

Role of commercialism in the arts and crafts of Pakistan

Khussa as a case study

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to identify the systematic flaws and the role of commercialism involve in the infrastructures dealing with the arts and crafts in Pakistan. As the local working environment in general is not as supportive for the development of artists and craftsmen, as compared to the international arena. One of the major systematic flaws such as communication are needed to be resolved in order to identify the major issues and retain the interests of all the stakeholders involved in the creation, displaying and selling of art valuables and craft pieces. These shortcomings are benefiting the other organizations, like Media, etc. to gain their interests and overshadow the major role of Art and Design in the society. Consequently, the institutions involved to advocate the idea of heritage and art in the society could not deliver effectively. As when the infrastructure involved is adhering to new developments, introducing new mediums, like the role of commercialism in organizing their management and promotional methods, then most of the time they couldn't maintain the balance, due to lack of proper communicational strategies. As a result commercialism in Pakistan has taken over through art domains only to overshadow the interests of the artists and the people struggling to give real meaning to their heritage. On the other hand lack of its effective existence in promoting crafts like Khussa, has deprived it to become a mainstream product. Thus, the underlying problem is not commercialism but the amount of its involvement in the infrastructures related to Art and Design. This problem couldn't be detected due to the present administrative model as the system practiced works from top to bottom. In this paper the weaknesses in the Art structure are identified through the Viable System model VSM, which is a model prescribed by Stafford Beer (1) A set of functions organized through this model ensures the viability of any existing organization. The VSM is founded upon the principles of Cybernetics or system sciences which deal with communication and controlling classifications within the structure from one source to another rather than its distribution in a bureaucratic manner from top to bottom (2). The idea is to strengthen the art structure through this linear communication VSM implied through this model

Introduction

In order to understand the art structure's bureaucratic framework one needs to understand it's 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 (3).

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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 \rightleftarrows Galleries/Museums \rightleftarrows Curators \rightleftarrows Writers/Art Critics \rightleftarrows 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 (4).

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 (5).

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 (6). 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 (7). 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 (8).

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 (9). 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 (10). 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.

Research Methodology

The approach towards this study would be to

- Identify the role of different variables in the art structure working in a bureaucratic manner (communicating from top to bottom), thus the role of economic circulation through this kind of communication.
- Increase in economic pressure and the demand of commercialism in art and design.

- Role of commercialism in Pakistani art culture and responses of different variables involved in its development through quantitative analysis.
- Role and need of commercialism in the development of crafts like *Khussa*.
- Solution proposed through the application of Viable System Approach on the art structure in Pakistan in order to maintain a proper communicational source.

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 economic 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. 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. 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. 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

