

Paths to Participation: Understanding How Art Forms and Activities Intersect

In 2020, the inability of many arts organizations to re-engage with arts audiences or visitors in physical spaces has posed an unprecedented setback for the industry. Even for arts venues that manage to reopen safely during the pandemic, the number of patrons will be generally lower than in the past because of new restrictions on visitor/seating capacity (due to social distancing protocols), downturns in the tourism and hospitality industries, and many people’s reluctance to participate in social gatherings.

Survey data predating COVID-19 may give hope to arts organizations and cultural policymakers who remain committed to delivering arts experiences to a broad cross-section of individuals and communities. As ever, artists and arts organizations have rallied with creativity and innovation to meet these new challenges—notably through greater virtual engagement of arts audiences and visitors. Now more than ever, it seems worth asking about the extent to which digital consumption of arts content can translate to in-person attendance at live events. Can these virtual arts experiences provide a pathway for broader participation in the

arts, once arts attendance resumes in most communities? For that matter, which arts activities or arts forms are closely linked, and how might these relationships affect future trends in arts engagement?

This research brief stems from analyses that the Arts Endowment requested from the consulting firm James Bell Associates in 2019, based on the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), a nationally representative survey of adults and their engagement with the arts fielded with the U.S. Census Bureau. The presentation of those findings has been adapted to suit the present-day context, with an emphasis on the positive links between electronic/digital media participation in the arts and in-person attendance, on the one hand and, on the other, the close association of certain art forms and activities.¹

Findings in Brief

1. Arts engagement through electronic or digital media is positively linked to live arts attendance at physical venues.

- Adults who used media to consume visual art or music, dance, or theater performances were at least five times as likely as other adults to attend in-person arts events. This ratio holds after accounting for differences in race/ethnicity, gender, age, and educational background.

2. There are also positive relationships between certain types of arts activities.

- Adults who participated in *theater* activities (whether attending theater live or virtually, or doing acting) were four times as likely as other adults to participate in visual art activities (whether attending an art exhibit or creating visual artworks)—and vice versa.

- Adults who participated in *literary* arts activities (whether reading or listening to books or literature or participating in book clubs) were two to three times as likely as other adults to participate in one or more broad categories of arts activity (e.g., attending arts events, personally creating or performing art, taking arts classes/lessons, or using media to consume art).

3. In total, more than half of U.S. adults (53 percent, or 131 million people) participated in two or more broad categories of arts activity in the course of a year.

- These categories are: attending arts events; personally performing or creating art; taking arts classes/lessons; using media to consume art; or reading books or literature.

