

From Stage to Screen:
The Digital Mediatization of Ballet

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INTRODUCTION

My parents enrolled me in my first ballet class when I was two years old, and it was at eight years old after seeing *The Nutcracker* when I decided I was going to become a professional ballet dancer. That same year, I auditioned for and began to take classes at that same local ballet school that produced *The Nutcracker*. This marked the beginning of 11 years of intensive classical ballet practice for me. I dedicated most of my days during the academic year to refining my technique and artistry in the ballet studio, and my summers were spent doing the same with some of the nation's premier ballet schools. At the age of 19, I began to draw back on the intensity with which I practiced due to a foot injury. At 20 years old I had to all but completely stop dancing because of a torn labrum and femoral hairline fracture in my hip. It has been difficult, if not impossible, to part with what was such a salient part of my identity, and at 22, I am still deeply immersed in the ballet world. My research thus emerged not only by my former involvement and persistent passion for ballet but also by the current sociocultural shifts I have observed.

The ballet world has been steadily evolving since its inception in the Renaissance courts of fifteenth-century Italy and France (Homans, 2010), becoming more reflective of contemporary values. As part of this process, it has become increasingly dependent on digital media. The degree to which digital media and ballet interact has been complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the pandemic has had a profound impact on many social and cultural fields, it has had a profound impact on ballet in particular. Where it was a part of the practice before, I have seen a growing adoption and dependence on digital media over the last two years. However, exactly how it has become dependent and the implications of such a shift are difficult to observe. Mediatization theory offers a valuable framework from which to evaluate the phenomenon. Mediatization captures social and cultural transformations in relation to changes in media and mediated communications (Lundby, 2014).

Thus far, ballet as a sociocultural field has attracted very little attention, with most research dedicated to ballet as a sport or a performance art and most media research dedicated to mediation or the process of becoming mediated. To contribute to the body of literature on ballet, my study intends to explore the relationship between digital media and ballet, defined as a sport and performing art, through adopting a socio-constructivist approach to mediatization theory that rejects digital media as a driving agent of change. Given the complexity of the contemporary digital media environment, this study refines the theory to investigate only the influence of digital media.

Studying a sociocultural field with which I had, until recently, been deeply involved provided an interesting perspective. Rather than impede my research, my familiarity with and experience in ballet influenced my theoretical thinking and accentuation of prevalent themes (Wulff, 1998). This study, because of the unique vernacular and secluded nature of the field, would have been encumbered by a lack of knowledge about ballet.

Since its beginning, ballet has been heavily mediated, although the focus on digital mediatization makes the influence of mass media negligible to this study. Additionally, while ballet is an independent sociocultural field, its unique intersection as a performing art and sport makes the results of this research applicable to the understanding of digital media influence on each of these broader fields.

While exploring how digital media influences the sociocultural field of ballet, this study intends to also assess: 1) how and why ballet dancers of varying degrees of involvement use different types of digital media when engaging with their activity?, 2) how do ballet dancers understand digital media's influence on the development of ballet?, and 3) What attitudes toward such influence do ballet dancers hold? As part of the study, 10 individuals who self-identify as ballet dancers and currently practice in the United States were interviewed. To eliminate bias, careful attention was paid to achieve a sample population that reflects the demographic of ballet in the United States ("United State Census Bureau," 2019). Mediatization was evaluated using Schulz's (2004) four dimensions of mediatization. As mediatization theory continues to attract attention in communication studies, this study intends to contribute to the literature by exploring a narrow field while defining ballet as a sociocultural field.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Digital Mediation of Performing Arts

In his book *Art Worlds* (2008), Howard Becker introduces the notion of an "art world" (1), a world in which there exists a "cooperative network" among actors. At first glance, the performing arts, defined by Alexey Aliyev (2020) as art "appreciated through an experiential engagement with a performance or performance-like object" (p. 941), may appear to be comprised exclusively of two groups—producers and consumers. The aforementioned are those who perform and contribute to the production itself, while the latter encompasses the audience. Though patronage is largely impacted by socioeconomic status, specifically in regard to affordability of entry, leisure time, the ability to comprehend subject matter, and the anticipated

elevated prestige from attendance (Borgonovi, 2004), the field of performing arts would virtually perish should the consumers be unaware of their occurrence at all (Shrum, 1991). This notion demands attention toward an essential third dimension—the media—upon which performing arts rely heavily to cultivate the relationship between the artist and audience member.