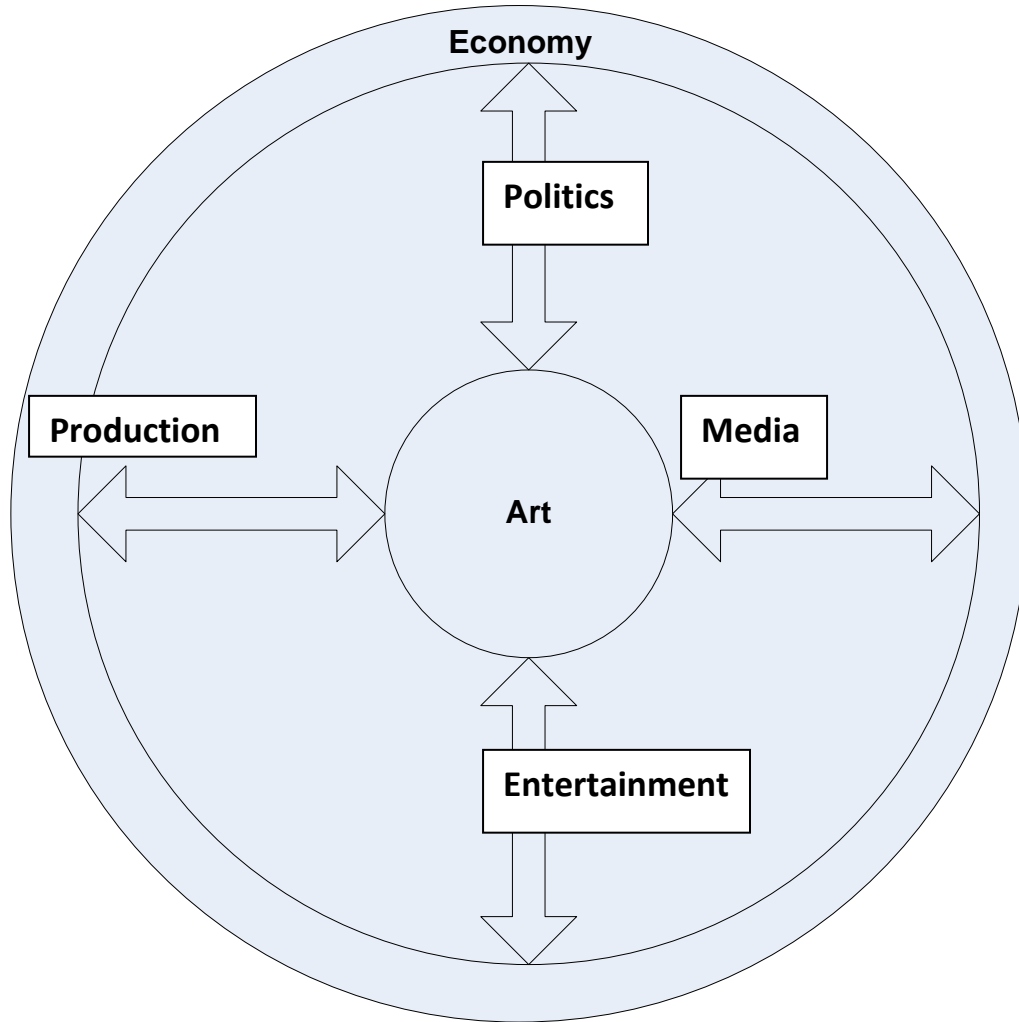


Figure 1 Supra structure minimizing the role of art

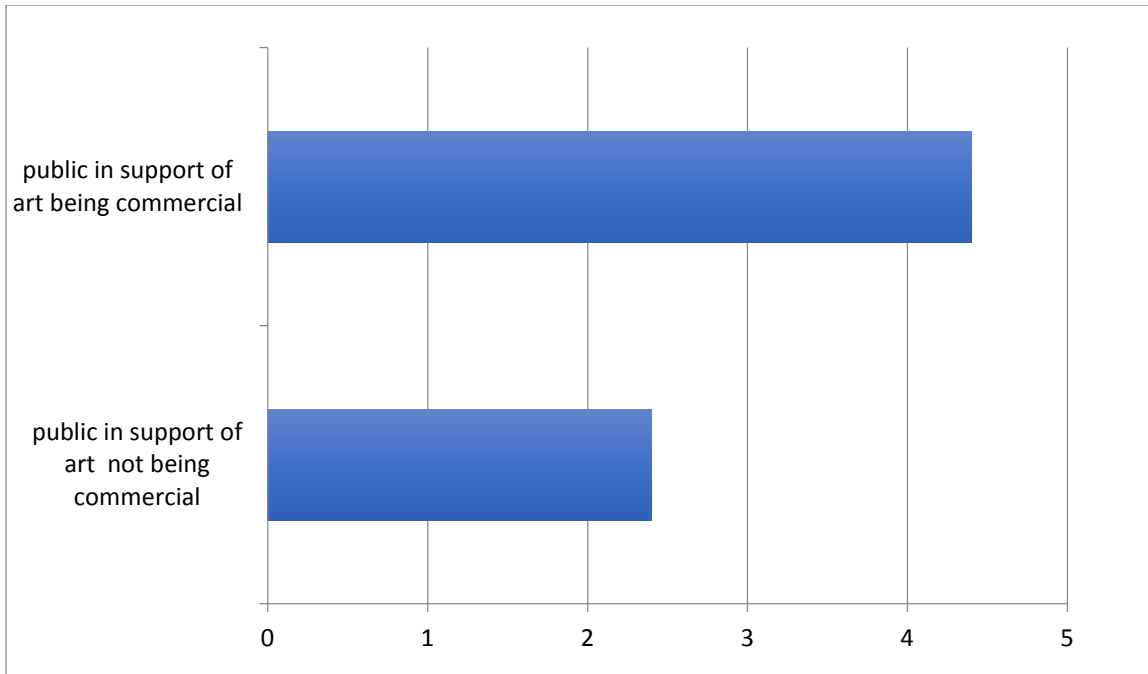


Figure 2: Table depicting the