EDITORIAL: Special Issue on South Asian Creative and Cultural Industries

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Introduction

This special issue brings together an exciting set of articles on the theme of ‘South Asian Creative and Cultural Industries’. We present new work on and about the creative and cultural industries of, related to, and connected with South Asia, both from across its diasporas and from around the world. The papers selected showcase interesting and informative research contributions that one can locate across the intersection of the arts and humanities, business studies, and social science disciplines. In many parts of the world the creative and cultural industries are contributing to the making of place and space in terms of urban regeneration, which include novel ways of managing work-life relationships, particularly as people work and consume the products of these industries in different ways. As such popular cultures are often formed and shaped anew in and through these industries and their cultural practices. The value of creative and cultural industries in some developing economies of South Asia is often linked to their ability to: stimulate cultural and social development; and provide an economic tool for growth and development based on the potential to create employment, generate income, earn export revenues and alleviate poverty (UNCTAD 123-131).

Many people acknowledge that creativity is emerging as one of the most important sources of economic growth. Hence investing in the creative and cultural industries should entail more than just pumping up Research and Development spending or improving Education, though both are important to these industries. It requires increasing investment in the varied forms of creativity such as the arts, culture, music, design and other related fields, because all are linked and flourish together. As stated by Florida (320), this also means investing in the related infrastructure and communities that attract creative people from around the world and that broadly stimulate creativity. Here, it is also worthwhile mentioning that one of the major difficulties encountered by creative and cultural industries is the challenge of establishing and sustaining a business given that these industries often have relatively low level of firms that eventually grow and assume dominant roles in relevant markets (Cox 10-15). Despite these difficulties, managers working in the creative and cultural industries often demonstrate an entrepreneurial flair. Swedberg (249) attributes this to the leadership qualities of these entrepreneurs as being dynamic, active, and energetic leaders. They must also be ready to identify and grasp market opportunities, undertake risks and try out new combinations. This requires them to be creative in unique and sometimes unexpected ways (Aggestam 30-53), which is a key feature found in many of the articles presented in this special issue.
Contributions

The first two articles of this special issue examine how South Asian arts and culture have developed in the UK recently, where arts and culture transcend across many areas including visual arts, theatre, museums, music and storytelling. Utilising infographics and netnographic interviews, Lipi Begum and Maher Anjum’s paper ‘Beyond the Creative Class, Mapping the Collaborative Economy of Bangladeshi Creative Industries: Case study of Oitij-jo’ documents how the British Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK have been collaborating to contribute to the growth of the creative sector in the UK and Bangladesh. They show how a not-for-profit open platform like Oitij-jo can enhance a wealth of networks that are necessary for nurturing entrepreneurship and growth. Oitij-jo can be summarised as a heritage that is learning from and looking at the past, for the present. It started out with the vision to present creative excellence and achievement of Bengali traditions in the arts and crafts. This paper helps us to appreciate that ‘creatives’ in the Oitij-jo context include those who were directly working as creative practitioners such as musicians, dancers, filmmakers, photographers, writers and curators. Creatives working with some non-creatives (e.g. those working outside of the creative sectors in areas like banking, catering, IT, law and others) can produce a space for networking, collaborating and skill sharing across digital and non-digital platforms. The authors conclude that there needs to be continued strategic leadership support for the Bangladeshi creative industry managers so that they are capable of delivering and communicating creative projects across diverse generations and audiences, which is often complicated by the lack of visibility to centralised access to technology and talent. This should also help to engage and include the Bangladeshi community within the growth of the UK creative economies in the future. Continuing with the theme of South Asian arts and culture in the UK, Jasjit Singh’s paper ‘What value South Asian arts in Britain’ reports that even though South Asian arts forms play an important role in enabling audiences to participate in relevant arts, South Asian arts organisations continue to be required to articulate their value primarily as part of a commitment to ‘diversity’. This paper presents some research evidence examining the cultural value of South Asian arts using four measures of their impact on: the economy; health and wellbeing; society; and education. The findings state that these arts can play an important role in engaging those who might be less likely to participate in arts activities. Also showing that some South Asian artists may not wish to be pigeonholed as purely ‘South Asian’ and others may wish to engage with South Asian arts because it provides them with a link to their heritage.

The next two articles have a Bollywood cinema industry connection. Giovanna Rampazzo’s paper ‘The Production of Ek Tha Tiger: A Marriage of Convenience between Bollywood and the Irish Film and Tourist Industries’, examines a collaboration between the Irish and Bollywood film industries for the production of Ek Tha Tiger (2012) in Dublin. This case study draws on participant observation in the film’s production, alongside interviews conducted with the film’s producers and representatives of the Irish Film and Tourist Boards. Having Ek Tha Tiger set in Ireland represented a big leap forward in the country’s attempts to secure Hindi film industry investments, providing a unique opportunity to showcase the beauty of Ireland to a vast number of potential Indian tourists. Hence, the film laid the
foundation for future collaboration between Indian entertainment industries and Irish creative and cultural industries. The second Bollywood industry paper ‘New Bollywood and the Emergence of a Production House culture’ by Amrita Goswami, attempts to show how the Hindi film industry has paved the way for a corporate led approach towards film production, distribution and circulation (New Bollywood). Goswami shows that in New Bollywood, production houses controlling the business of film production, distribution and circulation, are not exclusively in the business of making films alone; the film business is just one component of a larger audio-visual industry comprising of media and communications empires. She illustrates that the phenomenon of global media conglomeration which happened in the 1990s in Hollywood, took shape in the 2000s in India, thus opening up opportunities for screen convergence, where a film’s earnings are not dependent on just its theatrical exhibition, but also through its release across platforms and screens (Satellite TV, Mobile, home video, etc.). This provides us with a useful insight into the contemporary workings of a major South Asian creative industry in the production of popular culture.

