RAISING COVID-19 AWARENESS: STREET ARTIST AS A COMMUNITY PRACTITIONER

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Abstract

Street art can reshape and revitalize communities by giving colour, creativity, and a sense of identity to urban environments, it has the potential to engage viewers, elicit thinking, and inspire discussions on critical social, political, and cultural topics. The purpose of this study is to highlight the importance of street art with anthropomorphic images and the social responsibility of Indian artists during the pandemic in India by using creative art theory. To explores the effectiveness of street art in raising COVID-19 awareness among the Indian population, focusing specifically on the Tamil Nadu district. In addition to analysing existing research on street art and its impact, this study also includes insights from an interview with a street artist actively involved in creating COVID-19 awareness artwork. Creativity is described as the tendency to develop or discover ideas, alternative solutions, or opportunities that may be beneficial in problem-solving, communication with others, and entertainment. Creative approaches to education are focused on the holistic approach to teaching and learning, with the learner becoming a member of a specialized community, integrating the aspects of knowledge, performance, and identity creation. Therefore, street art has been crucial in raising knowledge about the COVID-19 pandemic and has helped to educate the public, promote public health initiatives, and develop a feeling of solidarity in communities all over the world because of its aesthetic impact, accessibility, and capacity to provoke emotions.

Keywords: Anthropomorphism, Awareness, Covid 19, Creative Art Theory, India, Interview

INTRODUCTION

"Street art, which is visual art that usually appears in public places" (Philipps, 2015), is popular around the world because it can bring people together and question social norms. India's street art has a lot of historical and cultural meaning. It shows the country's many customs, political and social areas, and urban settings. In the historical Roots of Indian Street Art, "India has a long history of street art" (Joshi, 2023) that goes back to cave drawings and rock art, which were used to tell stories and show cultural expression. However, street art has changed in India thanks to different artistic and political groups that started in the 20th century. In the case of India, the drive for freedom saw the rise of political murals and graffiti as ways to fight against British rule. Post-independence India's urbanisation and globalisation also made it easier for street art to spread to take back public places and express cultural identities. On the other hand, in the Cultural Influences on Indian Street Art, it "influenced by many different types of culture, such as traditional art styles, religious symbols, and modern pop culture" (Rafferty, 1991). India's street artists often use history and identity in their work, from bright murals of Hindu gods to stencilled pictures of famous people like Mahatma Gandhi. India also has a lot of different regional cultures and languages, which can be seen in the different styles and themes of street art all over the country. The vibrant street art in Mumbai and the detailed wall drawings in Delhi's alleyways show off the country's rich cultural mix.

In the Contemporary Relevance of Indian Street Art: Indian street art has become more well-known and recognisable in recent years, both in India and around the world. Artists are using the medium to make cities look better and to bring attention to important social problems like women's equality, protecting the environment, and urban growth. Furthermore, community projects and street art events have become places where people can talk and work together, giving marginalised groups a feeling of belonging and power. India is still rapidly urbanising and changing its culture, but street art is still a powerful way to express yourself creatively and shows how the Indian character is changing.

The term 'Anthropomorphism' derived from the Greek words "Anthropos" meaning "human" and "morphe" meaning "form," is the desire to give non-human things human feelings, traits, or goals (Shanmugapriya & Christopher, 2023, p. 196). In art, anthropomorphism can look like many things, from gods that look like humans in old myths to cartoon characters in modern cartoons. Empowering nonhuman beings with human traits is a common theme in art from all over the world and throughout history. There are numerous objects that can be anthropomorphized, from literary allegories to religious symbols. A sort of anthropomorphism that can be seen in art is personification, which gives animals, objects, or natural things human-like traits. In the research article "A Qualitative Content Analysis of Violent Representations in Animated Cartoons" researcher examined anthropomorphic animations not only entertain the young minds but also exhibits violence (Kumaravelu & Christopher, 2023). In Greek myths, for example, gods and goddesses often behaved and felt like humans, even though they were holy. In the same way, animals were shown in mediaeval bestiaries with facial emotions and body language that made them seem like people. This was done to teach moral lessons and suggest hidden meanings. While this is true, it has had a big impact on cultural stories and beliefs throughout history. In religious art, realistic depictions of God's help to make gods more like people and help people feel more connected to their spiritual beliefs. In Hinduism, for example, gods and goddesses are often shown with human traits and personalities so that followers can connect to them. In the same way, anthropomorphic figures in folklore and mythology represent cultural values and social rules, teaching people lessons and giving them fun. In advance it can also be used in children television as well.

