shape how people imagine themselves and their cultural worlds. Social media can be understood as a new, algorithmically shaped mediascape in which Indian art students are simultaneously producers and consumers of visual culture. Crucially, this framework draws attention to power asymmetries within these flows: images from Western digital economies may receive greater algorithmic visibility than those rooted in regional Indian traditions,

shaping visibility at scale.

The third framework borrows from postcolonial aesthetics theory, particularly Bhabha's²² concept of the “third space,” where colonizing and indigenous cultural logics intersect, conflict, and fuse to generate new hybrid identities and expressions. Indian art students posting to international social media platforms inhabit precisely such a third space by operating within an aesthetic tradition distinct from that of dominant platforms while being subject to the performance norms of globally dominant visual cultures. This framework enables the theorization of the dual function evident in the qualitative data: social media as a site of emancipatory cultural assertion and, simultaneously, as a mechanism of constraining aesthetic normalization.

These three frameworks collectively suggest that Indian art students in the postcolonial third space negotiate creative identity on social media, with global cultural flows constituting the structural context, creative self-efficacy constituting the psychological mechanism, and algorithmic navigation serving as the enacted response to this structural-psychological tension.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

A cross-sectional, mixed-methods survey design was employed in this study. The study integrated quantitative (e.g., structured questionnaire, descriptive statistics, multiple linear regression) and qualitative (e.g., open-ended survey items, reflexive thematic analysis) strands within a concurrent triangulation framework, in which quantitative findings were enriched and contextualized by qualitative themes. This design was chosen for its capacity to capture both the breadth (across a geographically diverse sample) and the depth (through qualitative responses) of the phenomenon under investigation. An online and paper-based questionnaire in English was developed by the research team and administered via Google Forms or in printed format to participating institutions from January to April 2026. The study received institutional ethical approval, and all participants provided informed written consent prior to participation.

3.2. Sampling and participant selection

A stratified purposive sampling strategy was employed to enhance diversity across institution type (e.g., government arts college, private arts college, university department of fine arts), program level (e.g., undergraduate, postgraduate), and geographic region (e.g., Northern, Southern, Western, and Eastern India). Institutions were identified using the All-India Survey on Higher Education

2021–2022 database and through direct correspondence with regional arts councils and the Indian Fine Arts Society network. This sampling framework was specifically designed to address the known institutional diversity of Indian art education and to avoid the metropolitan and elite-institution bias characteristic of much prior work in this field.

Institutions were selected to represent metropolitan, non-metropolitan urban, and non-urban contexts within each zone. Faculty contacts in fine arts, visual communication, and graphic design departments were approached via official email and provided with participant information sheets and consent forms. Participation was entirely voluntary and no incentives were offered. Of 352 questionnaires distributed, 312 were returned completed and valid (response rate: 88.6%). Forty questionnaires were excluded due to more than 15% missing responses, and four were identified as duplicate submissions through online response verification procedures.

The participants were enrolled in fine arts, visual communication, graphic design, or applied arts programs. Demographic characteristics are reported in [Table 1](#).

3.3. Instrument

The questionnaire comprised four sections:

- (i) Demographic information (eight items).
- (ii) Social media platform use patterns (frequency, purpose, platform type; 12 items).
- (iii) Perceived influence of social media on creative practice and cultural identity (20 items; five-point Likert scale: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).
- (iv) Creative self-efficacy (eight items adapted from Beghetto's¹⁸ Creative Self-Efficacy Scale, contextually validated for Indian art education settings).

Two open-ended items elicited qualitative responses regarding social media's influence on artistic identity and the perceived visibility of Indian art traditions online.

3.3.1. Instrument validation

Content validity of the instrument was established through a structured expert review process. A panel of five subject-matter experts, comprising two art education faculty members with experience in Indian higher education, one specialist in digital visual culture, one educational psychologist, and one practicing artist with an active social media presence who independently reviewed all items for clarity, representativeness, and cultural appropriateness. Items were revised across two rounds of review based on panelist feedback, with particular attention to ensuring that items relating to indigenous art content and Western

aesthetic pressure were culturally specific rather than generic. A content validity index of ≥ 0.80 was used as the acceptance threshold; two items falling below this threshold were revised before finalization.