Overview of Data on Arts Consumption Via Electronic Media

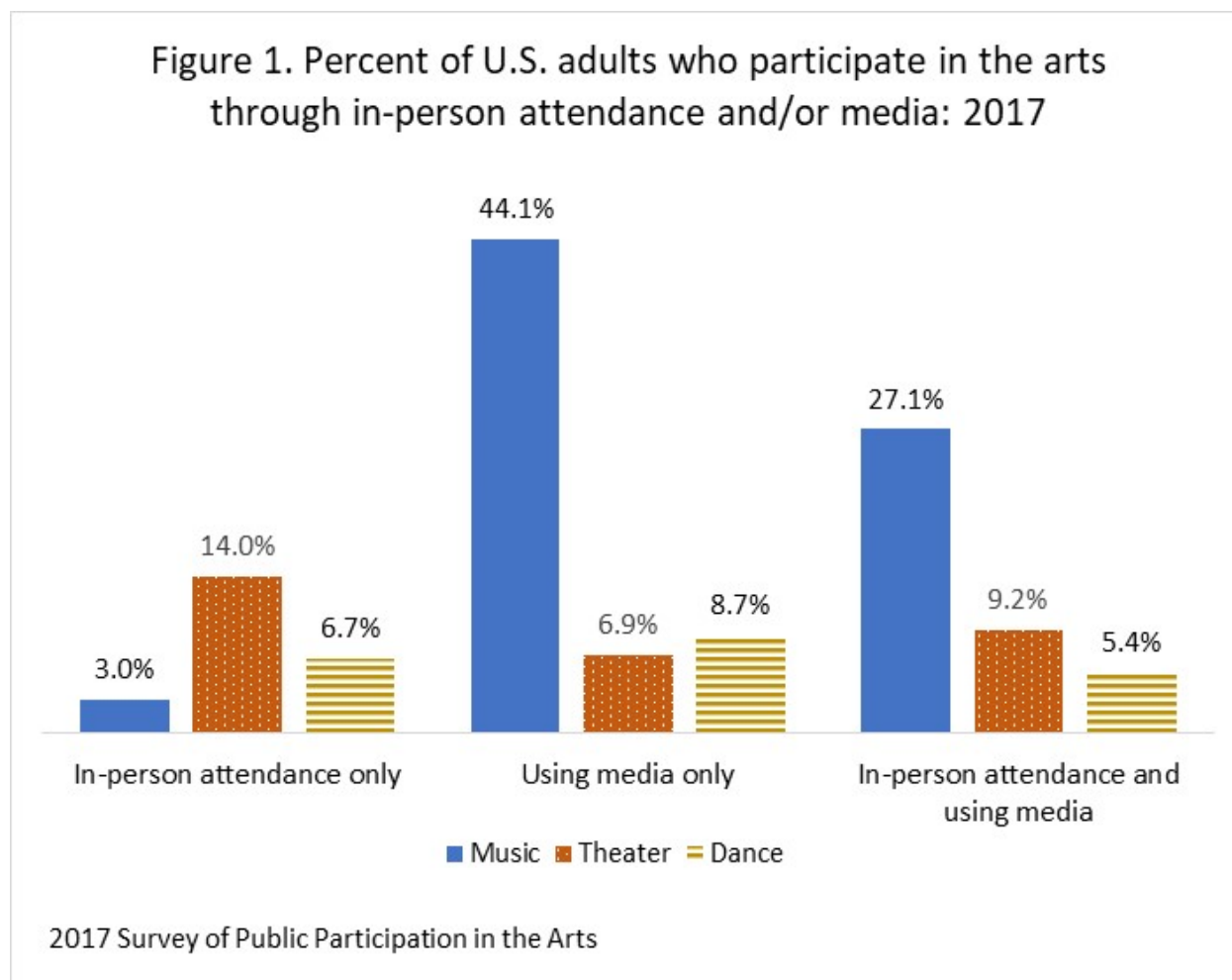
The 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA) collected data on U.S. adults' engagement with the arts through in-person attendance at live events as well as through electronic and digital media. Previous reports from the 2017 SPPA have estimated that **74 percent of adults, or 176 million people, use media for consuming art.**²

Music is by far the most popular arts activity involving media consumption. **Regardless of genre, 71 percent of adults (or 136 million people) used media in 2017 to view or listen to music.**

Specifically, 44 percent of adults used media to consume music in the course of a year, but did not attend live music events. (By contrast, only 3 percent of adults attended live music concerts but did not view or listen to music through media.³)

Across performing art forms, only theater attracted more participants through live attendance than through media consumption: 14 percent of adults attended a theater performance in 2017, compared with 7 percent who used media to view or listen to theater. Dance, meanwhile, attracted similar numbers of audience members