Anthropomorphism   **Non-anthropomorphism**
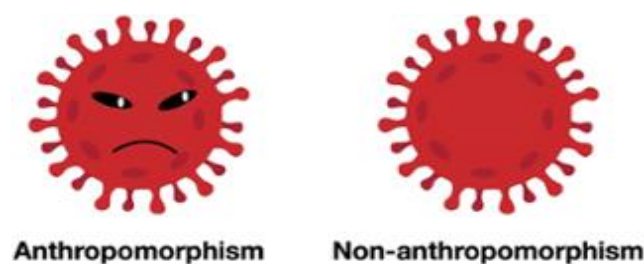
Source: Fig 1 (Xiang & Park, 2023)

"Anthropomorphism is also important for art's visual value" (Wen Wan et al., 2017). Artists can make engaging visual stories that connect with people on a personal and emotional level by giving nonhuman beings human-like traits. Humanoid sculptures and paintings, for example, can use symbolic gestures, facial expressions, and body language to tell complicated stories and portray complex themes. This allows viewers to interact with and understand the art on many levels.

Street art has the unique capacity to reach a wide range of viewers and leave an indelible impact, artists have effectively used their influence to raise COVID-19 knowledge during the Pandemic period in India through anthropomorphic animation because the pandemic has had a tremendous influence on many parts of society, including street art during the pandemic. Murals produced by street artists are vivid and eye-catching, conveying crucial information regarding COVID-19 prevention, etc. These works of "art frequently include messages promoting the use of masks, hand cleanliness, social separation, and vaccination for children, adults, and educated and uneducated people in India" (Hines-Coombs, 2018). The use of bright colours and compelling graphics serves to capture the attention of passers-by while also reinforcing important health principles. Because of the reduction in automotive and pedestrian traffic during lockdowns, street artists have been able to reclaim public areas for COVID-19 awareness art. These artworks turn plain walls and surface into powerful visual reminders of the ongoing pandemic. Street art, by inhabiting these locations, guarantees that COVID-19 awareness is visible and accessible to everybody.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The research paper titled "UK Street Art and the Significance of Masks during the COVID-19 Pandemic, 2020-21" (McEwan et al., 2023)delves into the role of street art in the UK as a medium for documenting changes in mask-wearing behaviors amid the pandemic. It examines how street art portrays masks as symbols of reassurance, protection, and fear, reflecting their significance in public health and risk management. The paper argues that pandemic-themed street art contributes to public discourse by expressing emotions, concerns, and societal meanings associated with disease control measures. Through visual representation, street art communicates the nuanced politics, cultural symbolism, and social dynamics surrounding the use of masks during the pandemic.

The research paper titled "THIS TOO SHALL PASS: Urban Interactions, Artistic Interventions, and New Visions in Public Space" (Feron & Marsili, n.d.) Explores the impact of a health crisis on urban public spaces. It examines how cities underwent a transformation, with empty streets, reduced interactions, and diminished awareness of surroundings. The paper highlights the significant reorganization of urban spaces and the need to rethink their purpose and potential. It discusses the role of artistic interventions in reshaping public spaces and inspiring new perspectives for the future. The article argues that these interventions not only reflect the current state of cities but also offer alternative narratives and possibilities for urban life. It emphasizes the importance of urban interactions and artistic interventions in navigating crises and envisioning transformative futures.