result of the survey conducted amongst public

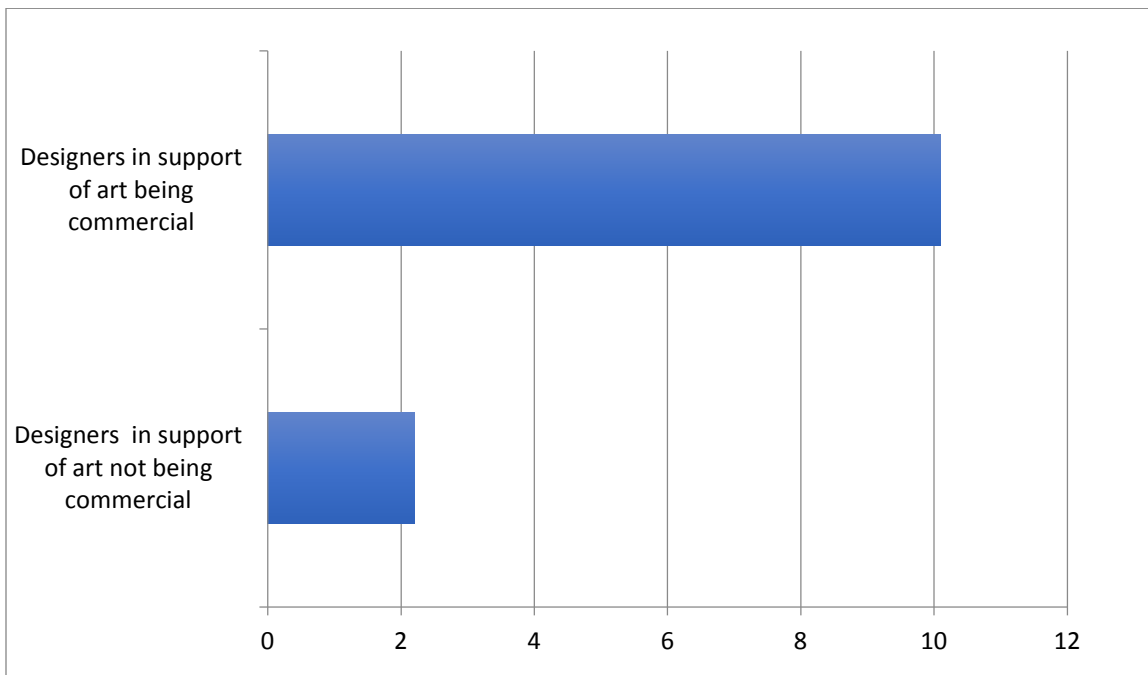


Figure 3: Table depicting the results of the survey conducted amongst the designers

