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Mahua Art Gallery-A Case Study on Usage of Information Technology in a Cultural Enterprise

B. Shekar* and Shamit Bagchi**

* Quantitative Methods and Information Systems Area, Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, Bangalore 560 076.

** Global Marketing Center, IBM India Private Limited, Bangalore.

Abstract

This paper, essentially a case study, begins by delving into the historical background concerning the entrepreneur and founders' mindset of a cultural enterprise like the Mahua Art Gallery; particularly how it came into existence. It then briefs on the art industry and also examines organizational aspects and related issues in a cultural enterprise of this genre. It touches upon significant aspects of Mahua's journey from nascence to the current state it is in. Discussions on how management initiatives have driven its recent adoption of technology are also present. Finally the paper concludes with a look into information technology and online social networks. Social media which this organization has embraced and potential benefits that accrue from its adoption are also discussed. This case is based on interviews conducted with the founders of Mahua Art Gallery and hence possesses an authentic stamp.

Key Words & Phrases: Cultural Enterprise, Information Technology & Art Gallery.

Art in the family

Dr. H.K. Kejriwal, father of Sadhana Jaipuria (also known in art circles as Meenu Jaipuria) was born in Calcutta in 1925. He started his career as a stockbroker, and then diversified into various businesses including textiles, mining, etc. A successful businessperson, Kejriwal possesses a deep passion for art. HK Kejriwal, besides inheriting a vast collection of art from his father Ramkumar Kejriwal, has been an avid collector since 1945. His collection that includes ancient paintings, sculptures, manuscripts, and coins date back to the 3rd century B.C.

Mr. Kejriwal is also involved with art foundations and institutions in various advisory and trustee capacities. He is the co-founder and vice president of Chitrakala Parishat, Bangalore's most prestigious art institute. He has donated part of his personal collection to the 20,000 square-foot HK Kejriwal museum that is housed at the Chitrakala Parishat. His donation to the people of India was recently valued at over 50 crores (12 million dollars). His collections to the Chitrakala Parishat are exhibited in four museums.

The art industry in India saw a spurt in growth during 2007-08, when the unusual buying behavior was later

followed by a lull during the 2008 economic meltdown. Traditionally, Sotheby's in the US and Christie's in the UK are the active art auction houses.

Art-related products are considered luxury goods and world-wide, their sales are estimated at 16%. There has been a dramatic acceleration of online art sales due to usage of the internet.

Sale of luxury goods in India is a mere 0.4 percent of global luxury goods sales. However, the luxury industry in India has shown very promising growth over the past couple of years. It is set to grow at about 25 percent per year over the next few years.¹

The Indian art market grew by 830 percent over the last decade (Artprice Statistics²) although India's art market is a meager 0.55 percent of the world art market. Size of the global art market was worth \$60.8 billion in 2012³ (\$11.6 billion art sales in 2011 as per Fortune ⁴).

Like all markets for luxury items, the art market is also driven by supply and liquidity. With rising disposable incomes, more and more HNIs (High Networth Individuals) are turning to passion investments to diversify their portfolio and satiate their tastes for finer things in life. Indian HNIs mostly restrict their passion investments to tangible assets (such as gems, jewelry and real estate) as against sophisticated financial instruments and are thus more conservative in their investment strategies.

Art and luxury goods are aspiration products that the middle class cannot afford yet. New indication as per reports and market surveys is that there is an increase in sale of art which can be categorized as 'affordable' (Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 75,000). This segment of buyers is probably expanding and benefiting the most.⁵

India is not a big market for arts. However, greater diffusion is expected to happen via technological interventions like the Google Art Project⁶ which would broaden the interest among those who are new to fine arts. Online art auctions are also seeing a rise⁷ in the Indian context.

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The art world is fraught with copies which get surreptitiously or unknowingly (even by famous art houses) sold. This raises the question of security while buying art. People are wary of copies and are careful in buying paintings. The artist's signature is necessary these days. Earlier it was not the case, for even copies of famous artists would sell.

