

The Audience Panel: Results from the May survey

NI audiences and culture online: What has changed?

Culture online: Quick facts



Most panellists did something **cultural online** since Covid started (83%). That's **nearly double** what we saw in our [Culture Beyond Covid: Arts survey](#) done in November 2020.

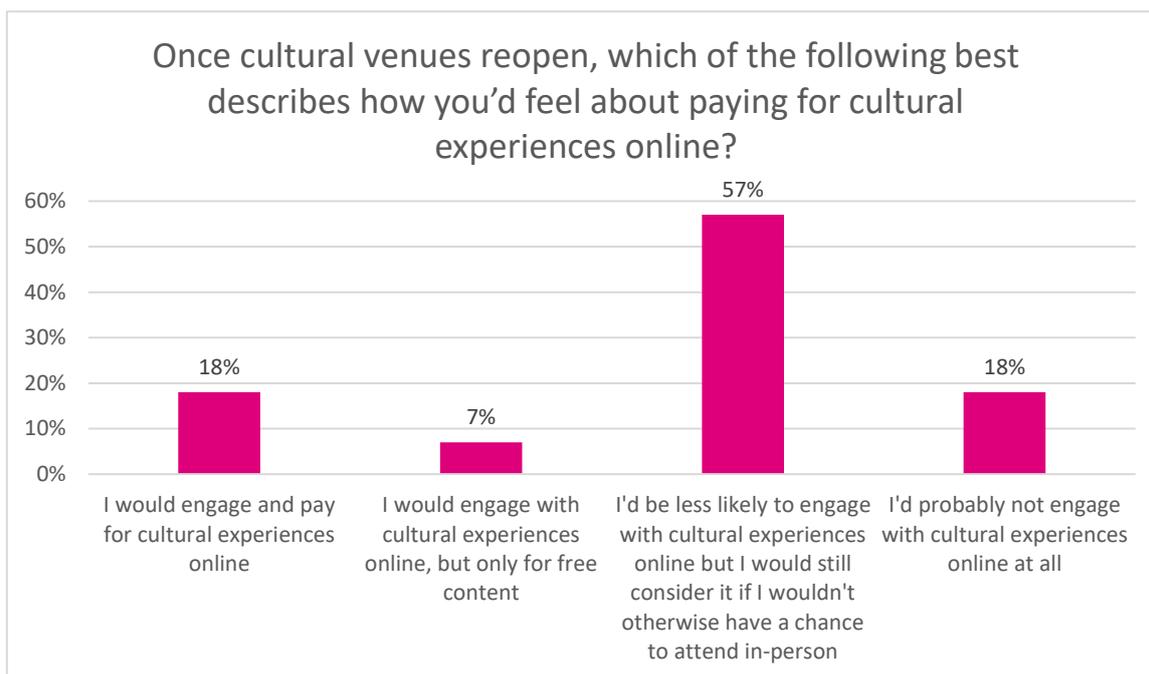


Barriers to engaging with culture online haven't changed since our Culture Beyond Covid: Arts survey last November – panellists feel that the online experience isn't an attractive alternative to the live visit, they are tired of staring at a screen, and the online experience is more of a solo one.



Accessing culture online is generally seen as a temporary stopgap for people to get their cultural fix.

When cultural venues reopen, panellists aren't as keen to keep engaging with culture online: 57% of panellists said they'd be less likely to engage with cultural experiences online but would still consider them if they couldn't otherwise attend it live. This is 7% higher than in our November survey, and suggests that audiences may either be shying away from digital now that restrictions are starting to be relaxed, or panellists in particular may feel a bit jaded by digital.



What do people enjoy about culture online?