Table 1. Demographic profile of participants ($n = 312$)

Variable	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	148	47.4
Female	152	48.7
Non-binary/other	12	3.8
Age group (years)		
18–22	134	42.9
23–27	121	38.8
28–35	57	18.3
Institution type		
Government arts college	98	31.4
Private arts college	124	39.7
University department of fine arts	90	28.8
Region		
Northern India	89	28.5
Southern India	84	26.9
Western India	76	24.4
Eastern India	63	20.2

3.3.2. Pilot testing

The revised instrument was pilot-tested with 28 art students from two institutions not included in the main sample (one government college and one private college). Pilot data were used to assess item comprehensibility (via cognitive interviewing), response time, and preliminary internal consistency. Minor linguistic revisions were made to three items based on pilot feedback. The pilot sample was excluded from the main analysis.

3.3.3. Reliability

Internal consistency of the Creative Self-Efficacy subscale in the main sample was $\alpha = 0.84$. Item-total correlations ranged from 0.51 to 0.72, confirming that all items contributed meaningfully to the composite score. The Western aesthetic pressure composite variable was constructed by averaging items C3 and C6 ($r = 0.58$, $p < 0.001$), which was confirmed as loading on a single factor through exploratory factor analysis (eigenvalue = 1.43, 71.5% variance explained).

3.4. Data analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Statistics (version 28, IBM Corporation, USA). Descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations, frequencies) were computed for all variables. Prior to regression analysis, assumptions of normality (visual inspection of Q–Q plots and Shapiro–Wilk tests), homoscedasticity (Breusch–Pagan test), and multicollinearity (variance inflation factor values, ranging from 1.1 to 2.3, well below the conventional threshold of 10) were verified. Multiple linear regression was performed with creative self-efficacy as the dependent variable and five theoretically motivated predictors: (i) Instagram use frequency, (ii) exposure to indigenous art content, (iii) perceived Western aesthetic pressure (reverse-coded), (iv) digital tool proficiency, and (v) peer feedback received online.

For the qualitative strand, open-ended responses were subjected to reflexive thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's²⁷ six-phase framework: familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and write-up. Two researchers coded the data independently before collaborative discussion of emergent themes; inter-rater reliability was $\kappa = 0.81$, indicating strong agreement. A full thematic summary, including theme definitions, code frequencies, and illustrative participant paraphrases, is reported in Table S4.

4. Results

4.1. Social media platform engagement

Table 2 presents platform usage data for artistic purposes. Instagram was the most frequently used platform for artistic purposes (primary use = 71.2%; average daily use = 2.4 h), consistent with its centrality to visual creative communities globally. YouTube was the second most used platform (primary use = 54.8%), primarily for instructional content and process videos. Portfolio-oriented platforms such as Behance and ArtStation were used primarily by 38.5% of participants, indicating an emerging orientation toward professional digital identity management.

4.2. Perceived influence on cultural identity and creative expression

Table 3 presents response distributions for selected key items from the 20-item perceived influence subscale. A majority of the participants (79.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that social media had expanded their awareness of diverse art traditions. Importantly, 68.2% reported incorporating traditional Indian art motifs into their digital work after encountering them on social media, suggesting that participants perceived social media as a source of indigenous cultural reinforcement, not solely as

agents of homogenization. However, 65.7% acknowledged experiencing pressure to conform to globally trending aesthetics to attract followers, and 53.8% reported that Western aesthetic trends on social media influenced their creative choices. These findings reveal a dual pattern: platforms were perceived as enabling cultural discovery while also being associated with pressures toward globally trending aesthetics.