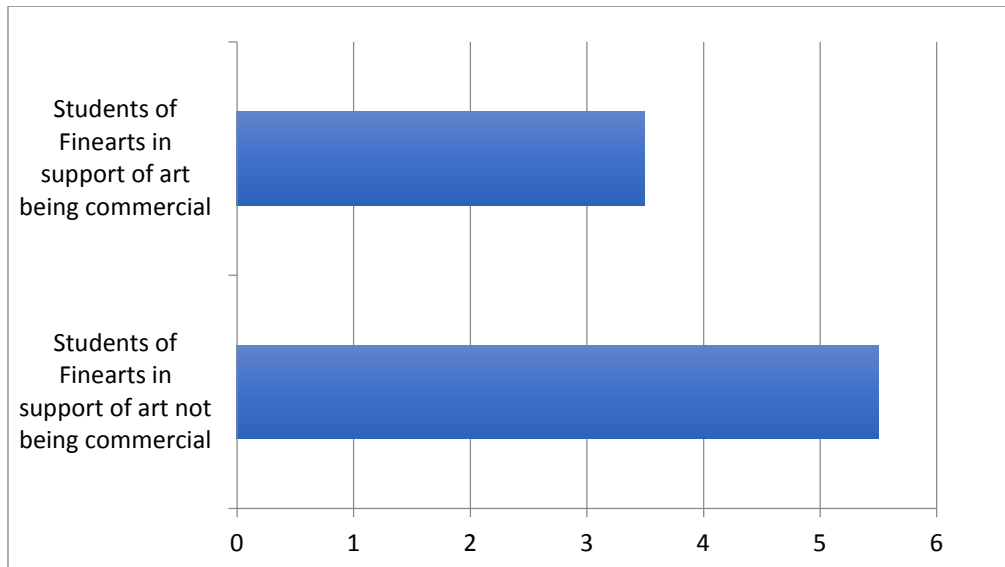


Figure 4: Table depicting the results of the survey conducted amongst the students of finearts

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.

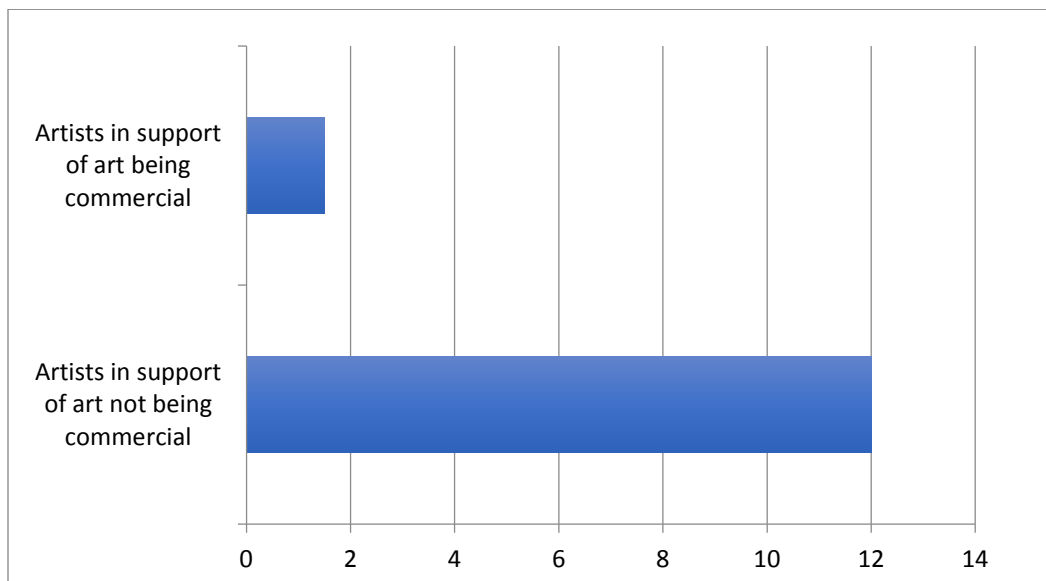


Figure 5: Table depicting the results of the survey conducted amongst the artists

On the other hand dying forms of art or crafts, which were once important heritage pieces that are needed to be retrieved again in terms of design, the role of commercialism will be

different. Such pieces of craft, when they are exhibited as part of craft exhibitions, collections or minor art forms in galleries then a certain strength of commercialism is needed according to the designer's or artisan's point of view. For this angle if we study *Khussa* as a case study, we can observe the various aspects that are contributing in shaping the crafts of Pakistan. In order to create a clear picture of the way design of the *Khussa* in the present and future context is synthesizing, it is important to analyze the situation and the factors involved in its shaping of the design procedures. *Khussa* as a product had been traditionally perceived and manufactured in terms of design especially. The transitional phases of *Khussa* as an ethnic footwear involved a basic functional form protecting from climatic hazards to a source of pride, fashion, status symbol and objects of beauty. Other than that they had been serving as a source of information about cultural identities. In order to study this viewpoint it is important to study the formulation of its design model from a consumer's background, industrial or manufacturer's perspective and the designer's approach.

