

# The Show Must Go On: Entrepreneurship in Dance Education

18 November 2022



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A recent study by [Zahra \(2020\)](#) suggests that entrepreneurial business will be able to take advantage of the global changes experienced in the past several years. Is this the case in the dance education industry? For many, dance and movement arts are peripheral. However, in the US alone, [the market size is \\$4 billion with over 66,500 business entities employing over 120,000 individuals](#). If the financial figures do not draw your attention, additional benefits include the role of dance in the treatment of [Alzheimer's and dementia](#) as well as therapy for [those with Parkinsons](#). Further, the social, physical, and cognitive [advantages](#) gained through dance are well documented within [many groups](#) – both [young and old](#).

Similar to many other industries, the dance education industry was negatively impacted by [the COVID-19 pandemic](#), resulting in devastating unemployment, lost revenue and business closures. However, being placed in a unique situation has compelled many in the arts, education and entertainment sectors to embrace new delivery methods (via access to digital technologies) [to continue operations](#). While the pandemic was the catalyst for a move to more digital dance education, the question of whether this evolution is here to stay emerges. The digitization of this industry came with many [accompanying challenges](#); however, it also presented the [opportunity](#) to adopt an [entrepreneurial approach](#) to operations and explore new opportunities.

Dance education has entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century and has implemented the tools of the [fourth industrial revolution](#). Emerging from the COVID restriction period, the question posed above becomes: 'What has the dance education industry learned through this time and what trends have surfaced to shape its educational delivery model in the next decade and beyond? Has the [entrepreneurial mindset](#) infused the dance education industry with the ability to take action given the changing global paradigm?

The events of the past three years have created [societal change](#); this can clearly be seen as the dance world pre- and post- pandemic are not the same. These changes have been demonstrated not only in the manner of program delivery but in how the dance educator builds loyalty and advocacy through customer experiences and journeys. Moving into the next decade, while there are levels of complexities to reach the diverse and dynamic dance participants, there are three universal aspects to consider in presenting movement art to clients: technological advancements; trends that represent shifting consumer values, approaches, and behaviours; and changing demographics. The entrepreneur must understand the nuance of how each of these factors shape the way consumers will engage in dance education.

## Technological Advancements

The pandemic may have precipitated the move to embracing digital technology for dance education, but a return to pre-COVID operating and marketing approaches is not feasible. While many in the dance education sector may have seen digital training as a temporary approach, technology is evolving at an exponential pace with 1.43 billion smartphones shipped around the world, up from 173.5 million in 2009. Further, the [global wearable AI market](#) such as smart watches and health monitoring units, are projected to be worth \$69.51 billion by 2026 up from \$10.63 billion in 2019. Marketing and entrepreneurial [trends identified](#) as critical in reaching consumers in these post-COVID times centre on embracing technology with multi-channel, interactive and conversational [content](#) that is agile and creates cohesive [consumer experiences](#), providing an opportunity for user-generated content to be captured. [Globalisation](#) will ensure that emphasis is placed on ensuring inclusivity in representation and that privacy and personalisation is delivered.

In fact, the last two years have demonstrated that the use of technology in dance education has allowed for the emergence of pedagogical aspects resulting in a positive impact on dance students. Studies conducted in professional dance training settings have shown that both [creativity as well as empathy](#) have been fostered through virtual training with [student-educator interaction](#) at higher levels virtually than in an in-person setting.

Creatively, the isolation during COVID has been an [inspiration for choreography](#) and, with the use of technology, presentations of original dance works have been held that featured the implementation of [immersive experiences](#) within a virtual environment. For example, shifting choreographic practice into mixed-reality environments has been reported in the extant literature showcasing '[Dancing in/Dancing with the Digital' project](#) based on a novel approach in transdisciplinary practice-(i.e, embodiment and movement in extended- or cross-reality, including augmented, virtual, and mixed-reality).

The development of an [AR dance training system](#) has been realized and this offering will be replicated, enhanced and proliferated as [online dance training](#) becomes more advantageous given the characteristics of: on-demand access for delivery in the space and time desired; genre-preferred training; and remote classes taught by dance maven teachers with international stature. What is known now is that dance education need not be kept in the studio 'box' and, in fact, there are significant benefits including individualisation, accessibility, and cultural diversity to adopting technological enhancements for both pedagogy and creativity.

## Emerging Trends

Building on technological advances noted above, the abrupt changes felt because of the pandemic have led to a cultural shift in customer values and behaviours. [Angus and Westbrook](#) (2022) published a paper highlighting ten developing consumer trends, half of which bear direct relevance to the dance education entrepreneur. These trends relate to either individual-centric or customer-segment demographics.

Individual trends include a customer shift toward emphasis on personal purpose and goals. Thus, consumers have moved from being consumption-driven to being [goal-driven](#). A second trend to note is that 'work from home' has changed the way time is used, clothes worn and relationships to family members and the environment. The 'space' within a home has become a workplace, an entertainment venue, and an educational environment. The demarcation between functional areas of living have blurred to accommodate the need to isolate while maintaining a 'full life'.

A third trend identified is that value-based decisions are prioritised. This translates to consumers desiring personalisation to address individual needs and desires as this is perceived as the key to personal happiness. These three trends reinforce the need for continued access to digital and blended delivery of dance education to: 1) fulfil the personal goals of the consumer in the manner expected; 2) to accommodate the desire to deliver access in the personal 'space' of the dancer, and; 3) to fit dance education within the priorities of individual consumers.