The research under the titled "Covid-19 Murals: Autocritical Messages from Society in the Public Sphere" (Haryono, 2022)examines the prevalence of Covid-19 mural art in Jakarta, Indonesia. It investigates how these murals convey profound messages and criticisms aimed at raising public awareness of societal responsibilities in combating the spread of Covid-19. The murals serve as more than just artistic expressions; they represent a form of autocritique, reflecting on people's attitudes and behaviors towards the pandemic. Through harsh criticisms and socially conscious themes, the creators communicate messages that highlight the public's underestimation of the virus and advocate for responsible attitudes and behaviors. Using Roland Barthes' semiotic

method, the study analyzes the symbolic meanings embedded in these murals, linking them to societal myths and narratives. Ultimately, the paper concludes that Covid-19 murals function as a potent tool for conveying societal concerns and criticisms within the public sphere.

The research article titled "Graffiti Art During the Covid-19 Pandemic Time in India" (Biswas, n.d.) Explores the emergence of graffiti art as a response to the pandemic. It examines how artists utilized graffiti to raise public awareness about Covid-19 and critique societal attitudes. The study highlights the social responsibility of artists and the effectiveness of graffiti art in engaging with the public. Additionally, it traces the lineage of graffiti art to India's mural painting tradition. The paper concludes that graffiti art serves as a powerful means of communicating societal concerns and criticisms within the public sphere.

The research article titled "Colonial Virus? Creative Arts and Public Understanding of COVID-19 in Ghana" (de-Graft Aikins, 2020) examines how Ghana's creative arts communities responded to the pandemic. It focuses on various art forms such as comedy, music, textile designs, and murals created during the initial months of the pandemic. These artistic expressions served as both health promotion tools and means of enhancing environmental aesthetics. Additionally, they served to commemorate the pandemic while emotionally connecting with the public and raising social awareness. Some artists also used their work to critique socio-political issues, advocating for social protection for marginalized communities and questioning the origins of COVID-19 and vaccination programs. Yet, no academic research has done research based on covid-19 and anthropomorphism in Indian street art

Objective of the study

1) To examine the Influence of Anthropomorphism in Street Art

2) To investigative the Impact of Anthropomorphism on Portraying COVID-19 Themes in Indian Street Art

Research questions

1) How does the utilization of anthropomorphism influence the portrayal of COVID-19 themes in Indian street art?

2) Are street artists considered community practitioners?

METHODOLOGY

Through a combination of qualitative analysis of interview data and a review of the literature, this study uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate COVID-19 awareness through street art in India. An interview was held with a street artist residing in the area who is well-known for his COVID-19 awareness artwork. The interview questions centred on the artist's inspiration, method of creation, reaction from the public, and estimation of the work's influence**.**

Creative approaches to teaching and learning

Researcher applied qualitative research method by applying Creative approach to explain the anthropomorphism influence the portrayal of COVID-19 themes in Indian street art. Indian artists during the pandemic in India by using creative art theory. Creativity is described as the tendency to develop or discover ideas, alternative

solutions, or opportunities that may be beneficial in problem-solving, communication with others, and entertainment. "Creative approaches to education" (Sale, 2015) are focused on the holistic approach to teaching and learning, with the learner becoming a member of a specialized community, integrating the aspects of knowledge, performance, and identity creation. The production of graffiti artworks, which typically occurs in a legally ambiguous space, became even more perilous with the implementation of lockdown measures in several nations. The unique circumstances, accompanied by heightened police monitoring, have resulted in technological adaptations, including a rise in the production of artworks utilising the stencil method. This technique involves applying ink or paint via perforations formed in cardboard or metal onto the intended surface for decoration. Another prevalent method that has seen a rise in usage during lockdown periods is the wheat paste poster. This involves creating a painting on paper in the studio and then quickly adhering the poster onto the required surface at the installation location.

DISCUSSION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound effect on numerous facets of Indian society. Particularly for marginalised communities, lockdown measures and movement restrictions have caused widespread employment losses, economic hardship, and disruptions in access to essential services. Moreover, the ongoing pandemic has brought to light pre-existing deficiencies and susceptibilities within India's healthcare infrastructure, thereby emphasising systemic inequities. The initial Covid-19 inspired artworks also tended to focus on the pandemic's most visible components, such as the facemasks, resulting in an overflow of masked celebrities, cartoon figures, and pop icons. However, as the epidemic became more serious and socio-politically complex, the iconographic repertoire expanded exponentially, resulting in the emergence of a distinct and entirely new visual programme inspired by science, popular culture, and social media, and fed by superheroes, politicians, and film characters. An intriguing subtopic has been the depiction of how the sanitary emergency has revealed our most primal human flaws. Each country's mitigation methods and the impact of the virus on the population may have differed. The epidemic has caused worry, anxiety, and dissatisfaction in individuals worldwide, leading to similar behaviours. Street painters have quickly captured some of our most intense emotions, sometimes with compassion, sometimes with rage, and sometimes with laughter.

