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Creative as a sustainable career in Africa

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Abstract: Art is a way of life (Bauman, Z. 2013) as "Artitude" epitomises freedom of self-belief and grassroots expression of the African connect. The creative arts industry is seen as low-hanging fruit for a lot of economies, especially in Africa. Very little attention is given to the creative arts industry, albeit a multi-billion industry in other parts of the world.

Numerous people in Africa may have a depraved perception of people pursuing art programmes, especially pupils in high school. Although there are some remarkable successful art stories, numerous people still don't perceive art as a sustainable career. Parents and guardians are still indifferent and sceptical about their children pursuing courses in the creative trade but would be quick to hail science and business-related courses. How do we change these misconceptions?

The research collects key insights from various stakeholders (students, parents, institutions, artists(es), agencies, and the general public) in Ghana, and also define the social and cultural indicators connected to these misconceptions. The document would further highlight the execution of an initiative (pilot project) with the sole objective of demystifying this misconception amongst all stakeholders. It highlights the model and findings of the employed strategy.

The execution strategy was categorised into four core areas: Workshop, Expose, Mentorship and Internship. This gave young creatives a platform to interact with practising creatives in commercial and non-commercial art spaces. Parents and institutions also took turns to engage practising creatives, to understand their ways and the relevance of art in society.

The research indicates the impact and lessons from the initiative. The document further analyses how a perfect synergy of positive perception in arts can build a stronger creative economy in Africa

Keywords: Artitude; Perception; Young Creative; Misconception; Creative Economy; Artlife Matters



1 Introduction

It is widely believed that art is a way of life and barely seen as a revenue stream in most parts of the African continent. Despite the abundance of artistic heritage of the continent, society looks down on creative arts and its ecosystem. To them, people who study the art subjects are perceived as those who may not do well with the so-called tough subjects like as mathematics, engineering, etc. Some aborigines who may buy artefacts also have the perception that they're chaffy and should be available to them for free. Some also marker art as idolatrous or fetishist and for that matter advise their religious pals and associates to desist from acquiring artworks. The effect of these misconceptions about the arts also reflects in the education system. A significant number of scholars end up in the arts classes because they couldn't make the grades to enrol in their preferred courses, and not because they wanted to pursue arts. Another misunderstanding about the arts is that, "art is all about drawing and painting". In today's world the creative economy cuts across Photography, Literature, Advertising, Architecture, Gaming, Music, Audio and Video Broadcasting, Craft, Fashion, Cultural Tourism, Software, Dance, Magazines, Design, Visual Arts, and more. Until Africa changes these misconceptions, it would be difficult to realise significant impact of the creative economy.

2 Literature review

"Goleman (2006) justified that there are two kinds of intelligence: intellectual (left-brained) and emotional (right-brained) which constitutes the learning process of an individual. The pursuit of art requires cognitive and top performance derived from both the left and right brain" [4]. This means the study of art is for intelligent students contrary to what most people in society perceives. Scholars such as Caldwell and Vaughan (2012), Dwyer (2011), Hartle (2015) and Reeves (2007) noted that art education merit an extraordinary part in the heart of education curriculum because it has a lot of benefits mainly in reasoning and critical thinking. "Melnick (2011) highlighted many cognitive advantages from art education like higher academic achievement, creativity, imagination, self-expression, rouses the mind of students and stimulates the brain" [4].

"Goma (2010) itemised misconceptions about art as: 'not everybody can understand art'. Understanding art is like understanding any other thing in life. It requires questioning and learning. There is no limit to learning; learning is a lifetime process" [2]. "Grayson Perry (2013) indicated that we live in an era where anything can be art, not everything is art." [7]. E Dissanayake (2015) believes every human society is characterized by behaviours that can be called "art," and in most societies in developed countries, the arts play an integral part in social life. The above



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statements may explain why it is a bit difficult for the ordinary indigene to understand the relevance of art.

Ntim-Ofosu (2018) stated that the “creativity of children in Africa is overly controlled, meaning parents are constantly telling them what to do and how to do it” [6]. Such controls may leave children feeling like their originality is a mistake and exploration is a waste of time. Apart from parents, teachers and peers continuously suppress the power of creativity. “Ntim-Ofosu (2018) established that these actions smother the child’s inquisitive nature to be creative and adventurous” [6].