Beginning with the key role of the critic in influencing the prosperity of a performing art, the field is invariably bound by a longstanding relationship with media. Anthropologist Helena Wulff (1998) identifies an inevitable “conflict over interpretative authority” (p. 134) between artist and critic, rooted in an inherent discrepancy between doing and observing art when there exists a competing purpose in elevating one’s own career. Apart from bridging the gap between patron and performer, critics and their reviews also act to fortify “transnational connectivity” (Wulff, 1998, p. 149) across performing art communities, leaning once more into Becker’s (2008) notion of isolated art worlds.

Despite the highly physical sensory aspect of many performing arts, digital media began to permeate the field in the latter 1980s as a means of data preservation (Birringer, 2002). New technologies enabled artists to analyze archival footage of past performances for inspiration and imitation. In this sense, initial patterns of digital mediation in the performing arts largely leaned toward independent use. Alongside the increasing popularity of and explosion of new networked digital media platforms in the 2010s, such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, patterns shifted toward that of public dissemination (Fornäs, 2016). Recreational and professional performing artists as well as companies or organizations could circumvent mainstream media and associated censorship by uploading digital content to their personal social media accounts. Across the industry, digital media is used by artists to share news, engage with fans, and expand their audiences. Additionally, audience members are able to use digital media to connect with artists and develop parasocial relationships.

The performing arts adapts to digital media not only by the desire to promote itself, broaden viewership, and dispel an elitist assumption surrounding the industry but by necessity (Gladstone, 1999). The COVID-19 pandemic, in crippling the overall economy, caused a decline in consumer spending on live entertainment by \$28,538 million in the same quarter over a twelve-month period from 2019 to 2020 in the United States alone due in part to nationally mandated closures of performance venues and rehearsal spaces as well as social distancing guidance by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022). While retaining “elements of theatrical liveness” (Heyer, 2017, p. 119), content was digitally transformed and aided by the introduction of new online streaming platforms that

exclusively offer performing arts footage, including international streaming service *Marquee TV*, *Met Opera on Demand*, *BroadwayHD*, and *Broadway Direct*. As new digital media technologies develop, scholars continue to add to the existing body of literature concerned with digital mediation of performing art, namely the adaptation of performing arts to various forms of digital media. There remains, however, a dearth of research dedicated to the profound impact of this mediation on the art forms and artists themselves.

2.2 Digital Media in Sports

There is much literature articulating the interdependency between media and sports (Frandsen, 2015). The emergence of new media technologies, namely digital media, however, has reshaped the relationship. Regarding viewership, “sports-related events are increasingly being designed and choreographed for online audiences” (Thorpe, 2016, p. 557). As for the athlete or athletic organization, they are using digital media technologies to reach new audiences, further develop their skills, and supplement traditionally small incomes through sponsorships upon establishing a reputable and stable social media presence (Gilchrist & Wheaton, 2013). Television remains a relevant medium for sports, though the role of social media has spurred much scholastic interest as its permeation into the field marked a shift toward a new networked communication model (Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). Nevertheless, research centered on sports and digital media largely continues to consider digital media as simply another communication channel and focus on the consumption of sports media and how sports are being designed for digital distribution.

2.3 Ballet as a Performing Art and Sport

Relating back to Becker’s (2008) notion of an art world, ballet dancers and those admitted into the sphere frequently refer to a secluded “ballet world.” Within this ballet world, there exists conventions “known to all or almost all well-socialized members of the society” (Becker, 2008, p. 42) that set it apart from other art worlds. These “engraved commandments” (Mazo, 1976, p. 24) include the “five classical positions of the feet, pointed toes and turned-out legs, the specifically defined placement of the arms, and the long code of steps that has been developing since” (p. 24) the beginning of ballet. With this overt emphasis on aestheticism, the athleticism is routinely ignored in ballet’s categorization as a performing art. The categorization of ballet as an art or sport has been the subject of much debate among dance critics and scholars. Adopting the language of Becker’s (2008) book, ballet positions itself as an art by the command of “aesthetic judgement” (p. 1). Russian choreographer Michael Fokine famously expressed, “the

aim of a dancer is not to establish a record; it is to express feeling beautifully” (Goodhew, 2007, p. 35). Alternatively, drawing on the vulnerability to injury (Mazo, 1976) and endurance of pain (Turner & Wainwright, 2003), other scholars consider ballet, much like American football, to be a contact sport in which ballet dancers’ bodies exert much force on themselves (Stretanski, 2002). Acknowledging the auspicious arguments on each side, ballet is thereby situated between two seemingly competing camps. Thus, the literature of both performing arts and sports can be applied to this study.