Reflections in Street Art:

In response to the "difficulties posed by the COVID-19 pandemic" (Batubara, 2021), street artists in India have produced thought-provoking and moving works of art that mirror the struggles and collective experiences of communities throughout the nation. Street art, encompassing murals that exalt frontline healthcare professionals as champions and graffiti that advocates for social distancing and mask-wearing, has functioned as a visual conduit through which support for vulnerable populations has been mobilised, solidarity has been promoted, and awareness has been raised. Furthermore, street art has served as a medium through which the voices of the marginalised could be amplified, advocating for social justice, equitable access to resources, and other pertinent concerns.

Covid-19 and Street Art

An exemplary instance of "COVID-19 street art in India is the "Mask Up" (Sabnani, 2022) initiative, characterised by vivid murals and graffiti that advocate for the adoption of mask-wearing and "social distancing measures in public areas" (Kim, 2020). Furthermore, in an effort to honour frontline healthcare professionals and essential personnel who have put their lives at risk to combat the pandemic, artists have produced works of art (The Times of India, 2020). In addition, street art has been employed as a means to bring attention to mental health concerns and the psychological repercussions that the pandemic has had on communities and individuals (The Hindu, 2020).

(Fig 2): Kerala

(Fig 3): Tamil Nadu

Fig 2 & 3 are the example of anthropomorphised corona virus (*Coronavirus Street Art Photography in Tamilnadu - Google Search*, n.d.). A Graffiti mural (fig.2 and 3) depicting viruses on the road and walls of India. It is a huge size mural and artist showing the deadliest virus in cartoonish language.

Promoting Awareness:

In addition to providing information, this kind of art also engage and motivate local populations to take proactive steps to stop the virus's spread. Apart from endorsing preventative measures, street art has been essential in advancing immunisation campaigns. All things considered, street art is an engaging and open medium for spreading vital health information and encouraging community involvement in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Fig 4

In Kolkata, India, a guy finishes off a piece of graffiti that depicts a vaccination amid the coronavirus disease (Covid-19) outbreak (*India's Vaccine Jabs May Start next Week*, 2021). Graffiti and murals by artists have been produced to honour healthcare professionals, emphasise the value of immunisation, and motivate communities to get immunised. Using vivid colours, striking images, and culturally significant symbols, street art draws onlookers attention and initiates discussions around public health campaigns.

Street artists a community practitioner

"Community practitioners, or street artists, shape the urban landscape with their bright and thought-provoking art. Public areas are their canvas, turning commonplace walls and abandoned nooks into strong artistic and social commentary. street art's many uses for community participation, empowerment, and good change" (Viranjan, 2021). Street art encourages artist-community engagement across boundaries.

Locals participate in community-driven street art initiatives. They give their neighbourhoods ownership and dignity via ideas, brushstrokes, and enthusiasm. Community members learn about creative expression and art's transformational power by engaging with artists. Collaborations bridge barriers and develop communal ties beyond art. Blank walls become canvases, and decrepit structures become bright outdoor galleries. St. Art transforms abandoned public places into beautiful storytelling.

Community spaces become pieces of art as murals and graffiti appear. This visible change gives the neighbourhood pride. "Residents relate to these colourful paintings' stories as they pass by. Street art also deters vandalism and makes cities safer and friendlier. Street art broadcasts societal commentary.

Art addresses injustice, discrimination, environmental difficulties, and human rights. Visual expressions like murals and graffiti spark debates and thought. Passersby connect with thought-provoking artworks' messages. Street art lets communities speak out for change and challenge the existing quo. It shows that art inspires conversation and action, not simply beauty" (2020).