“Bolanle (2017) perceives Africa as the cradle of civilisation, as the birthplace of artistic exploration and that, the continent has produced the rhythms that are still influencing the contemporary music landscape” [2]. Recently, Beyonce paid tribute to Yoruba deities in her groundbreaking visual album. Aside from music, Africa has a footprint on modern art, dance, theatre, and others. Notwithstanding the significant influence, Africa’s global share of creative industries remains insignificant.

There was an absence of literature that highlighted the direct correlation between these social misconceptions and the performance of the creative economy in Africa.

3 Methodology

The research is a case study that seeks to understand these misconceptions in Africa and its impact on the social and economic well-being of the continent. The approach used was qualitative method via focus group sessions, survey forms, online subscription and observation. The research was executed in a continuous project that identifies misconceptions, executes activities intended to correct these misconceptions and evaluates the results. The evaluation seeks to improve subsequent activities. The project has been running for three years.

3.1 Project – ARTITUDE

Artitude was a capacity-building project designed to expose young creatives, institutions, parents and the general public to the potentials within the creative arts space while demystifying the misconceptions when it comes to the pursuit of the arts, powered by Artlife Matters. Every participant went through a mandatory subscription process that collected data on their views on the misconceptions and what their expectations were in the upcoming activities. This gave participants a sense of ownership.

The project was executed in four structures with the main focus on the senior high school students and young adults who had an interest in the arts.



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Workshop gave the students a hands-on experience to work with, learn from and interact with practising professionals in an area of interest within the creative arts space. We had a total of fourteen workshops: Sculpture, Architecture, Music Production, Poetry, Talk Sessions, Acting, Fashion, Film making, Music Business, Picture Making, Content Creating, Advertising, Photography and Dancing. Engaging with a professionals made participants confident as well as gave them a glimpse into their prospective futures in the arts.

Exposé gave participants an opportunity to showcase their creative talents to parents, industry players and the general public. There were Art installations, Art Competitions, Dance Performances, Art Performances, Exhibition by art institutions, Online Radio Production and an Open Concert. Parents also got a unique platform to interact with twenty-seven top practising creatives to explore the potentials within the creative arts industry. Most parents were surprised to know careers like Architecture, Psychology, Design and others were related to arts. It was an eye opener to know that a sculpted table-top bust could cost more than fifteen thousand US dollars. This revelation gave the research assurance that perceptions were being changed.

Mentorship in the form of art clubs were formed organically because there was the need for frequent engagement. As mentioned by some school authorities, perceptions could be changed with consistency. The research team and creative facilitators visited the clubs periodically.

Internship opportunities were given to participants who were interested in jump-starting their career. Industry players have reached out to talents and Artlife Matters have also assigned students as interns with partners.

4 Results

4.1 Finding before execution

In 2019, the research team (Artlife Matters) engaged senior high schools to evaluate the misconceptions around the study of the arts. Figure 1. below shows our findings after engaging five hundred and twenty-four students pursuing studies in the arts in five senior high schools. Method employed were focus groups, and printed/online survey forms.

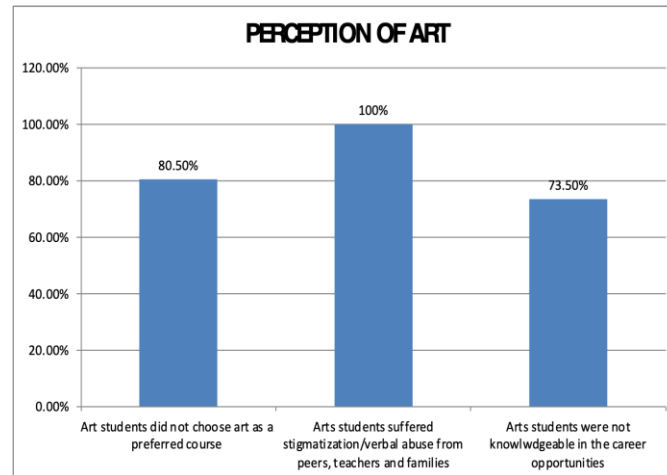


Figure 1

Survey: Focus group with arts students in Ghana.