Rooted in the lavish Renaissance courts of fifteenth-century Italy and France, ballet boasts a dense legacy as an elaborate spectator event comprised of not only the choreography but also of ornate costumes and songs that concurrently impose a strict aristocratic quality and hierarchal standards (Homans, 2010). By the mid-seventeenth century, ballet was beginning to mimic the more accessible, formalized discipline recognized today with the foundation of academies and the transition from the court to the stage.

Each art world is a social field (Becker, 2008). Intimately connected to ballet’s continued development is the globalization of the art form furthered by “guesting, touring, competitions, galas, festivals, and new technologies” (Wulff, 1998, p. 18). Guesting and touring offer opportunities for ballet dancers to supplement their notoriously small salaries with an additional income while courting relationships with other companies and dancers (Mattingly, 2005). Ballet competitions, galas, and festivals subject students and professional ballet dancers to “a criterion for excellence” (Morris, 2008, p. 40) and occur at the local, regional, and international levels. For the most part operating within the “intense, closed, highly specialized community” (Wulff, 1998, p. 18), guesting, touring, competitions, galas, and festivals function concurrently with new technologies to make ballet an increasingly visible spectacle.

As a progressively public global practice, the performing art has subjected itself to several anthropological, psychological, and sociological studies evaluating ballet dancers’ identity formation. Joseph Mazo (1976) found that ballet dancers, “even more so than the rest of us, are bound by their profession” (p. 12). In her research, Angela Pickard (2012) finds that “the values of the field of classical ballet are transmitted and perpetuated via the ballet school and ballet class to the young dancers” (p. 27) who strive to develop the “performing body” (p. 32) through the regular repetition of institutionalized technique. Victoria Willard and David Lavalley (2016) investigated the retirement experience of ballet dancers following an “overinvestment in their dance career” (p. 275). Researchers have heretofore been interested in the reaffirmation of gender stereotypes, development of eating disorders among young ballet dancers, and preoccupation with a negative body image (Ravaldi, 2006). As ballet continues to adopt new

technologies, however, deserving of additional attention is the profound impact of digital mediation on ballet and its culture.

2.4 Digital Media in Ballet

By the nature of its inception in highbrow arenas, ballet has been highly mediated. Established media, namely dance journals, and magazines, remain relevant in contributing to the development of the activity and growth of transnational connectivity. Subsumed under this traditional medium are the American *Dance Magazine* and *Pointe Magazine*, the German *Ballett International*, the Swedish *Danstidningen*, and the British *Dancing Times*, *Dance Europe*, *Dance Now*, and *Dance Theatre Journal* (Wulff, 1998, p. 149). Even at the height of traditional media, in-person engagement with ballet was perceived to be more prestigious and thus assigned an elevated status (Homans, 2010). The emergence of new media, namely digital or electronic, however, has “decreased the significance of physical presence in the experience of people and events” (Meyrowitz, 1986) and has thereby modified what it means to have a first-hand experience of the performing arts. Existing literature on the mediation of dance, sport, and performing arts suggests digital media affects ballet differently than traditional mass media (Mitoma, 2002; Milovanovic, 2021; McLean, 2008; Cushman & Ghosh, 2012; Boehmer, 2016; Rocamora, 2017). By its inherent “spreadability” (Jenkins et. al., 2013, p. 3), the adoption of digital media by ballet is a primary proponent of the activity’s growing popularity beyond the ballet world.

Mediation research on ballet suggests dancers presume digital media to benefit their technique, cultivate a transnational community online, and elevate their careers through increasing their online visibility. Upon adoption, new media was used largely for education. Photographs and videography were used as “research tools to study technique, to review and analyze choreography, and to build performance skills” (Mitoma, 2002, xxxi). Part of a ballet student’s training became both reading about ballet as well as digesting dance videos (Wulff, 1998). To overcome financial, geographic, and temporal barriers, ballet dancers sent digital documentation of their work to companies in lieu of in-person auditions or competitions (Wingenroth, 2018). Outside of the studio, it was soon discovered that emerging media technologies offered new modes of accessibility for patrons by diminishing those barriers that challenged ballet dancers themselves (Heyer, 2017). However, some critics are concerned that “since many people will never see dance live on stage, what is produced for film affects the overall health of the art form” (Gladstone, 1999, p. 33). To date, studies on digital media in

ballet have maintained a media- or audience-centric objective, focusing exclusively on one medium or acknowledging the effect of mediation on patrons.