Street art lets marginalised people tell their tales. Art gives voice to the voiceless. Street artists bring together varied themes about cultural history, personal challenges, and future hopes. Visual narratives celebrate persistence and become part of cultural

memory. Street art promotes inclusion and compassion by strengthening marginalised voices. Street artists inspire communities through creativity. Their art inspires us to explore deeper, interact with our surroundings, and imagine a more vivid and connected world. On the streets decorated with their works, we join a wider discourse that celebrates diversity, questions norms, and stimulates good change.

Interview

The street artists conversation provided insights into their creative process and the function of street art in raising awareness about COVID-19 in Tamil Nadu. Throughout the epidemic, the artist conveyed a strong sense of social duty and a desire to improve their society. They talked about how they come up with ideas for visually striking artwork, do pertinent research, and then place it in public areas that the community uses frequently.

The artist reports that their COVID-19 awareness artwork has received a resoundingly good reception. Numerous community members have joined in discussions on the pandemic and preventive measures, as well as expressing gratitude for the project.

The artworks operate as discussion openers, encouraging people to consider their actions and take preventative measures to keep others and themselves safe from the virus. The artist also underlined how crucial cultural relevance is while creating street art to raise awareness about Covid-19.

They clarified that adding linguistic and cultural components from Tamil culture increases the artwork's accessibility and relatability to the community. By traditional patterns and symbols, the artist hopes to close the gap between cultural identity and public health messaging.

We performed in-depth interviews with a variety of artists engaged in the street art project to document the narrative behind the wall murals. In addition to looking into how street art has affected Tamil Nadu, this is also a retrospective of earlier work done to extract some important lessons that may be used to the street art project going forward. Six individuals are involved in the interviews, as indicated in Table 1. The following subsections include an analysis and categorization of the interview findings.

S.no	Name	Character Design	COVID 19 paintings
1	Santha Moorthi. S	Cultural Unity (Religion)	20
2	Munisami. T	Political leaders	35
3	Kanna Perumal. G	Kollywood stars (actors)	10
4	Velmurugan. J	Local artist	15
5	Govinda swami. k	Political leaders	35
6	Kappen. S	Mural artist	30

Note: The interviews with the artist were conducted in Tamil, their native language. However, to ensure better comprehension, the researcher translated the recordings into English.

Mr. Santha Moorthi

➢ Can you describe your COVID-19 street art experience?

➢ Why was your character design about religion and cultural unity?

➢ Do your artworks raise COVID-19 awareness or address issues?

➢ Did you confront any obstacles while creating these works?

➢ Have you received any community comments on your paintings?

Answers: 1. The COVID-19 street art project was very enlightening, promoting cultural unification and religious peace via character designs. 2. My character design was inspired by my concept of unity in difference, especially during crises like the COVID-19 epidemic. 3. My artworks promote unity and understanding across cultures and religions to raise awareness about Covid-19. 4. I struggled to appropriately reflect numerous cultural symbols and make these artworks accessible. 5. My paintings message of solidarity and resilience in difficult times has been well received by the community.

Mr. T. Munisami

➢ Why does your COVID-19 artwork feature political leaders?

➢ What messages or ideas did you want to communicate through your art?

➢ How may street art affect public opinion on social and political concerns like the pandemic?

➢ Were there any special hurdles or impediments on this project?

➢ Have you seen any public reactions to your paintings?

Answers: 1. My COVID-19 paintings represent political figures to emphasise their role and responsibilities during the epidemic. 2. My artwork conveyed accountability, leadership, and COVID-19 prevention through group action. 3. For social and political topics like the pandemic, street art may start debates and change public opinion. 4. Navigating political sensitivities in art was difficult for this endeavour. 5. My artworks have sparked questions about political leadership and epidemic response.

Mr. G. Kanna Perumal

➢ In your COVID-19 paintings, how did you depict Kollywood actors?

➢ What is your take on these pandemic numbers?

➢ How does your art contribute to the COVID-19 and entertainment industry dialogue?

➢ Were there any noteworthy moments when painting these?

➢ What do you think your art does to spread COVID-19 awareness?