- We asked people what they enjoyed about the cultural events/activities they attended online, and here is what they said:
 - *"Being able to enjoy live music and getting a taste of the festival even if it wasn't the same as being there in person."*
 - *"Just be able to enjoy performances when you couldn't actually go to a live performance."*
 - *"Convenience. It was an option to do these things when 'live' was not possible."*
 - *"They enabled me to remain engaged with art & culture."*



- As expected, some artforms were more popular than others online.
 - What was most popular among panellists? Musical performances, talks/lectures, classes/workshops, and plays/theatrical performances. Less popular? Comedy performances, interactive events besides classes/workshops, visual art exhibitions, dance performances, and circus performances. On average, panellists engaged with 2 of the listed artforms online.



Gender had an impact on the types of activities people engaged with online. Women were more likely to attend online classes/workshops, other types of interactive events, and dance performances. Men were more likely to attend online comedy performances.

Interesting facts

How often people attended cultural activities prior to Covid had an impact on barriers to online engagement. For frequent attenders, the barriers were more about the online experience – it's not an attractive alternative to live, it's more a solo experience, and there isn't a good range of events/activities online. For infrequent attenders, barriers focused on external factors – there's too much going on in my life, I don't know where to look, I'm not confident in using the tech, or sound/picture quality of my equipment is poor.



Age had an impact on attitudes towards online engagement once venues reopen

- The youngest group (16-34's) would engage online, but with caveats: they were more likely to consider online experiences only if it was free or if they couldn't attend the event/activity in-person.
- The appeal of free content decreased with age.
- People aged 35+ were keener to engage with and pay for cultural experiences online, even once cultural venues reopen. About a fifth of them would be willing to pay for cultural experiences online.

What are the aspects of culture online they enjoyed less?



- Again, we know that **online is not a perfect substitute for live**. Many panellists mentioned the lack of atmosphere and social interaction.
- **Tech and the devices we use to engage with cultural content online can sometimes detract from the experience.** People are still suffering from poor internet/wifi connections and watching/participating in a cultural experience isn't great when you're using a small screen or your sound quality isn't good. Even with the best of connections, Zoom may lag and isn't always conducive to group discussions.

What can cultural organisations do to help?

- Remember that people's attention spans are different for online vs. live cultural experiences. **Shorter is better** – remember people are looking at a screen. It's probably not best to host 90-minute talks/lectures. Don't make it feel like work!
- Organisations can help by **setting audiences' expectations** for online events/activities – email Zoom/event links ahead of time and tell people what to expect on the day. Reminders also help!
- Also remember your audiences – will they have a good internet connection? Are they tech-oriented enough to want to attend your events/activities online?



Our top tips for cultural organisations on promoting online activities based on what panellists said

If restrictions are in place and you're shifting to online activities, remember that while you can't offer the experience of an in-person event, you can offer a way for audiences to stay connected with you and with each other. Emphasise the perks of being online:

- A more **relaxed environment** – audiences can relax with some food and drinks, hit the mute button, and have a wee chat with other household members without disrupting the event.
- Online activities are **easier to attend** – audiences can save time on transport/traffic/parking and are great if you have kids but don't want to bother with finding a sitter. And if you have a disability such as visual impairment, online content may be better as you then have a front row seat to an event. Also, people with mobility or chronic health issues may find it easier to attend something online because transport to a venue won't be an issue, and it gives them the option to take breaks if needed.
- A more **intimate setting** – if an artist is performing in their own home, it's more personal. Live-streamed performances can also allow for Q&A at the end, where people submit questions through a chat function.
- **Connection with others in a safe way** – not everyone is vaccinated yet, and some may prefer online activities because they are shielding or have children at home who can't be vaccinated yet. There are also people who are still uneasy about attending events in a crowd – online activities give them the option to stay connected with you as an organisation and other audience members in a safe way.
- Opportunity to reach a **wider audience**. Do you have niche artforms or have some interesting content that may appeal to other audiences? With online content, you can reach a wider geographic audience, attract new audiences who may want to try you out, and appeal to current audiences who typically have a difficult time getting to your events.
- It's Northern Ireland. People can still attend even if the weather's terrible.