The video-sharing platform YouTube and social networking site Instagram appear to be especially important in ballet for a dancer's professional development. In addition to watching compelling choreography, many ballet dancers have employed the platforms to establish a personal brand through which they can offer seemingly more authentic insights into their lives and gain an advantage in a competitive job market through increased visibility (Kourlas, 2015). Many ballet dancers have garnered sufficient social media followings on Instagram that have enabled them to attain verified statuses, including American Ballet Theater principal dancer Misty Copeland (@mistyonpointe), who has over 1.8 million followers, and Mariinsky Theatre principal dancer Maria Koreva (@marachok) who has over 558,000 followers on Instagram alone. According to Instagram's eligibility requirements (n.d.), the verified "account must represent a well-known, highly searched for person, brand or entity." Some critics, however, argue that the prominence of digital media in ballet has altered the performing art's value system in that "the rise of YouTube and the internet have made it more difficult than ever" (Furness, 2016) to meet audience expectations. Others contend digital media creates "a more democratic and participatory access to dance that has built a more global and inclusive engagement with the arts for geographically peripheral spaces" (Milovanovic, 2021, p. 128). There also exists strong evidence suggesting a relationship between digital media use, specifically social media, and negative body images and the development of eating disorders in adolescent ballet dancers (Doria & Numer, 2022). While digital media may contribute to the development of ballet with positive externalities, it may also lead to a reappraisal of shared values and instability in self-image. There has been much research on the mediation of ballet, but there has been no study that has placed particular emphasis on mediatization. The following two sections aim to clarify this study's approach to mediatization, or more specifically, digital mediatization.

2.5 Mediatization

Across contemporary media and communication studies, mediatization is experiencing a conceptual renaissance. The theory, which may be traced back to the early twentieth century in Northern Europe, "explores the transforming potential of mediated communication upon culture and society" (Lundby, 2014, p. 12; Rocamora, 2017). Today, the field of mediatization research is fractured by several different attempts to define the theory. Some scholars suggest two "concrete traditions" (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 196)—institutionalist and social

constructivist, with the former focusing on “traditional mass media” (Hepp, 2014, p. 616; Deacon & Stanyer, 2014) and the latter considering “everyday communication practices.” Others have proposed three perspectives—mediatization as “technological, institutional, and cultural processes” (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014, p. 709). Definitions, it appears, are differentiated on the basis of three dimensions: “time, technology, or theory” (Lundby, 2014, p. 14). It seems, however, most scholars converge on a general definition of mediatization as a metaprocess, “*a concept used to analyze critically the interrelation between changes in media and communications on the one hand, and changes in culture and society on the other*” (Couldry & Hepp, 2013, p. 197; Strömbäck, 2018; emphasis added). Striking at its core, mediatization is a conceptual framework by which media and communication scholars investigate the media’s relevance in regard to sociocultural transformation.

Despite its relative youth, mediatization may be applied to the earliest human communication, though it is the contemporary proliferation of and dependence on media that has prompted the theory’s rebirth and growth (Lundby, 2014, p. 14). Critical to grasping mediatization is an understanding of the distinction between mediation and mediatization. Where there is some overlap in that both are positions from which to study “media and social movements” (Mattoni & Treré, 2014), “‘mediation’ is a concept to theorize the process of communication in total; ‘mediatization,’ in contrast, is a more specific term to theorize media-related change” (Hepp, 2014, p. 616). Mediation considers the media as merely another channel of communication and explores media practices, traditionally in reference to a single medium (Strömbäck, 2018; Mattoni & Treré, 2014). Alternatively, mediatization grasps the “long-term interrelation processes between media change on the one hand and social and cultural change on the other” (Hepp, Hjarvard, & Lundby, 2010, p. 223). Mediatization thus captures the multidirectional influence driving transformations.