At times, artists themselves cannot identify their own originals. Rules in Europe and the US mandate that the artist sign behind the artwork. Several mechanisms are used to verify the authenticity. One such mechanism is to store the original colors used in the painting for later comparison. This is not a new phenomenon, as 300 years ago too, paintings used to be copied. Another method for identifying the age of the painting is through crackles —the bigger the crackles, the greater its age. Authenticity and credibility are thus the key parameters for an art collector.

Copies are not valued as much, simply because of the uniqueness aspect. Uniqueness lends itself to better valuation and beyond just monetary terms. In this respect, a gallery essentially provides authenticity for the art and the artist. It so happens that style is copied and as a result its value falls. This is what happened with the artwork of Jamini Roy whose artwork has no buyers now.

Art collectors are valued for the history of true authenticity associated with them. Thus the source of the art lends importance to the person collecting it.

Any art form can be copied. However, for traditional art forms like Kangra or Mughal –vegetable dyes were used to color – so to replicate and obtain a similar effect is difficult. People consider a painting new if creases on the painting, which are most essential, do not exist. The selling route also can help detect copies.

Art collectors generally have a high level of emotional involvement and attachment to whatever they collect. The human tendency is to overcome loneliness. Art is an expression of those feelings and emotions that overcome loneliness.

Appreciation of art is much higher in western countries as several people view the art on subways, art boards in railway stations, the underground in London etc. Knowingly or unknowingly, viewing art leads to appreciation. Sculptures are also prominent in public spaces. It has taken years to establish this. Making people aware is the first step. A beginning has to be made and public policy is important here. Chitra Santhe as an annual event happens in Bangalore, India, near Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat. In London and Paris, people copy and sell art on the streets, near museums etc on Sundays and holidays.

In colleges and universities too, films on development of art and artists and their techniques are showcased to promote art.

Dr. H.K. Kejriwal's personal background

Born in a Marwari community and brought up in a Bengali locality in Kolkata, Mr Kejriwal was educated at the Hindu college. In his own words, being in the company of the culturally rich Bengalis paved the way for intense interest in the arts! Then, wealthy Zamindars (land owners) would collect art — portraits and oils paintings. Marwaris did not have a passion for the arts. Kejriwal's father did not want to send him to Marwari schools. In order to inculcate Indian culture and heritage, he was sent to The Hindu School. The Hindu School was an affiliate of the Presidency College and was started by Raja Rammohan Roy. He started learning Hindi much later. A mindset that was oriented towards wealth accumulation was prevalent among the marwaris. Women's education was neglected in

the Marwari community. A hybrid of British and Indian culture was present in the Loreto School. This helped in the growth of Dr Kejriwal's interest in the arts.

In 1948, art was sold to emerging collectors through local brokers. Artworks were sold for as low as 100-200 rupees. Mr. Kejriwal started his collection from 1948 and later-on introduced the culture of art to the Birlas. Five thousand books on art were purchased in 1946-47 from Oxford with a view to cultivate art culture. They engaged a professor who was learned and had the knowledge of the evolution of art in Bengal.

It was in this environment of appreciation for the arts that Meenu Jaipuria was born and brought up. This was an important experience for her in her early life. Seeing the paintings, like-minded collectors including her father (incidentally all the four Kejriwal brothers have separate collections) made an impact on her. This was a strong reason for her making a career in the arts sector as the founder of the Mahua Art Gallery. Mr. Kejriwal is a great admirer of Rabindranath Tagore. He has a high degree of involvement in Bengal art. He claims that communism has destroyed art and culture in the Bengalis.

Usually, wealthy people use art to decorate their houses. Beautifying their residences with paintings is in vogue again. Dr Kejriwal says it is akin to adding more glamour to beauty!

A satisfied man and a frustrated man will see art in different ways. Only a satisfied man turns to art. Beautiful things are bought to decorate and bring out the expressive side of an artist. The analytical buyer is different and may look purely at investment or try to find meaning in the artwork. Attractive paintings are what he likes to collect.