It was surprising to know that even in recent years with the advancement in technology and communication, not much had changed when it came to the misconceptions surrounding the arts. The students were still being stigmatised with negative comments from teachers, peers and guardians alike

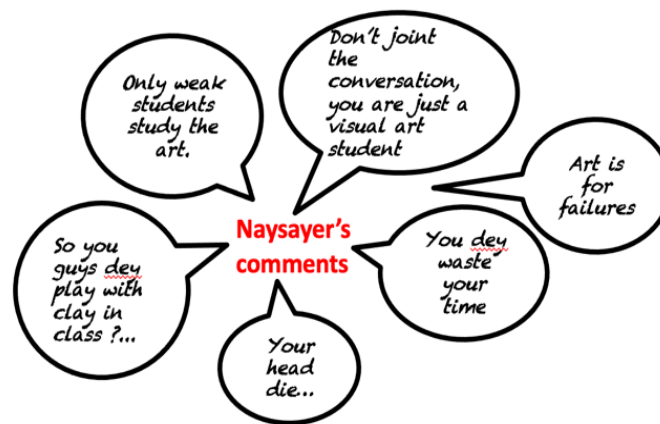


Figure 2

Naysayer's comments curated during the insight sessions.

According to our findings, the visual arts programmes were preferred by students who did not gain admission into their chosen courses. This explained the emotional and psychological struggles that some students experienced in order to adjust and understand a topic they were not connected to. On the other hand, there were some



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students who wanted to study the arts, but their guardians insisted they pursued the course they perceived to be more important.

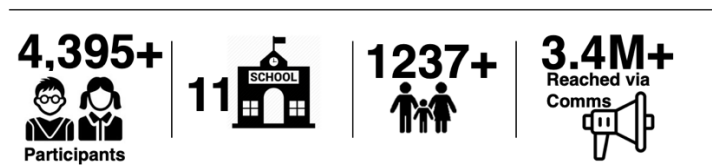
The creative process was intense and required heavy use of studios within the schools' departments. That meant that studios needed proper maintenance schedule to keep materials and the facilities up to standard. Our observation was that very little attention was given to the various art departments. Most of the renovations by the government and old students' associations prioritised other programmes than the arts. None of the schools under this study advanced digital creative studios with high performing computers and other technology enabling them to compete on a global scale

Visual art students had very little recognition both internally and externally. During speech and prize giving days, open days or any form of award scheme, science related courses were prioritised. The National Science and Maths competition has gained so much traction in Ghana recently. It has become a source of pride for high schools and their alumni to fiercely compete in Math and Science. The same enthusiasm and pride are yet to be witnessed in Ghana with regards to an art related programme at the high school level.

The students also highlighted that there was very little external engagement with institutions, organisations and practising artist during their study period. They further intimated that linkage programmes connecting them to careers after school may assure them in the pursuit of arts.

4.2 Impact After Execution

Over three years of project “Artitude”, the team has been able to engage over four thousand, three hundred and ninety-five young adults in eleven institutions. Through Art Exposés and presentations at Parent Teachers Association (PTA) meetings, our message and activities have reached over one thousand, two hundred and thirty-seven parents/guardians across eleven institutions.



Figures 3
Campaign reach over the period.

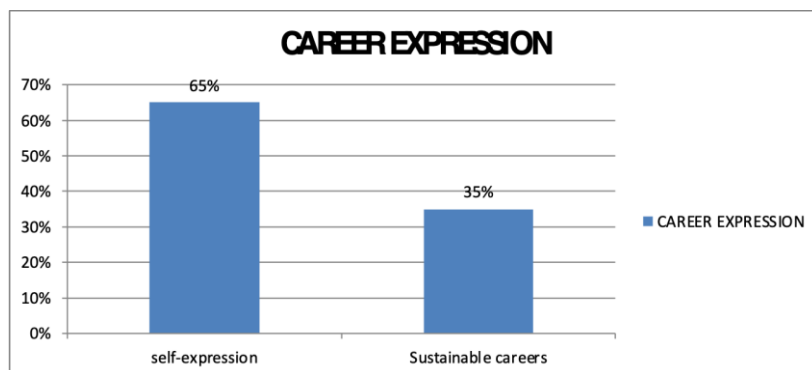


Figure 4
Interest category of participants. (2019-2021)

Through observations, the participants were grouped into two categories. The first category (65%) was those that participated in the activities because they had an interest in art as a way to express themselves. They partook in every activity with passion and the hope to be part of a group that resonates with them. They love art but do not have the zeal to pursue it as a career.