Hybridity shared its part in the development of *Khussa* when it became the fashion trend in the royal court of the Mughals in this region. Then onwards its journey saw differences in its forms adhering to footwear trends and the changing target groups. In the Mughal courts worn by the royals, the maharajas and the nobility, *Khussa* as a footwear was categorized as a part of the elite footwear form. But as the royal setup was transformed into the colonial period, there were lot of changes in its appearance and position in the society. The debate in reference to the recognition for the crafts started off in the nineteenth and twentieth century, when Greenough strived for the status of a craftsman in the perspective of Industrial revolution. Arts and crafts movement which was a key drive for design recognition of that age stressed upon the fact that instead of making visual representation and its background, the key ethics to review a product should be judged according to the barometer of function, purpose and phases of production (11). The debate rose due to the distance felt between the very much qualified art works and the minor occupations that is the crafts. In confronting craft the role of the crafts man was seen in a broader perspective where he gained his position as the mediator between history, industry and the culture. As a result then onwards the craft's sustainability is being tried to get retrieved in many possible ways. The modern times have adapted various crafts like *Khussa* with different approaches.

The word culture means cohere in Latin, which stands for "to build" and "to care for" (12). It is the platform for a community to showcase their social and religious bonding and thus develop a series of values, customs and product that they can own as heritage (13). Another definition of culture by Horton and Hunt is that it is a learning and a sharing experience for a society which they keep on developing (14). The craft is still an object of beauty, existing more as an artifact of individual entrepreneurship rather than a product of mass production (15). It is an individual's effort without leadership, in fact a contribution to a collective struggle to reposition a cultural role in an indifferent social scenario. This cultural patrimony associated with craftsmanship ultimately brings out a recognition, a presence of the self for an individual citizen or even a group. Other definition of cultural identity refers to an idea of "shared culture", a collective effort where ones façade is hidden beneath layers of many others (16). Thus, culture is the depiction of lifestyle, dresses, fine arts, customs and traditions. In the Persian, Arabic and Urdu literature culture is called Tihzib. It is developed

by man and then it's the role of the society to transfer it from one generation to another. Crafts are one of the significant ways for the representation of culture.

This somehow, enhances the fact that *Khussa* is a participant in the building up of cultural identity of this region as a legendary craft. It had become an integral part of the museum's collections and a symbol of folklore, an essential footwear with the dresses of regions especially in Punjab and Sindh. Vernacular term could be used for the craft of *Khussa* for the discussion which would be followed. As the term "Vernacular" has been linked to architecture for explaining domestic and functional forms instead of monumental buildings (17). The role of *Khussa* in today's Pakistan is the same, the monumental status from the past developed to its more vernacular form is somehow one of the many journeys it went through. The paths of this journey cross through the various districts of majorly Punjab and then Sindh. As *Khussa* is evolving with a traditional, ethnic and a manufacturer's approach, it is difficult to ignore the involvement of commercialism in its exhibits in local exhibitions or museums. To understand the role of commercialism in the shaping of *Khussa* the industrial aspect is needed to be assessed.