The market value of an art piece is the amount that a willing buyer pays a willing seller under normal circumstances. Normal circumstances mean when the buyer has both reasonable knowledge of the artwork and the artist is not unduly influenced by any gallery.

Estimates are arrived at and there is a probability that out of ten paintings bought, at least one will be valued at around a crore within a span of 1-2 years.

Artist reputations differ within the art community and it is important to remember this while buying art. For example, there is a difference in reputation between those that are established universally as against those established locally within India. The statures of the two are not the same. Celebrated artists are of a totally different and higher category.

When an artist's work reaches 2 to 5 lakhs, then the perceived value of his work goes up. Simultaneously, demand soars and recognition by museums adds to the importance. Rarity in art is also another important factor. As with any traded commodity, the value of a product goes up if its availability is restricted.

Dr Kejriwal himself possesses the best collection in modern Indian arts including folk art.

If the rich buy, then the artist becomes famous. Hype about an artist can lead to greater sales of his works. This can further lead to a temporary appreciation in the value of that artist's future works. This is not true for the permanent value associated with artists considered as the masters. The art of the masters will never depreciate. Art valued for centuries cannot be undervalued suddenly.

Creation gives joy to the artist. Art has several dimensions that include aesthetic, commercial and emotional. Dr Kejriwal feels that nature, art and beauty lend joy to him. And the possession of art is also a great joy!

Dr Kejriwal says art has made him what he is today! This drives him to give back to the society, as art is a national asset. Therefore, a significant part of his large art collection has been donated to the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat in the form of several galleries. He says his daughter Meenu Jaipuria also feels proud when she tells the world that they have initiated these unique galleries in the Karnataka Chitrakala Parishat.

Dr. Kejriwal himself is tempted to buy good art. He often visits art shows in the city. He has travelled all over the world and visited many museums - near about a hundred museums several times. He finds it all addictive.. He has donated Modern art worth a few million rupees to the Chitrakala Parishat. He set up Chitrakala Parishat in Bangalore. The HK Kejriwal

foundation also focuses on education and awards are instituted for young artists for propagating art.

Dr Kejriwal is of the opinion that art appreciation has to take the shape of a social movement. Tourism can also be built through art museums and in a cyclic process it will lead to greater appreciation and discussion of art. Museums are not well-maintained in India. Very few art-museums have air-conditioning which causes a lot of discomfort.

Art is sure to flourish in a financially buoyant environment. Bombay and Delhi continue to be the hubs for art activity. In Dr Kejriwal's view, Bangalore will soon be the place of action for art.

Meenu Jaipuria's experience

Meenu Jaipuria founded the Mahua Art Gallery in Bangalore in 2002. An aggressive commercial approach was not what she envisaged for her gallery. Nurturing arts was the prime rationale and her approach was different. Every gallerist has a different outlook and a different worldview. Her idea was not to scale up in size like Saffronart (India's largest art auction house).

In the art world, 'art cliques' get formed and these are opaque and often difficult to penetrate.

Either artists need to market themselves or the gallery does it for them. Thus many a time branding requires a thrust from the gallery as Being more innovative is an important way of being unique and not just playing with numbers, hiking them in auctions etc. A good perception of an artist's body of works helps build a market for his/her artworks.

Collectors who pick up artworks are important. As a result, art gallery cliques cannot always drive the valuation. Value has to be inherent in the work. Risk is involved in buying art. Different minds approach art in different ways. For cutting-edge art such as installations — unique thought processes are essential as they are conceptual in nature. Worldwide biennials especially the big ones usually promote the same galleries and the same set of artists.

