

Is All Publicity Really Good Publicity?

As the presence of social media grows in size and power, dance must find new footing in the advancing digital age

by Allison Yolland

They always say out with the old, and in with the new. This has never been more true when it comes to dance now. People automatically search for new ways to connect to one another. No longer are the days when dancers first connected with, “I took ballet from the time I was three,” but more recently, “I learned a new TikTok dance today.” Before the time of digital dancing, most people might only have danced as a young child. Now, any average person is able to look up viral trends on TikTok, learn thirty seconds of choreography, and suddenly they’re a dancer. Rather briskly, we’ve entered a world that recognizes someone who can learn “The Renegade” more than someone who has danced for their whole lives.

The ever-growing virtual world has made dance more visible, allowing outsiders to build connections with the dance world. In this swiftly changing world of technology, does dance flourish from social media presence, or does it taint the overall perception of the arts? While the online world has allowed the dance industry more opportunities for exposure, and increased accessibility, are the consequences of social media harming more than helping?

With the power of social media, individual dancers have been able to gain exposure on a more personal level. Dancers can build community, gain recognition, and share what matters most to them as easily as posting. *Los Angeles Times* journalist Makeda Easter noted some positive aspects, saying, “The video-centric platforms including Youtube, Instagram and the burgeoning TikTok are enabling dancers and choreographers to break out of the shadows and be more than nameless bodies backing pop stars” (Easter 1). Dancers can now put a face to their brand, giving them more opportunities for growth and success in the industry. Instagram especially is a very beneficial platform for both pre-professional and professional dancers to share their work. University of Wyoming student, Hannah J Ellis explains that, “The visual nature of Instagram plays a critical role in exposure for brands and sets up the perfect platform for dance to be featured. Professional and amateur dancers use Instagram to create a personal brand for themselves by taking advantage of the visual component of the platform” (Ellis 4). With a stronger online presence, professional dancers are able to capitalize on the platform and share their work. Social media also allows individual dancers to express themselves exactly the way they want, showing much more than submitting a resume would.

In addition to giving individual dancers a stronger platform for exposure, Ellis points out, dance on social media “[fostered] a greater demand for dance content” (Ellis 2). TikTok in particular has presented dance as extremely approachable, she says, helping to create a positive dance environment (Ellis 6). Previously uninvolved communities now have the opportunity to build their own relationship with dance. TikTok benefited from pandemic isolation as young consumers became invested in this online platform. Unfortunately, the collateral damage of that attachment is that they may depend only on information there. Journalist Laura Cervi shared that, “during a rehearsal break, a teenage girl told me that her ‘favorite dancer ever’ was Charli D’Amelio,” (Cervi 1). A non-professional dancer who found her fame through simple TikTok thirty-second dances is now more famous than any dancer likely will be. This can be discouraging for dancers who train endlessly to receive the same recognition—not to mention the message it sends to young children who may expect to succeed without training. As well, TikTok is not censored in any way, so dances may be over-sexualized, as well as providing a bad example of dance technique (Ellis, 6). In this way, social media dance doesn’t present a positive or accurate image of dance and the industry.

All things in this world have pros and cons, and for me, the benefits of dance on social media far outweigh the drawbacks. Though younger generations may not see dance the same, having the platform to find their own voices at a young age might encourage them to explore the world of the arts. At the end of the day, dance is all about individual expression. Dance on social media may not look like what it was before, but it may provide a bridge to the professional dance world. Social media has opened up new doors and any negative effects may be growing pains on the way to more growth for the dance industry.

Regardless of the impression digital dance leaves on people, it’s clearly not going anywhere. How can it continue to grow? Looking into the future, there are multiple professional-based platforms that dancers in the industry could utilize. LinkedIn is a social media network intended to make business and professional connections, which is something the dance industry can easily and successfully capitalize on. Currently LinkedIn is not utilized in the dance world, but it would be incredibly helpful to continue to grow the online presence of the industry: dancers could build their professional presence on one unified network, companies could publicize opportunities to their intended audience, and dancers could separate their personal from professional lives.

While it’s fair to say all publicity can actually be good publicity, how can we ensure that dance remains relevant in the online world? Capitalizing on new opportunities, continuing to expand the presence of digital dance, especially in the space of networking, we can anticipate a bright future for the dance industry.

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