Group trends to consider begin with recognising the growing seniors' market. The audience of technologically competent seniors represents a new demographic with which to connect in a manner not previously attempted. A further trend to consider is that continued health concerns and different attitudes to in-person engagement on the part of both young and old, require a diversity of offerings. Consumer-comfort levels will be met through personalising customer experiences and multi-channel access. In fact, the 'metaverse movement', and its blend of engagement between 'real life' and the virtual reality (VR) and the augmented reality (AR) worlds, while in its infancy, is growing as technological advancements become mainstream. With retail and entertainment industries adopting the mix of AR/VR, dance consumers will demand more individualisation with an expectation of service and delivery from dance education that echoes their client experience encountered in obtaining products and services from other retailers and service providers.

Finally, dance industry-specific trends must also be considered. The proliferation of access to online training during COVID has been further exacerbated by [training](#) offered by large-scale organizations with brand recognition, significant financial resources and celebrity endorsements. Like the effect of a 'big box' store in a small town, these businesses are direct competition to the traditional dance studio. The dance education entrepreneur's appropriate responses to this situation can only be found in the marketing and delivery of [customer experiences](#), both in-person and virtual (blended), that engage the dancer through [an effectively designed customer journey](#).

Given the individual-centric trends noted by [Angus and Westbrook](#), a studio emancipated from the rigid traditional mindset can offer a greater level of personalization craved by the current dance student. Further, continued development a blended model can capitalize on [new target markets](#) to open access to those who may not have considered dance as an activity and attain growth through diversification of dance programs to a wider audience.

### Changing Demographics

While much of what has been covered above is relevant to the immediate future and the understanding of the ubiquitous and evolving nature of digital enhancements, the third aspect to consider looking to the future of dance education, is planning for the emergence of the [Alpha Generation](#). While the dates of this generation are still debated, there is agreement that this group, born after 2010, will be the largest generation in the history of the world, numbering close to 2 billion. They will have purchasing control and greater financial endowment than any previous generation and be the most 'tech-savvy' given their lives have been enculturated by technology. As 'digital natives', their focus and engagement will be engendered through technology and their attention attracted and dominated by artificial intelligence (AI) and VR tools.

A further consideration for the dance education entrepreneur is to consider that the largest growth rate to be experienced is projected to be in the African and Oceania regions. [Globalization will allow](#) for cross-cultural connections and new opportunities for different genres of dance education. The above factors represent the characteristics of the emerging dance education target market. Relevance to this generation will require customer journey interactions that demonstrate a connection between their life goals and aspirations and their engagement in dance education through either in-person or virtual delivery models.

### Dance Education as a Credence Service Offering In 2030

So, we return to the original questions: 'What will the dance studio look like in the future and how best is the client engaged in the changing paradigm of dance?' How can the dance education [entrepreneur](#) advance the industry having gained resilience and strength through recent global shifts? Given that the benefits of dance to our society are significant, it is imperative that the dance education sector reach out in a manner that engages not only the current consumer community but looks to the future and the changing dynamic of the desires of the emergent client.

To do this successfully, two aspects of dance education must evolve. First, the dance education entrepreneur must deliver services through mechanisms that engage the current and future consumer as an individual. Dance education, as a type of credence service offering must remain 'cutting-edge' and continue to adopt new technological approaches that emerge through multi-channels, utilizing tools that are being developed in the metaverse. Second, the dance education entrepreneur must understand the changing environment, the shift in priorities engendered by societal change and the 'space' within which we operate to recognize, and utilise opportunities to [innovate and create value](#) in dance.

The dance entrepreneur, driven by passion, optimism and engaging enthusiasm, will lead to a dance education future that encourages us to move on from the old operating and marketing paradigms and embrace that which represents the new culture within which we will live and work. In moving forward, however, the richness of the dance past is not negated but assures that dance will live into the future, continuing to offer benefits and depth of culture and heritage to remain a vibrant and integral component of our lives.



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A passionate proponent of children's programs with over 35 years of experience in organizational and team management, fund development, and strategic planning, Ms. Ahmadi is an advocate for collaboration and cooperation. She leads a team of dedicated individuals in developing a multi-program approach to performing arts education and has built a community of compatible independent organizations that work in collaboration for synergies in operations, creating community ownership of the pursuit of excellence in the Arts, Athletics and Academics.



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Experienced Senior Lecturer in Marketing with a demonstrated history of working in the higher education industry. Skilled in Marketing Management, Analytical Skills, Advertising, and Integrated Marketing. Strong research professional with a Doctor of

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## **Bora Qesja**

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Bora has over ten years of experience working in academia and industry. Bora obtained her PhD from the University of Adelaide, Australia (where she taught for five years) funded by the ARC Training Centre for Innovative Wine Production, graduated with honours from a MSc in Luxury Goods and Services from the International University of Monaco (Monaco), and has a BS in Bioinformatics from Jacobs University (Germany) which equipped her with strong analytical skills. Dr. Qesja continues her engagement with the industry as a consultant, with the latest project ('Riverland on the Verge') resulting in a permanent Virtual Reality fixture (for promoting the tourism of the Riverland Wine Region) in both the National Wine Centre (Adelaide) and Riverland Wine Centre.



## **Dr. Samaneh Soleimani**

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Samaneh is a self-motivated researcher with a multi-disciplinary background in marketing and tourism management fields. She has a solid experience in applying qualitative, quantitative, and mixed research methods. Samaneh holds a PhD in Business and Management from University of South Australia.