Answers: 1. My COVID-19 paintings depict Kollywood stars as icons of perseverance and optimism in the face of challenges. 2. Their creativity and influence encourage and motivate people during the epidemic. 3. My art addresses COVID-19 by showing how entertainment may comfort and distract. 4. The community and support from other artists and fans made these works memorable. 5. I judge my art by how it affects audiences emotionally and how it provokes debates about COVID-19 and the entertainment business.

Mr. J. Velmurugan

➢ As a local artist, how do you address community concerns like COVID-19 using art?

➢ Can you describe your COVID-19 artworks' themes?

➢ What links do you perceive between your art and local epidemic experiences?

> ➢ Did this project provide any unique challenges?

> ➢ Has the local community responded to your paintings?

Answers: 1. As a local artist, I believe my participation in addressing community concerns like COVID-19 via art would promote awareness and solidarity. 2. My COVID-19 paintings focus on community solidarity, resilience, and crisis support for local projects. 3. My painting reflects my local epidemic survivors' trials and successes. 4. I struggled with logistics and representing the community's different experiences in my art. 5. Many locals have thanked you for voicing their sentiments.

Mr. K. Govinda Swami

> ➢ Why does your COVID-19 artwork depict political leaders?

> ➢ How does your art help to pandemic awareness?

> ➢ Please describe the sentiments you wanted to communicate via your artworks.

> ➢ Did you face any challenges while creating these works?

> ➢ Have you seen any noteworthy audience reactions to your paintings?

Answers: 1. My COVID-19 paintings emphasise political leaders' influence on pandemic response tactics and policies. 2. My artwork criticises leadership actions and promotes responsibility to raise pandemic awareness. 3. My paintings emphasise honest communication, evidence-based policymaking, and crisis resource allocation. 4. Navigating political messaging and artistic integrity were challenges throughout the construction of these pieces. 5. Audience reactions range from critical engagement with the political concerns to appreciation of the artwork's boldness and relevancy.

Mr. S. Kappen

> ➢ What is your technique to making large-scale COVID-19 murals?

> ➢ Which topics or thoughts inspired your COVID-19 paintings?

> ➢ How does your work engage the audience and promote pandemic awareness?

> ➢ Did this project present any unique difficulties or highlights?

> ➢ How does your art affect the community and COVID-19 discourse?

Answers: 1. I include optimism, resilience, and communal solidarity in my large-scale murals about COVID-19. 2. My COVID-19 paintings are about the human spirit's ability to overcome hardship, communal action, and art's healing power. 3. My art fosters empathy and understanding by telling pandemic stories via visual tales. 4. This project was challenging and rewarding due to logistical preparation, community interaction, and seeing my work on public walls. 5. My artwork inspires community discussion, contemplation, and COVID-19 action.

CONCLUSION

Visual representations of outbreaks are very frequent in art history, but this theme and its consequences had never been included in street art until 2020. In their search for inspiration, many street artists initial responses to the crisis rescued mediaeval and early modern iconographies of historical plagues, such as sick people, medical staff, or skeletons: one example is the terrifying bird-like Venetian plague doctor painted by artist Suhaib Attar in his terrace in Amman, Jordan.

Throughout more than a year of grappling with the "Covid-19 epidemic, and following a series of lockdown periods" (Lau et al., 2020), humanity have generated several instances of street art relating to the pandemic, devised a multitude of collective cultural reactions, and innovated various imaginative methods to alleviate loneliness and foster social connections. This article aims to provide a few examples of urban art and culture, highlighting their value as tools for resilience and mental health, political critique, creative expression, and mutual support in challenging times. "Sutham argued that it works well to use street art to establish connections among individuals" (Neves & Bengtsen,n.d.).

The great impacts of public awareness of COVID-19. "Artists can promote behavioural change and convey vital health messages via visually compelling artwork" (Kelly et al., 2024). The graffiti artist's interview yielded valuable insights highlighting the significance of creativity, cultural sensitivity, and community participation while tackling public health issues. In the future, cooperation between street art creators, public health officials, and community organisations can further maximise street art's potential to raise awareness of COVID-19 and build community resilience.

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