Table 2. Social media platform usage for artistic practice ($n = 312$)

Platform	Primary use (%)	Secondary use (%)	Never used (%)	Average daily use (h)
Instagram	71.2	18.6	10.2	2.4
YouTube	54.8	31.4	13.8	1.8
Pinterest	47.1	34.6	18.3	1.3
Twitter/X	19.2	29.8	51.0	0.7
Facebook	12.5	27.6	59.9	0.5
Behance/ArtStation	38.5	28.2	33.3	0.9

4.3. Predictors of creative self-efficacy

Multiple linear regression was conducted with creative self-efficacy as the dependent variable and five theoretically motivated predictors. The overall model was statistically significant ($F[5, 306] = 71.8, p < 0.001$) and explained 54% of the variance in creative self-efficacy ($R^2 = 0.54$, adjusted $R^2 = 0.53$). Results are presented in Table 4.

Exposure to indigenous art content on social media was the strongest positive predictor of creative self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$), followed by digital tool proficiency ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$), Instagram use frequency ($\beta = 0.29, p < 0.001$), and peer feedback received online ($\beta = 0.20, p = 0.002$). Perceived pressure to conform to Western aesthetics was a significant negative predictor of creative self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.18, p = 0.006$), even after controlling for the other variables, indicating that this pressure was independently associated with lower creative self-efficacy.

4.4. Qualitative themes

Thematic analysis of open-ended responses ($\kappa = 0.81$) yielded three core themes (full thematic summary in Table S4).

4.4.1. Theme 1: Cultural pride and digital visibility

Students described how social media provided opportunities for previously marginalized Indian cultural expressions (particularly from tribal and folk communities) to reach international audiences through informal digital channels.

Table 3. Perceived impact of social media on artistic practice and cultural identity ($n = 312$)

Statement	Strongly agree (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree/strongly disagree (%)
Social media has expanded my exposure to diverse artistic traditions	41.3	38.5	12.2	8.0
I have incorporated traditional Indian art motifs into my digital work after seeing them on social media	28.8	39.4	19.9	11.9
Western aesthetic trends on social media dominate my creative choices	22.1	31.7	27.6	18.6
Social media platforms have helped me monetize or promote my art professionally	34.6	33.7	18.9	12.8
My cultural identity as an Indian artist feels more visible through social media	31.1	40.7	17.0	11.2
I feel pressure to conform to globally trending aesthetics to gain more followers	27.6	38.1	21.5	12.8
Social media has improved my technical skills in digital art tools (e.g., Procreate, Adobe)	39.4	36.5	14.1	10.0

Table 4. Multiple linear regression: Predictors of creative self-efficacy ($n = 312$)

Predictor variable	B	Standard error	β	t	p
Creative self-efficacy	1.24	0.18	–	6.89	<0.001
Instagram use frequency	0.31	0.07	0.29	4.43	<0.001
Exposure to indigenous art content	0.44	0.09	0.38	4.89	<0.001
Western aesthetic pressure (reverse-coded)	–0.22	0.08	–0.18	–2.75	0.006
Digital tool proficiency	0.38	0.08	0.33	4.75	<0.001
Peer feedback received online	0.19	0.06	0.20	3.17	0.002

Notes: $R^2 = 0.54$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.53$; $F(5, 306) = 71.8$; $p < 0.01$.

Participants noted that posting culturally grounded work online generated more engagement from international audiences than formal metropolitan exhibitions, suggesting that participants perceived platform-based distribution as providing broader visibility for non-mainstream artistic traditions. This theme was present in 58.7% of responses.

4.4.2. Theme 2: Aesthetic tension and the algorithm

A second, closely related theme (67.6% of responses) captured the experienced conflict between platform-rewarded aesthetics (characterized as minimalist, globally legible, and visually immediate) and the ornate, narrative-dense, symbolically complex visual traditions central to Indian art education. Many participants reported actively code-switching between creative registers: producing culturally specific work for smaller, more culturally resonant audiences while creating algorithm-friendly content to maximize reach and follower growth. This practice of dual aesthetic management points to a sophisticated, if

psychologically demanding, form of platform navigation.

4.4.3. Theme 3: Social media as an informal art education resource

The third theme (62.8% of responses) reflects the pedagogical role students ascribed to digital platforms. YouTube tutorials, Instagram process videos, and Pinterest mood boards were described as supplementary (and in some cases primary) sources of art education, particularly in institutions with limited specialist faculty or insufficient digital equipment. This finding points to the uneven distribution of formal art education resources across India and the compensatory but unequally accessed role of informal digital learning.