As a metaprocess implying a period of sociocultural change, mediatization is not applicable to all domains but to those “that have their own cultural order” (Livingstone & Lunt, 2014, p. 706). The theory’s precursory purpose was to consider the interrelationship between media and the field of politics but has since been applied to that of sports, science, fashion, music, education, religion, and others (Strömbäck, 2018; Skey et al., 2018; Roedder & Schaefer, 2010; Rocamora, 2017; Michelsen & Krogh, 2017; Stack, 2016; Hjarvard & Lövheim, 2012). Ulf Hannerz was the first to apply mediatization theory to cultural studies in the later twentieth century (Lundby, 2014, p. 14). Sports and art are relatively new objects of mediatization research, with the earliest attributed to Kirsten Frandsen (2015) and Jürgen Wilke (2011).

Because subjects within these “social fields” (Bourdieu, 1977) move easily between multiple channels, studies using mediatization theory should not begin with the media themselves but with the observed social and cultural shifts in microprocesses (Jansson, 2013). The ambition of mediatization is to measure media logic’s interrelationship with social and cultural change, though new digital interfaces pose interesting challenges to the theory.

2.6 Digital Mediatization

While already a fractured field, there exists an additional layer of contention across mediatization scholars concerning digitization. Media and communication scholars often acknowledge multiple media matrices. The notion of a “media matrix,” a term coined by Joshua Meyrowitz (1985), accounts for the evolution of media technologies in amassing not only the set of media and the social environment in a given social field within a given period but also those that came before (Finneman, 2011). Because social and cultural “transformations are not sudden or complete” (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 18-19), contemporary mediatization research must rest in a new media matrix to account for the proliferation of digital media (Shultz, 2004).

Digital media differs from traditional mass media, which Meyrowitz (1985) defines as “books, newspapers, magazines, and pamphlets” (p. 69), in that they signal a shift “toward a more participatory model of culture” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 2) in which the dichotomy between producer and consumer is obscured. The term “new media” is often used to refer to “user-directed” (Lundby, 2014, p. 25) distribution, whereas “old media” accounts for a centralized authority. As “today’s new media have properties that differ from the properties of yesterday’s new media” (Finneman, 2011, p. 76), the effects of digital media vary significantly in each sociocultural field (Hepp, 2013). Within mediatization research, some scholars consider digital media as just another leg in the dense legacy of media, though this study situates itself in the conceptual camp that considers digital mediatization as an entirely new branch of mediatization theory. The hypoconnectivity afforded by digital media has confounded the existing conceptual framework in giving rise “to new forms of dependency” (Lundby, 2014, p. 26) and evoking a paradigmatic shift. To accommodate for the shift in the centrality of forms of media to certain sociocultural fields, Johan Fornäs delineates between four distinct phases of mediatization: “graphic mediatization,” “print mediatization,” “audiovisual mediatization,” and “digital mediatization” (Lundby, 2014, p. 483). Given the increased centrality of digital media in ballet for the dissemination of information, professional development, and transcultural connectivity, this study operates within the latter.

3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study drew upon applied mediatization theory as well as digital media use in the performing arts and sports as outlined in the preceding literature review. It understands mediatization as a metaprocess that may be best captured by the perspectives of individuals who partake in the sociocultural field as defined by Bourdieu (1977). The study acknowledges the importance of digital media for sociocultural transformations but does not adopt a linear, media-centric perspective. Abiding by Ekstöm et al.'s (2016) three-step research agenda for mediatization studies, this investigation specifies the narrow sociocultural field of ballet, acknowledges the need for longitudinal comparisons by posing questions framed within different temporal contexts, and measures mediatization by using Strömbäck's (2008) four dimensions of mediatization: centrality of the media in communication, autonomy of the media, dominance of media logic, and practices as guided by media logic. Perspectives from participants that can be regarded as indicators of these dimensions are interpreted as indicative of mediatization in ballet.

Adopting a digital mediatization approach, this study offers a definitive interpretation of digital media. Founded in Fornäs's (2016) definition of digital media, this study will define digital media as both the technology and content—websites (e.g., blogs, vlogs), social media platforms and networking sites (e.g., Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat), video-sharing platforms (e.g., TikTok, YouTube), digital camera technologies (e.g., smartphone cameras, digital cameras), and any technology enabling the production of digital media content.

