



REVIEW OF RESEARCH

ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.7631 (UIF)

VOLUME - 15 | ISSUE - 4 | JANUARY - 2026



SOCIAL MEDIA AND INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC IMPACT, BENEFITS, CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the impact of social media on Indian Classical Music, while providing the context of impact technology has had on music in past generations. The impact is assessed for different aspects – for the musicians, the listeners and the commercial models.

KEYWORDS: Social Media, Indian Classical Music, musical instruments, microphones, recording, broadcasting, social media platforms, internet, gadgets, learning aides, genres, commercials, purity, benefits, impact.



INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, technological advancements have impacted society and culture directly or indirectly. These changes have been more significant in last 150 years or so, than any time earlier.

Music in general and Indian Classical Music in particular, is no exception to such influence. Here are some prominent technological advancements that had an impact on the music in the past:

- 1. Improvements in musical instruments:** Musical instruments most remarkably the Sitar, Sarod, Flute, Harmonium etc. have improved significantly over the years. These were due to innovations by artists and instrument makers and availability of better materials and technology. These changes in turn impacted the artistic creativity as well. Flute, as an example, was elevated to a classical instrument from being a folk one, after the tonal quality and accuracy improved with the longer flute. Sitar and Sarod went through several changes that added to the richness of the sound and resulted in evolving of the playing techniques.
- 2. Microphone and loudspeakers:** Before this technology music could only be heard in small gatherings where human voice could reach. Singers developed skills to enhance their voice to reach the end of a large hall. Even with this, the number of people who could listen to music at any given point in time remained small. The advent of loudspeakers changed that – music could now be heard in gatherings of thousands of people. Concerts became bigger, artistes were able to reach a much bigger audience. There was also an impact on the artistry – subtleties which were earlier difficult to convey could now reach the audience even if the original music was produced at a low volume especially on instruments such as the sitar and santoor. Occasions such as Ganesh festival and Durga Puja used this technology to popularize the classical music much beyond its earlier reach.
- 3. Recording of music:** Starting with the gramophones and then evolving up to the cassettes and CDs recordings had a profound impact on music. On one side it improved the quality through well

designed recording studios and on the other it made music available anytime. One only needed a record, cassette or CD and the corresponding player to listen to anything anytime and later anywhere. It also helped to preserve the artistry beyond the lifetime of any individual, thus making available to the next generations the best of the tradition.

- 4. Broadcasting of music:** This started with the radio and evolved into cinema, television and finally the internet. It gave the music an even wider reach and a much bigger audience. Prior to the broadcasting technologies, Indian classical music was available only to the elites – the kings, maharajas and the wealthy zamindars or businessman. For the common man access to music was through religious and folk music. Broadcasting technologies took recorded music of great musicians to every household.

The internet further added several social media platforms in last two decades which expanded their reach very rapidly. This is a huge development which has influenced several aspects of our personal and social life. Music also couldn't be unaffected by these. Several platforms dedicated to music came up and in a very quick time reached out to a population that far exceeded any previous channels. These were aided by development of gadgets designed for consumption of music – iPOD, smart phones, tablets, USB storage devices, earphones, high quality headphones, portable speakers and finally high-end music systems and auditoriums.

The leading platforms currently are – YouTube, Spotify, Amazon music, Apple music, Pandora, Sound Cloud and various internet-based radio channels.

Every stakeholder in the world of music – the listeners, the students, teachers and finally the performing artistes have been profoundly impacted by the advent of Social Media. It has also impacted the commercial models of music. Here is an attempt to understand and articulate the effect social media has had on classical music through each of these groups.

First of all, the listeners! They without doubt are the biggest beneficiaries of social media platforms. An entire treasure of music which was earlier protected through all kinds of control mechanisms – suddenly opened its riches to a vast population. Almost all recorded music of nearly last 100 years suddenly became available on fingertips – just a click away. A listener could now have access to any music, anytime anywhere – a sea change from a situation of the previous generation where one had to be at a certain place at a certain time to listen to a certain type of music. As an example – to listen to devotional music one had to visit a temple in the evening! While a lot this music is available for free – at least there is no direct price to be paid for the music, the enormous reach of the medium and the exposure it provided to the listeners has eventually expanded the market for music by many folds. More on that later.

Next are the students and teachers – both serious and amateur. Besides the sheer exposure and therefore much better awareness, a lot of content for learning became easily available. The barriers of distance, time and money were removed. In contrast to the time when a student hungry for the knowledge had to wander in search of a Guru, at least basic learning was now available through social media. The teachers also could reach out to students across locations and time limitations thereby allowing them to teach far more students compared to what they could otherwise do.

Learning aids – tutorial sessions, mobile based apps to help teach and practice, electronic musical instruments, recorded lecture demonstrations and structured courses became available. Distance learning – made even more common during the Covid pandemic when all schools and colleges had to switch to online learning – meant that even one on one sessions could now be done across locations.

And finally, the performing artists! Without the doubt – as creators of music - the most important people in any scenario and therefore also in the social media ecosystem. With dramatic expansion in the number of listeners or consumers the need of content also exploded. The already recorded music of thousands of artists over nearly 100 years was simply not enough. So, there was both an opportunity and a medium for the artists to take their music to a much larger audience. And just as for the listeners

and students, the cost for reaching out to this vast audience either reduced drastically or vanished altogether. Anyone with a recording device – smart phone a very basic option or a home studio at a more serious level – could now broadcast to a large audience at no cost. This is far cry from the days when only the very select elite artists would get the opportunity to record and broadcast.

From all the above, the benefits brought to the field of music in general and classical music in particular by the social media backed by several powerful technologies are quite clear.

Are there any adverse effects?

While it may not be called an adverse effect, there is certainly a disruptive change in the commercial models of the music field. At least one major direct source of income for artists - the money from sale of records, cassettes, CDs and consequently the royalty has almost vanished. It is now replaced with a model where social media first helps an artist to reach out to more and more people and become a known name. The next step is to increase the number of listeners and viewers so much that the platform becomes a source of income. YouTube is a good example of this benefit. Finally, the following earned through the social media platforms results in live concert opportunities, concert tours and private concert events. Further lucrative opportunities come from the fields of cinema, television, advertising and corporate sponsorships. Finally – teaching assignments – that have always been a source of steady income remain a very viable option with a much larger number of students to target.

In the end it is certainly worth considering if the changes in technology and the current dominance of social media have impacted the art itself? Has anything changed in the music – if it has, is it for the better? Looking back at the history may provide some indication to this aspect. Artists like Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Ustad Amir Khan, Pandit Bhimsen Joshi and Pandit Ravishankar all came on the scene after some recording and broadcasting technologies had become common in the music world. Did it affect their art? We know that the purity of their music remained unaffected. They however did adapt and experiment with the formats, genre and presentation. Sometimes the renditions became shorter. Performances could be dedicated to a genre such as Gazals, fusion or devotional music besides the traditional formats.

It is fair to expect that the basic tenets of classical music – swar, laya, purity of raga and the inherent spirituality will remain unchanged. Opportunities to be creative will keep coming. One hopes these will make our music richer and more rewarding for the artists, listeners and business partners of music while expanding its reach to much larger number of people both within our country and worldwide.

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