5. Discussion

This study examined social media's influence on creative identity, cultural expression, and self-efficacy among Indian art students, integrating social cognitive theory,

Appadurai's²⁶ mediascape framework, and Bhabha's²² postcolonial third-space theory within a single empirical investigation. The findings collectively resist both technological determinism and cultural homogenization narratives, revealing a more differentiated and contextually specific picture.

The most theoretically significant finding is that exposure to indigenous art content on social media demonstrated the largest standardized positive association with creative self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$). Within Bandura's¹⁸ social cognitive framework, this relationship is interpretable through vicarious learning: when students encounter practicing artists successfully operating within indigenous traditions in digital contexts, this witnessing function (particularly important given the historical marginalization of folk and tribal art forms within some formal institutional contexts) provides vicarious models that may strengthen students' confidence in their own culturally grounded creative capacities. Critically, indigenous art visibility on platforms is not merely a matter of cultural preservation; it may represent a psychological input associated with students' creative self-efficacy. This finding has clear pedagogical implications: deliberate curation of indigenous art content within students' digital learning environments may function as an efficacy-building intervention.

The negative relationship between perceived Western aesthetic pressure and creative self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.18, p = 0.006$) warrants careful theoretical interpretation. Bhabha's²² third-space theory illuminates the complexity of this dynamic: the qualitative data indicate that this pressure is not experienced as simple cultural loss but as an ambivalent negotiation. The "code-switching" strategy reported by many participants (maintaining separate aesthetic registers for algorithm-optimized and culturally authentic content) parallels findings from other postcolonial digital media contexts, including the analysis of Instagram among Indonesian youth, where dual-account management emerged as a coping mechanism for navigating platform-mediated norms.¹⁰ This parallel suggests that aesthetic code-switching may represent a broader postcolonial digital practice, not unique to the Indian context, and merits comparative investigation.

Digital tool proficiency as a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$) raises an equity concern that neither social cognitive theory nor postcolonial theory fully anticipates. Professional-grade creative software (e.g., Procreate, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Photoshop) is not equitably distributed across India's art institutions; government colleges and non-metropolitan institutions may experience comparatively lower access. When tool proficiency is

a predictor of creative self-efficacy, unequal access to tools becomes associated with unequal access to the psychological conditions for creative identity formation. This finding repositions digital infrastructure investment from a merely pedagogical concern to a matter of creative equity.

The pedagogical theme (social media as an informal art education resource) occupies an important theoretical position within all three frameworks simultaneously. From a social cognitive perspective, platforms function as observational learning environments providing modeled behaviors, instructional content, and feedback. From a mediascape perspective, they are environments in which dominant and counter-cultural aesthetic grammars circulate and are absorbed. From a postcolonial perspective, their pedagogical role is structurally ambivalent: they expand access to global art knowledge while potentially facilitating the continued prominence of Western cultural frameworks within that knowledge economy.

Taken together, these findings call for a more nuanced theoretical account of social media in art education than the dichotomy between culture-corrosive and creatively liberating platforms permits. The evidence indicates that outcomes are conditioned not simply by whether students use social media, but by how they use it, with what cultural orientation, institutional support, and access to tools. The concept of algorithmic navigation (as enacted by students through strategic content differentiation, active indigenous content-seeking, and reflexive platform engagement) offers a theoretically productive framework for understanding these conditioned outcomes and represents a contribution to digital culture theory beyond the art education context.

6. Limitations

Several limitations of this study should be considered. First, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias; students may have reported engagement with indigenous art content or conformity pressures differently from their actual experiences. Second, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; the regression predictors are statistical predictors, not established causal antecedents of creative self-efficacy. Third, all items were administered in English, which may have disadvantaged students in non-metropolitan institutions or those with limited English proficiency, potentially introducing language-related response bias. Fourth, confirmatory factor analysis of the full 20-item perceived influence subscale was not conducted due to sample size constraints relative to the number of items; the factor structure of this subscale should be validated in future research with larger samples. Finally, while the

stratified purposive sampling strategy achieved geographic and institutional diversity, the sample cannot be treated as statistically representative of the Indian art student population. Findings should be interpreted as theoretically rich and empirically grounded rather than nationally representative.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations are derived directly from the empirical findings and are organized by stakeholder audience.