You need guts to become an entrepreneur. A support system brings in the trust factor and confidence. The

entrepreneurial journey has different problems. The entrepreneur is judged on the basis of commitment to business --is it a casual one, or a more serious long term one? Responsibility and credibility are two main issues which need to be handled. Building credibility takes time. Meenu Jaipuria enumerates a few criteria for building credibility:

- Aesthetics in art selecting and promoting the right ones
- Transparency with the artist--constant communication
- Conveying jargons of business to artists. If a certain artist's work does not sell it does not reflect the quality or incompetence of the gallery. Such issues crop up.
- Being a conduit between the artist and the art buyer which can be tricky
- Event invitations and dialogue building with art buyers
- Providing authentication certificates to collectors.
 They are provided by the artist via the gallery.
 Secondary sales of the art works of dead artists happen only when the works are in the possession of credible art collectors.

For an individual entrepreneur frustration can be a key issue, especially when there is a need to close down the gallery because of poor sales. Any new art venture does not involve just buying and selling of art. An art entrepreneur faces many administrative difficulties such as logistics.

Meenu Jaipuria sought and obtained help. One has to seek advice from people in the business and they become mentors. In India, people do not look upon art for art's sake. For them, art is a quick money-making business. The market is maturing. Established art schools turnout the best artists from the young and fresh artists. Art galleries should seek out and select artists from these. Some of the good national art institutions are: Shantiniketan, Baroda School of Arts, J J School of Arts and Cholamandalam. In her opinion, skill acquisition is highest in Bengal (Shantiniketan) and Baroda School is known for conceptual depth.

The current challenge is marketing arts to the young people and educating them about it. Mahua is making efforts to bring out an electronic bank (in the form of CDs) containing knowledge such as history of art in India, contemporary and ancient art. They have also gone in for a tie up with National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) to conduct art-related lectures and performing arts events. Over the weekends, Mahua invites 10-20 people to meet at the gallery, discuss and understand the aesthetics and nuances of art. Meenu Jaipuria cites an example where children in cities like New York gain exposure to arts right from early childhood.

Newer folk artists are jumping from a background of traditional art to education and moving on to contemporary art forms. This is an evolution of art and this need not be viewed as a corrosion of traditional techniques. The artist brings in his or her own imagination along with contemporary concerns. Australian aboriginal art was sold in Christies auctions recently.

In Meenu Jaipuria's view, dilution of the traditional style is not a cause for concern. If the spirit and energy is intact, art evolves based on the choice and prerogative of the artist. Choice of the artist and nurturing the art are very important. Evolution in artistry helps artists sell their works. Gaining an audience is equally important, as it is a matter of livelihood for these artists.

Authenticity of the artist and freedom of expression are most important. Different people want different things. Maintaining authenticity should not lead to the art gallery owners gaining control. The value is in preserving the creative urge that comes only once in a while.

MF Husain's works of 1970's are good. Now they are a mere status symbol. Meenu Jaipuria says she buys paintings that give her inspiration! Husain's branding has helped bring up the market as a whole. However branding and commerce bring in repetition in art. Consequently creativity in the artist suffers. As multiplicity of an artist's works goes up, replication occurs, and in the process, evolution stops.

It is quite natural to have lack of confidence initially. Entrepreneurs need to shut out the depressive, sinking feelings that occur at times. Genuineness of people involved in the business (artists and art buyers) is very important when you are in the growing phase! A passion for art is essential. Entrepreneurs need to find out how artists think and create art!

To learn about art Meenu Jaipuria often travelled to Shantiniketan. There she interacted with the artists at leisure. She got to know the artists on a personal level and watched their creative art processes. She visited master artists and renowned art collectors. In her view, although technique is important, imagination is crucial. Lack of imagination leads to repetition and such artists cannot succeed.

Commerce was not the basis of her foray into arts; rather it was a search for excellence along with a drive to find out how the whole thing works. Her gallery started in a place with very few footfalls; then it was housed in the Leela Palace, a seven star hotel in Bangalore. It was not affordable even though she was invited to curate. To start with, she did curate a show there by borrowing art from elsewhere. Later, she booked a space to house her art permanently. Identifying a location for the gallery should take into account footfalls of potential buyers! Master artists questioned the presence of an art gallery in a hotel as it was against their ethics.