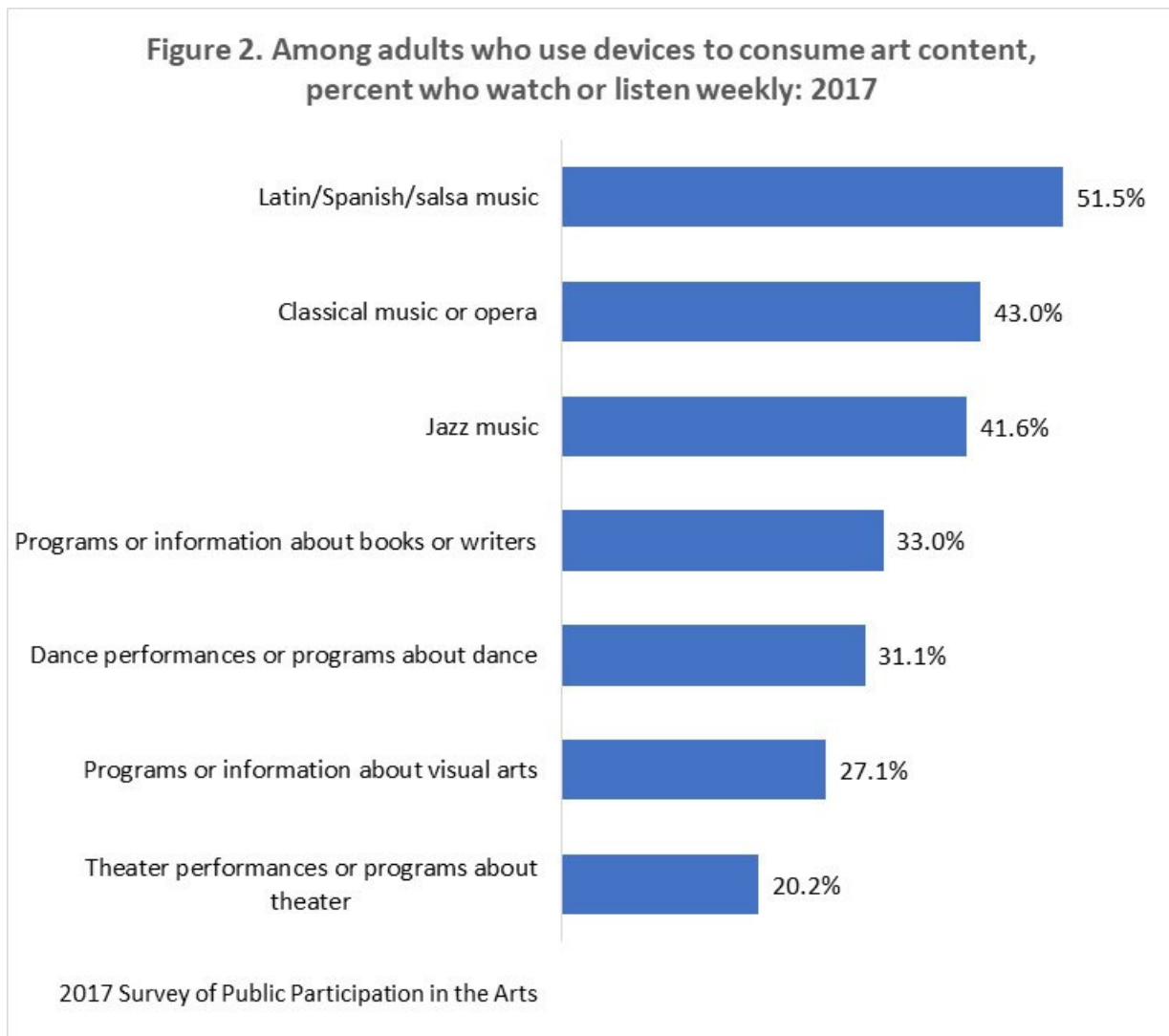
through in-person attendance and media participation. Roughly 8 percent of adults in 2017 experienced dance through either format.



Frequency of Music Consumption via Electronic Media

Not only does music attract far more viewers and listeners through media than through live attendance, it also accounts for more frequent rates of media-based participation than do many other art forms. **Latin/Spanish/salsa music draws the greatest percent of weekly viewers or listeners** (nearly 52 percent of all who use media to consume this art form), when compared with classical music and jazz and with audio/visual content related to theater, dance, visual arts, and literature.⁴