The fifth article presented in this special issue is ‘Optimising the Contribution of Design to Innovation Performance in Indian SMEs - What roles for Culture, Tradition, Policy and Skills?’, co-authored by Simon Bolton, Lawrence Green and Bhavin Kothari. This essay commences by examining the growing body of evidence and commentary relating to the contribution of the creative industries – especially the design sector - to the innovation performance of firms and national economies. It moves on to explore trajectories in policy that have been elaborated as a means of supporting and fostering design, and provides examples and analysis of design promotion initiatives from across the globe. In line with the theme of this special issue, the article attempts to demonstrate how and in what ways do the creative industries and creative practitioners contribute to innovation performance in Indian Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs). More specifically drawing out implications relating to issues of cultural diversity, demographics and regional identity for design-enabled innovation in Indian SMEs. India is experiencing rapid growth, and design is just one factor that will facilitate its acceleration. However, it is a factor that faces a unique set of challenges, which include: the orientation to design that is prevalent in India (importation and adaptation) must gradually shift in favour of indigenous design; and there is much space to blend traditional craft with contemporary design sensitivities, especially since India is uniquely well-placed possessing a rich heritage and culture.

The final research article is entitled ‘Envisioning the Future: Financialization and the Indian Entertainment Industry Reports’ by Nitin Govil. This work uses quite an imaginative presentation style drawing on and critiquing industry reports with a number of different graph illustrations. Govil argues that India’s investment in the creative sector has been mobilized by future-oriented aesthetic strategies, which he details in his argument. His archive is the annual Indian entertainment industry brochure, now the standard gauge for business interest in the creative sector, produced by Indian business lobbies in collaboration with media industry confabs and international management consultancies. Govil considers that the rapidity of aesthetic transformation in the Indian entertainment industry reports, from simple to increasingly aggregated regimes of accuracy, is symptomatic of the compressed time-space
of Asian modernity. He also posits that these reports conscript data to a new regime, designed not only to present a vision of the future, but motivated by the necessity of envisioning for tomorrow.

This special issue also contains some very interesting insights on the theme of creative and cultural industries from three ‘Working Notes’. The first contribution is an interview based working note from Emma Varughese entitled ‘Bahrions New Delhi: commerce and creativity in Khan Market’. This contribution gives us valuable insights into a book store in New Delhi’s Khan Market, which has come to be known as Bahrions. This book store’s continuing success relies on the creative industries of domestic India, a sector that has undergone immense change post millennium. The interview conducted with the book store’s CEO, explores issues of commerce in Khan Market and gives some fascinating facts into the manner in which books are selected, sold and marketed, which all takes place against the backdrop of New India.

The second Working Note is a short essay on ‘Impacts of Funding in Digitising the Bangladesh Film Industry: Challenges Ahead’, prepared by Muhammad Shajjad Ahsan. This essay shows that although the impacts of government funding in digitising the Bangladesh film industry is noticeable, the aspiration of growth to be expected has not yet been fully met. In-depth interviews with film industry professionals and secondary data insights are utilised to better understand productivity growth and business to business relations in the context of the Bangladesh Film Industry’s digitisation project, revealing that this project was not completed within its original timeframe. However, this essay confirms that the Bangladesh Film Development Corporation’s traditional production capability has now been integrated into its digital upgrade, which has been the main goal for this industry since 2003.

The third Working Note is by Catherine Casson entitled ‘Creative Enterprise from the Medieval to the Modern Period: Alternative Perspectives’. This contribution presents an insightful review of two books that are linked to the special issue theme. The books by Denise Tsang (2015), *Entrepreneurial Creativity in a Virtual World* and by Karel Davids and Bert de Munck, eds. (2014), *Innovation and Creativity in Late Medieval and Early Modern European Cities* are compared and contrasted here. One interesting issue arising is that both books suggest that new and creative ideas can emerge out of both opportunity and necessity. For example, from the book *Innovation and Creativity in Late Medieval and Early Modern European Cities*, Casson highlights the fact that ‘necessity’ drove product innovation in woollen production in Florence in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. From the book *Entrepreneurial Creativity in a Virtual World*, Casson highlights the fact that the use of ‘social media’ for marketing purposes is now seen as a cost-effective way for small companies to promote goods or services. Casson’s paper also demonstrates how both of these books make a strong contribution to the field of innovation and creativity. While not explicitly covering the geographical region of South Asia, both books address themes that appear in current research on innovation in a South Asian context.
The range and variety of articles and shorter pieces compiled in this special issue exemplify some important developments in the area of creativity and cultural industries research, especially in the context of South Asia. The essays have advanced our understanding of how these developments play out at various levels of analysis within different types of firms and other organisations, as well as providing some interesting policy perspectives to learn from in the future. We hope that researchers active in the fields of arts and humanities, business studies and social science disciplines may embrace some of the themes presented in the special issue and learn some new insights from the methodological approaches reported in a number of the articles. It is also hoped that this special issue stimulates more interesting future research into analysing creative and cultural industries, especially from a South Asian perspective.

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References


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