There were people from London who visited the show at The Leela. So the next question was: why not conduct a show directly in London? Waiting for a market research was not feasible, as in that case she may have never gone to London. It is the passion that sustains an art enterprise, and at some level, an entrepreneur is a gambler. So her London exhibition paid off and she made a decent profit in London.

The euphoria of a sale in a foreign land is but temporary. The question then arises, what next? The entrepreneur should always be thinking of the next move in gaining sales. A rough plan also helps in the decision-making process.

During the early phase of the startup, logistics and transportation was provided by a partner company (her husband's firm). In-house insurance was also an advantage due to the presence of the partner firm.

It takes up to one year to recover the insurance money. In several cases, the amount cannot be recovered.

The brand initially created at The Leela Palace continues to sell art through exhibitions. Commissioned projects

involving interior designing and mural art for corporate houses and architects are envisaged as a means for Mahua to diversify.

The gallery is trying to educate collectors through talks and events. Recently in international sales, art by Seema Kohli was auctioned in the UK. Art collections for resale and art fund markets like the London market are possible targets.

Meenu Jaipuria feels some new entrants into the art business lack the passion for arts as they come from a background that is highly commercialized. In the field of arts, this route may not work in the long term. She cites Religare as one such initiative, which tried to model a stock exchange for arts - looking at art merely as an investment option and nothing else. They have not been successful in this endeavor.

It takes time to build efficiency and goodwill in a business. Among startups, there is often a fear due to the presence of big firms and the big money. Art is about beauty and culture and thus understanding the field and self-education is necessary. Perception building through public relation drive is possible but not sufficient. It is primarily a relationship-oriented business.

It is essential to find out what a customer is looking for. Potential buyers should walk around the gallery to view the existing works. If necessary, explanation should be provided. An artist first replicates a style, learns it and then creativity leads to establishing a unique style. To understand and explain this style to the buyers is also a very important task. Curators are sought for this very reason. When renowned art collectors get intrigued by an art style, then its value soars. For this to happen, the style has to be an inspired one.

Bangalore is a tier 2 city for arts. Growth had been slow until now. All galleries should be collectively engaged in nurturing the art ecosystem. Goodwill building with the community helps in branding. Branding is very important for a gallery. Annually, young artists are awarded by the Mahua and the H K Kejriwal foundation. Education events promote sales. One such example is the joint event organized in association with NGMA.

Financial benefits keep an entrepreneur excited and energized. Creation of wealth along with a responsibility towards propagation of arts go together. An art entrepreneur needs to keep these twin goals in mind. Clarity in positioning of the gallery has to be first achieved in the mind of the entrepreneur. Helping people who are novices in buying art and initiating them into the process of buying is a great service that an art gallery can do. Documenting and filming the processes and styles in art creation will be helpful. This may help mature customers make informed decisions. Art galleries hire curators as they are knowledgeable. Mahua plans to enable buyers of art to be intelligent and well-informed.

To an existing art gallery the online community acts as a supplement. This online community helps in reaching out to the new generation of artists and art buyers. Usage of blogs helps in making connections. The online social medium is quite active these days. Innovative marketing is possible on OSNs. Community building has started as Mahua now has over 4000 registered members, growing on their Facebook community page.

Teaching Note (In the form of possible questions and plausible answers):

Does Mahua need to adopt the online mode more aggressively?

To stay relevant and be with the current trends, Mahua needs to focus some of its efforts on brand building online. Some recent developments include VIP Art Fair — an art fair conducted worldwide and entirely online, Google Arts Project brings online several art museums from across the world. These clearly indicate the power of the online medium to reach out. Several of the most successful art galleries have massive online presence. One such example is Saffronart. Many galleries have reported that 50 percent or more of their revenues accrue from online sales. Physical space constraints do not exist online and as a result, more artifacts can be displayed.

With its view of targeting the youth should Mahua be creating its own online social network?