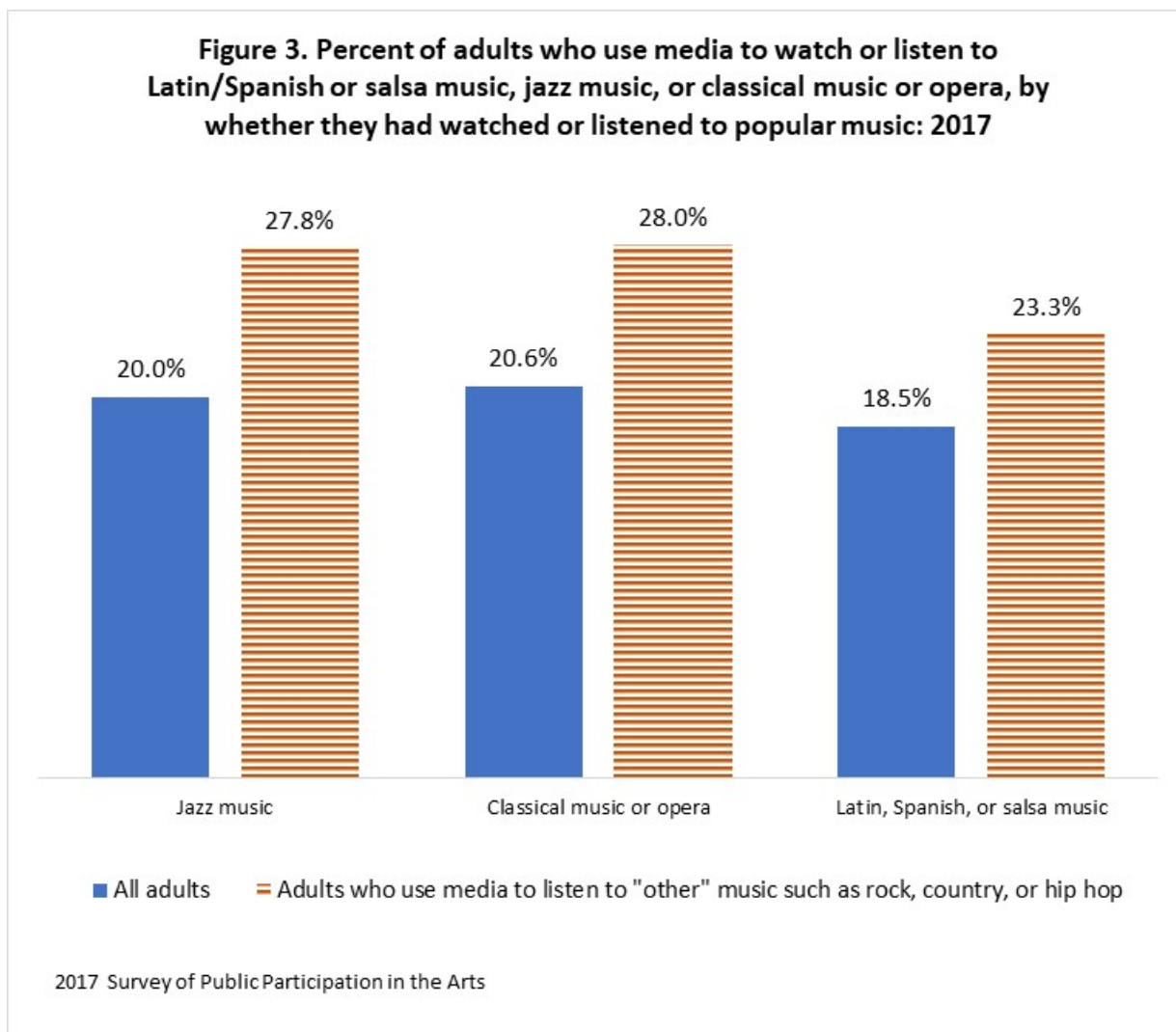
In addition, **more than 40 percent of adults who use media to view or listen to jazz music or to classical music or opera do so weekly.** The percent of media users who engage, on a weekly basis, with jazz and/or classical music in this format is still greater than the share of adults who engage weekly with theater, dance, visual arts, or literature through electronic/digital media.



Overlap in Consumers of Different Musical Genres

In addition to asking respondents about their use of media to consume jazz, classical, and Latin/Spanish music, the 2017 SPPA asked about using media to consume “other” music such as rock, country, rap, and hip hop. In 2017, **65 percent used media to view or listen to music in these other genres.**

The survey shows that **many adults who used media to consume music in these genres are also consumers of Latin/Spanish/salsa music, jazz, or classical music.** Overall, 48 percent of adults (74 million people) who consumed rock or country music or rap and hip hop also listened to Latin music, jazz, or classical music. Please see below for a comparison of the overlap in listeners to the individual music genres.