The design process at present is not all about only production methods, distribution strategies and consumption figures of a product like *Khussa*. It has become a process, a journey where the producer, designer, manufacturer and even the buyer is involved in its development. The idea of such procedure extends further than transformation in designing processes, it also elaborates the following context to describe the change in the approach towards design. Thus in such a society the change is amongst a passive purchaser into an active user. As the consumer builds his own persona by actually consuming various products. Individuality here is an in-house concern that is addressed as a transcendental occurrence through these campaigns launched by the industrial groups, designed tailor made in order to create a particular personality. The industrial point of view is to capitalize the market for a particular target group and thus generate a certain product to suit their requirements. Conclusively, in order to represent a craft like *Khussa* it is important to build a system which is more linear than from top to bottom, so that the interest of all the variables could be addressed.

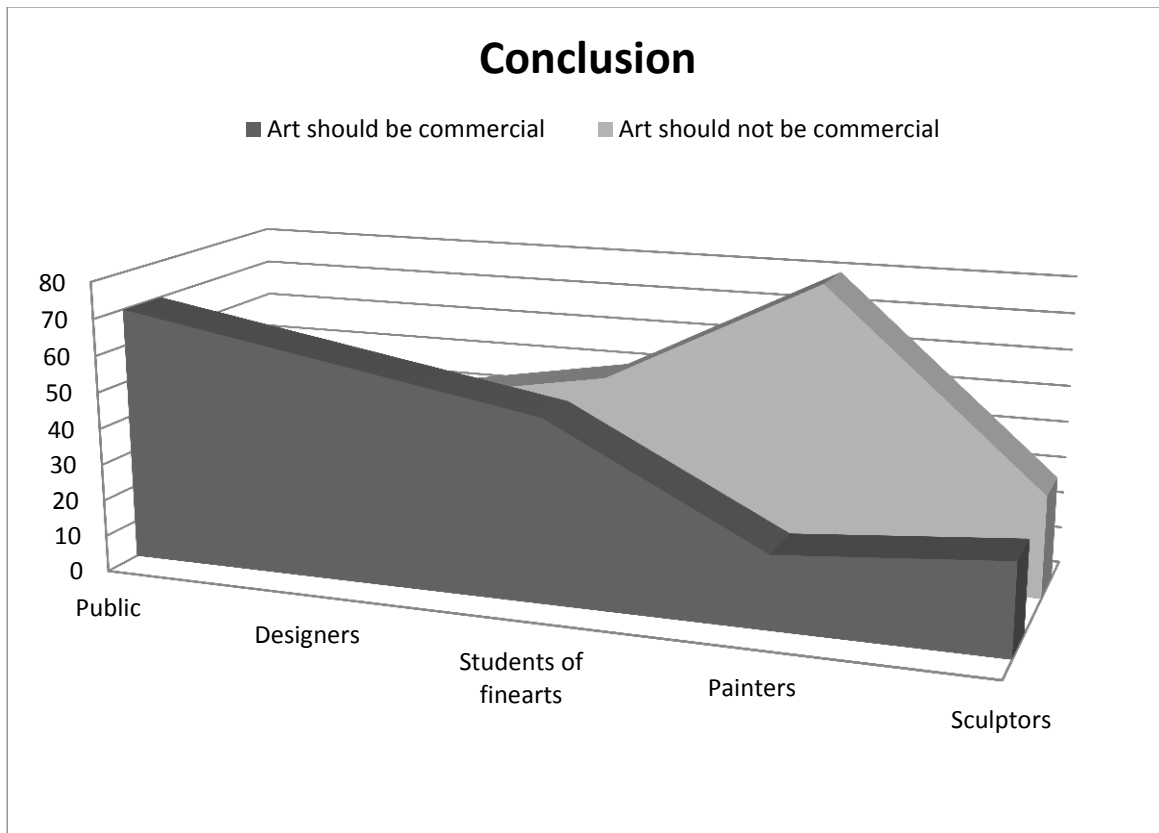


Figure 6: An overview of the total results conducted through this survey

Hence it is proved that there is no proper system in Pakistan that is trying to retain art and crafts in a way that all the stake holders are benefitting from the situation. 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. A system proposed in such a situation is the VSM model through which things could be more synchronized and most of the problems could be addressed or avoided.

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 rises 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 or artisan 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 or museums 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 mis use 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.

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