- (i) For art educators: Given that exposure to indigenous art content on social media is the strongest predictor of creative self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.38$), educators should deliberately integrate indigenous digital content into studio curricula. Assigning students to engage critically with algorithmic visual norms (examining the cultural assumptions embedded in platform aesthetics and documenting their own connections to indigenous art communities online) would transform passive platform consumption into structured critical pedagogy. Such interventions may target the efficacy-building mechanism identified in this study.
- (ii) For institutional policymakers: The significant predictive relationship between digital tool proficiency and creative self-efficacy ($\beta = 0.33$) indicates that unequal access to professional software may represent a systemic equity problem. NEP 2020 implementation frameworks should prioritize the establishment of digital art labs with current industry-standard software (e.g., Procreate, Adobe Creative Suite) in under-resourced government institutions and non-metropolitan colleges, where access disparities are most acute.
- (iii) For curriculum developers: The dual finding that social media both enables cultural visibility and exerts Western aesthetic pressure suggests a need for formal digital visual culture studies within art teacher training programs. Teachers require conceptual frameworks for leading productive discussions about postcolonial aesthetics, algorithmic governance, and the political economy of platform visibility, topics currently absent from most Indian art teacher training curricula.
- (iv) For platform-engaged art organizations: Given the negative association between Western aesthetic pressure and creative self-efficacy ($\beta = -0.18$), institutional social media accounts operated by arts organizations (e.g., Crafts Council of India, Sangeet Natak Akademi, regional folk-art cooperatives) could function as space that intentionally prioritize culturally grounded content despite dominant platform visibility

dynamics. These accounts can provide the vicarious learning models that Bandura's framework identifies as central to self-efficacy development.

- (v) For research policy bodies: The cross-sectional design of this study limits causal inference. National-level policy bodies should commission longitudinal studies tracking how students' platform engagement patterns, cultural identity, and creative self-efficacy co-evolve across the duration of their art education programs, generating evidence to support dynamic, responsive curriculum reform aligned with NCF-SE 2023 goals.

8. Conclusion

This study contributes an empirically grounded, theoretically integrated account of the complex relationships between social media engagement, cultural identity, and creative self-efficacy among Indian art students. Social media functions simultaneously as a democratizing archive of indigenous cultural heritage, an informal pedagogical infrastructure, a professional marketplace, and a normative aesthetic environment in which culturally specific expression may be constrained. The finding that indigenous art content exposure is the strongest predictor of creative self-efficacy (more powerful than platform frequency, digital tool proficiency, or peer feedback) carries clear implications: strategies that deliberately advance students' digital encounters with their own cultural traditions, through curatorial institutional practice, faculty social media advocacy, and curricular integration of digital visual culture analysis may represent potentially valuable approaches for supporting creative self-efficacy in algorithmically mediated learning environments.

India art education is currently undergoing substantial policy and technological transformation. The NEP 2020 and NCF-SE 2023 have articulated a vision of art education that is simultaneously culturally sustaining and digitally fluent. Realizing this vision requires empirical grounding in students' actual digital experiences, cultural negotiations, and creative development. This study provides a foundational contribution toward that understanding.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Author contributions

This is a single-authored article.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Formal institutional ethics approval was obtained from the Research and Development Department and the School of Media Studies at Presidency University in Bengaluru, India, in December 2025. Written informed consent was obtained digitally from all participants prior to data collection.

Consent for publication

Written informed consent to publish this article was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Availability of data

The data are not publicly available due to ethical and privacy concerns, as participants did not consent for public data sharing.

Further disclosure

The author used Grammarly for proofreading and language correction only. The substantive content of this paper (including the literature review, theoretical framework, and all scholarly arguments) was authored entirely by the researcher. The author reviewed all content and takes full responsibility for the integrity of the published work.

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