The Link Between Electronic Media-Based Arts Participation and Participation via Live Attendance

Despite sizeable differences in the numbers of adults who consume art via media and those who attend live arts events, research suggests that the two distinctive forms of arts participation are highly complementary. **After we account for socio-demographic variables such as race/ethnicity, gender, age, and education level, adults who do one activity are more likely than other adults to do the other as well.**

For example, odds ratios generated through logistic regression analysis show that the chances of attending a live music performance are nearly five

times greater for adults who use electronic media to watch or listen to music content, compared with those who do not use media to consume music.

Similarly, the odds of going to an arts museum or gallery or of attending a festival that features visual art are 7.7 times greater for those who used media to consume visual art content.⁵

The table below shows the improved chances of attending live arts events for those who have used electronic media to consume arts content.⁶

When individuals use electronic/digital media to participate in:	...their chances of participating in the same art form through live attendance increase by:
Visual art	<i>7.7 times</i>
Dance	<i>6.5 times</i>
Theater	<i>5.5 times</i>
Music	<i>4.9 times</i>

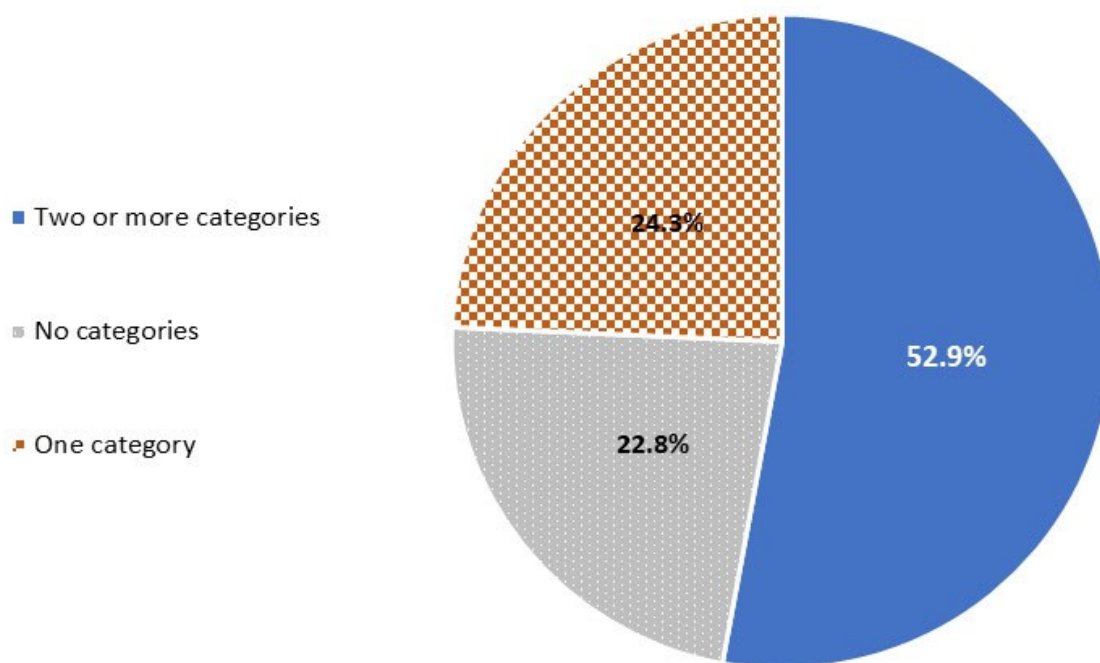
Other Links Between Participants in Various Art Forms and Activities

In-person attendance at arts events and the consumption of art via media are two broad types of arts engagement that are tracked by the SPPA.

Other categories of arts engagement—also measured by the survey—include reading books and literature, personally performing or creating art, and taking arts classes or lessons.

Overall, **53 percent of U.S. adults report having participated in two or more of these broad categories of arts activities in the course of a year.**

Figure 4. Percent of adults who engage in different categories of arts activity: 2017



Note: Categories include in-person arts attendance; using electronic media to view or listen to arts programming or content; reading books or literature; personally performing or creating art; and taking arts classes or lessons.