Yes, the adoption rates of the online social networks have gone up. This is also true because the best way to target the youth is where they spend the maximum amount of their time! To the extent possible, medium's popularity needs to be exploited. According to a Nielson study, there are over 30 million users of social networking websites in India1. According to the study, Indians spend more time on social media than they do on checking personal email. An equal number spend up to an hour on social networking and email. However just 8% spend between an hour and three hours on personal email, 20% spend the same time on social media sites. Over next six months 45,000 online Indians intend to join social networking sites each day. Nearly 40 million Indians are using online reviews to make informed purchase decisions. 67 percent of Indians who are on the web, use online reviews to help them make purchases. The annual growth rate of online social adoption in India is about 100%.

Should Mahua use *Youtube* channels as an authentic art knowledge repository produced by Mahua and other online mechanisms to create their unique online identity?

Since Mahua art gallery has plans to come up with a repository of art videos it is an imperative that they use an exclusive Youtube channel to showcase the videos and create a brand presence online. These videos can become viral, if crafted in an appropriate way and can spread among the online spaces. These videos have the potential to become a reference of sorts leading to online discussions. Video and audio podcasts have been found to be a means of self-learning preferred by art enthusiasts. Videos of one-time events may be streamed live as well as stored for archival purpose. With the onset of smart phones, mobile apps (applications) are becoming very popular. Apps are a great way to reach the customers and keep them engaged with frequent news and content updates. Audio and video are dominant means of entertainment in India. As a result, videos can naturally connect better with the middle class. This could help to spread a culture in arts beyond niche crowds.

For an art-focused online social network the following would engage you				
	Very true	Somewhat true	Not very true	Not at all true
Virtual worlds	25%	31%	25%	19%
Audio and video podcasts	28%	38%	22%	13%
Interactivity like games and puzzles	16%	22%	38%	25%
Mobile apps	22%	38%	22%	19%
Simulation of home decor	44%	19%	22%	16%
Loyalty and privilege points	28%	22%	31%	19%

What benefits will the Mahua brand gain by adopting online social networks (OSNs) for interaction among artists, art collectors and art enthusiasts?

Withinonline social networks, friends' recommendations are of greater value than those provided by others online and offline. An art marketer's dream would be to positively influence a well-connected person online. He then influences many others within his vast social network. Such a person spreads the word through the viral word-of-mouth, leading to a greater reach than through a standalone website. Sentiment analysis can be done to analyze the positive and negative comments emanating on any OSN. The contents that members discuss can likewise be analyzed through text analysis.

Greater involvement is beneficial as it can lead to repeated buying. OSNs play a significant role in increasing this involvement. Fresh content is generated more often. Keen members have a higher frequency of usage and generate greater volume of information. Registered members can subscribe to specific topics or to online feeds generated by other members using appropriate technologies. Some of the current technologies available include RSS - Really Simple Syndication, Atom or bookmarking sites such as Digg, StumbleUpon, del.icio.us). Targeting customers may be done by gleaning self-published data (at multiple levels) on areas of interests of members and their friends. Due to a two-way interaction, the gallery may get valuable feedback from the buyers in real time.

Benefits to the buyer include greater variety of art available online and feedback to judge the quality of this art. Engagement of the buyer within forums goes up. OSNs help scale up and reach a large number of people. This will result in increased creativity for the artists who are on the OSN as they would have access to diverse information and perspectives, and a constant stream of information from other members. The curatorial function of finding, filtering and displaying art (or related contents) done by registered members within an OSN generate more value for everyone.

The autonomy within online social networks is similar to that within cultural industries. Hence the application of online social networks to a cultural organization like Mahua will further reinforce it. Artists being independent and highly individualistic will be able to adapt with ease and comfort to an OSN. Artists from different locations rarely come together and hence interaction does not happen. Online social networks provide an additional advantage in such cases. OSNs may be used for increased sharing of knowledge and interaction among artists. This may result in high quality art creations.

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