The second category (35%), were those that engaged beyond passion. They asked a lot of questions and followed up with the team and workshop facilitators in search of avenues to improve their skills and ability to succeed through the arts.; to an extent of talking to parents on their behalf.

Every participant understood the true purpose of art and how they wanted to inculcate it into their everyday lives. A common response on their feedback form after their workshop activities highlighted their insight into the potentials within the creative space.

Through the career dating exercise during the Exposé, parents engaged with a lot of creative professionals and they were enlightened about the job opportunities, the incentives and success in these careers. In an interview with one parent, he was convinced in the prospects of the arts and encouraged the daughter to pursue visual arts in Achimota Secondary School in Accra- Ghana. This was a proof of the impact of Artitude in helping to shape the misconceptions about arts.

Achimota School (Accra-Ghana) was used as a controlled group to monitor the impact over three years. The school enrolls an average of four thousand five hundred students each year. These students come from the sixteen regions and neighbouring countries like Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Nigeria. Through surveys and observations, teachers in the art department recorded significant transformation (positive) in how students related to art activities. Student groups registered new art clubs in photography, dance, music, drama and writers/poetry after the workshops in 2019. The team recorded that the students and the school



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authorities wanted more search projects. A mural that was executed as part of the renovation for the department had made the art department a hot spot for non-art students, staff and the public.



Figure 5

Renovation of the Art Department

The project was executed with a campaign message that sought to enlighten the general public on the possibilities within the creative arts space. The campaign was broadcast on radio stations, television stations, social media platform and focus group presentations (old school associations and PTA meeting). With a media reach of three million four hundred thousand people over the three-year period, it may be worthy to note that a significant number of people have heard the message.

The results showed that the misconceptions were somewhat evolving with the numbers that were engaged over the period of the research. However, further work is required to reach an exponential impact across the continent.

5 Discussion

R. Wallis (2008) highlighted that creativity is homegrown. The domestic environment must support and protect creatives, education and entrepreneurial efforts. The extraordinary international and local success of the Swedish music industry in recent years is an impeccable example domestication. Creatives individuals with basic music skills, performing talent, IT knowledge and entrepreneurs have created hubs of expertise that can compete with major resources of traditional music industry centres (London and Los Angeles). African music and dance somehow have a global appeal but without significant economic gains. Very few independent/private creative entities have been diligent in protecting their intellectual properties and benefits across the globe. The continent needs a collective domestic environment that would grow, protect and guide the creative potentials both home and abroad. In 2020, Ghana passed a creative arts bill in parliament, but the industry is yet to understand and actualize the benefits. The Africa Continental Free Trade Area founded in 2018, should have a practical system in integrating the economic activities of the creative industry to reduce unemployment.



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“According to R. Wallis (2008), modern information and communication technology has made creative industry more interactive. “Art institutions increasingly embrace new media for the display, promotion and conservation of their collections, aiming to create a unique experience for their visitors” [9]. It is agreed that through digital technology, a lot of artists have had a lot of cultural and economic exchanges in Africa. As much as there is a massive positive contribution of digital technologies, creatives also acknowledge that there are threats like copyright, originality, and others which has become a global conversation, and African needs to contribute in others to protect its creative interest

If Africa could focus its efforts on bringing life to its creative arts sector, a new economic age would be birthed on the African continent. It has been argued that the forms of art include making and earning money, but the best form of art is a good business. If the continent could position itself as the focus for worldwide creative arts, content, creative artists and large economies would flourish.

Conclusion

African art has been gaining traction over the past few years. Projects like Artitude, Gallery activities, Cultural programs, Music exchange among others have contributed to this awareness but a lot more would have to be done.

1. The public should be educated about the importance of the arts.
2. Art courses must be inculcated in the academic calendar at the early stages. If possible, art courses should be a core subject at the Senior High Schools to boost their interest
3. There should be a lot more galleries and art institutions focused on exhibitions, talks, workshops, conferences to enlighten the public about art endeavours.
4. African creatives need a legal framework that protects and govern the affairs of the industry
5. Artists should see themselves as a respectable brand and carry themselves in an admirable way that would attract a new narrative.
6. Ministry of Art and Culture in various African countries pass a creative bill that would guide the group of the industry through relevant agencies and partners.

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