2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts

What is the overlap among these broad categories of arts participation? After accounting for factors such as age, race/ethnicity, and education, the 2017 SPPA shows, for instance, that adults who have engaged in arts learning (e.g., taken arts classes in the past 12 months, or learned from friends or family) are more than 6 times more likely as others to participate in the arts using media.

Those who attend live arts performances are nearly four times as likely as non-attendees to personally perform or create art.

Finally, adults who participate in reading and literature arts (e.g., read or listen to books or literature, do creative writing, etc.) are almost three times more likely as others to personally perform or create art, engage in arts learning, or attend live arts performances.

When individuals engage in literary arts, their chances of participating in the following broad categories of arts activity increase by:	
Personally perform or create art	<i>2.9 times</i>
Take art classes or lessons	<i>2.7 times</i>
Attend live arts events	<i>2.7 times</i>
Use electronic media to view or listen to arts	<i>1.8 times</i>

There are also relationships between certain art forms. For example, people who engage in dance (attend a live dance performance, use electronic media to watch dance programming, personally dance, or take dance classes) are 3.6 times as likely as others to engage with various means of music participation.

Participating in theater (either through live attendance, media, personal performance, or arts learning) is strongly linked to participation in the visual arts. Unlike the case with the relationship between dance and music (i.e., given that an individual engages in dance, he or she is more

likely to participate in music, but a person who first engages in music is no more likely than others to engage in dance), the link between theater and the visual arts is manifest in both directions.

Adults who participate in theater are four times more likely than others to participate in the visual arts. Similarly, those who go to art exhibits, create paintings or photographs, watch programming about artists, or take an art class are four times more likely to participate in theater.

When individuals engage in dance, their chances of engaging in music increase by:	<i>3.6 times</i>
When individuals engage in theater, their chances of engaging in the visual arts increase by:	<i>4.0 times</i>
When individuals engage in the visual arts, their chances of engaging in theater increase by:	<i>4.0 times</i>

Conclusion

Knowledge about the overlapping characteristics of U.S. adults who participate in certain art forms and activities can help entities who seek to stimulate and diversify arts participation at the local, regional, or national level. The 2017 SPPA finding of linkages between in-person attendance and electronic/digital media consumption of art—coupled with pre-pandemic data about the frequency with which adults engaged with art via media—may give hope, if not quite reassurance, to arts practitioners at a time when larger numbers of people are staying and working from home.

Tables showing arts participation through electronic media, and the links between arts activities and forms, are included in Arts Data Profile #18, *The 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*.

Endnotes

¹The questionnaire provided respondents with examples of electronic devices, including “TV and radio, and record-, cassette-, CD- and DVD-players as well as computers, laptops, tablets, cell phones, and other mobile devices.” For more information, see the 2017 SPPA technical documentation, available at the National Archive of Data on Arts and Culture (NADAC).

²National Endowment for the Arts, *U.S. Patterns of Arts Participation: A Full Report from the 2017 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts* (Washington, D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2019).

³In this analysis, “music” refers to all music genres captured by the SPPA. However, if the analysis is restricted to jazz music and classical music and opera, 12.5 percent consumed using electronic media only. Fewer than 1 percent attended live jazz/classical/opera performances but did not listen to or watch using radios, TV, or other devices.

⁴In this context, “literature” refers only to video or audio presentation of programming about books or literature, and not to reading literature on electronic devices.

⁵As described in *Audience 2.0: How Technology Influences Arts Participation* (released in June 2010), the 2008 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts was used to investigate the relationship between consumption of arts using electronic media and live arts attendance. Although the 2008 SPPA questions about arts participation through media differed from those in the 2017 SPPA, and the methodology used in *Audience 2.0* differed from that used for the analysis described in this document, the outcomes were similar. *Audience 2.0* reported that the likelihood of attending a live arts event was 30 percentage points higher for arts participants through electronic media than for non-participants, after controlling for demographic characteristics.

⁶The estimates shown are odds based on logistical regression analysis.