4 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

Founded on the conceptual framework outlined above, this research intends to investigate how and why ballet dancers of varying investment use different types of digital media when engaging with their activity, how they understand digital media's influence on the development of ballet, and their attitudes toward such influence. This study, therefore, seeks to answer the following research question: *In what ways is ballet subject to digital mediatization?* The subsequent section will outline the selected methodology to measure digital mediatization in ballet.

5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Rationale

There is not a definitive methodology to researching mediatization, therefore this study applies concrete methods from humanities and social sciences and draws on existing literature from other performing arts and sports (Lundby, 2014). A qualitative research design employing a semi-structured interview made it possible for the researcher to capture the complexities of the deep sociocultural transformations of ballet. The researcher investigated mediatization as experienced by individual ballet dancers to grasp broader institutional transformations. Lundby (2014) contends that “to claim that there is a process of mediatization, one should have several observations of moments and objects along the way that demonstrate the transformation of the sociocultural institution under study” (p. 23). To grasp the overall process of mediatization, the researcher interviewed ballet dancers of varying degrees of involvement in ballet (e.g., professional, pre-professional, and recreational), age groups, and gender, as well as the evolution of media coverage in established ballet-centric magazines and journals.

The researcher also conducted qualitative content analysis of six professional ballet dancers’ social media channels—Kathryn Morgan (former soloist with New York City Ballet and Miami City Ballet and current instructor at Ballet West), Maria Khoreva (first soloist at the Mariinsky Theatre), Michaela DePrince (second soloist at Boston Ballet), James B. Whiteside (principal dancer and choreographer at American Ballet Theatre), Marianela Nuñez (principal dancer at The Royal Ballet), and Harper Watters (first soloist at Houston Ballet). The mere existence of these latter artifacts demonstrates the mediatization of ballet because the ballet dancers selected have become icons across popular culture, becoming ambassadors of prominent athletic brands and making appearances on talk-show variety shows. People are interested in not only their lives as professional ballet dancers but in their lives and attitudes outside of the studio. Though these sources are presumptively filtered, this subjectivity—an element also of the interviews conducted—is not considered problematic in regard to this study because the work seeks to interpret perceptions.

5.2 Research Design

A qualitative research design was deemed most appropriate to address the objective of the study. The research design allowed for collecting “meaning in context” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 2) relevant to social and cultural construction. The data set was collected through semi-structured interviews to permit flexibility to explore questions emerging from each conversation while remaining attentive to a predetermined focus of study (Patton, 2002). Ethical approval for

the study was received from Texas Christian University's internal Institutional Review Board (IRB).

5.3 Participants

Ten ballet dancers—five (one male and four female) professional ballet dancers, four (one male and four female) pre-professional dancers, and two recreational ballet dancers (zero male and two female)—were recruited to participate in the study. It is difficult to determine an accurate profile of the demographic of ballet dancers, so data collected by the United States Census Bureau (2019) on the gender composition of dancers and choreographers was used as a proxy to guide participant sampling. According to the data published in 2019, individuals identifying as females accounted for 76.2% ($\pm 6.5\%$) of the occupational group. Accordingly, eight of the participants are female. Furthermore, 55.2% of dancers and choreographers surveyed in the United States self-identify as white (non-Hispanic). Reflecting the demographic of ballet, six of the respondents are white. The average age within this occupational group in the United States is 30.5 (± 2.61) years old for a male and 29.5 (± 2.09) years old for female ballet dancers, though the average age of participants fell below at 28 years old for males and 25.7 years old for females.

The researcher contacted the participants by one of three methods. Nine interviewees were contacted via their personal emails linked from their social media accounts or given by another ballet dancer, and one interviewee was contacted via a direct message over Instagram. Participants represented varying degrees of involvement in ballet (e.g., professional, pre-professional, recreational), age groups, and gender.

5.4 Interview Guide

To permit flexibility and develop conversational rapport with the participant while simultaneously “ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (Patton, 2002, p. 343), an interview (or topic) guide (See Appendix 2) was used for each interview. The interview guide was modeled using the areas of exploration suggested by a study that applied semi-structured interviews to sport and performance psychology (Aoyagi et al., 2017). The interview guide was divided into four parts and comprised of questions designed to be open-ended. The objective of the first part was multifold. It posed questions to capture the participant's background in ballet, ensure each person interviewed met participatory requirements as approved by the IRB, and establish a conversational quality for the subsequent

questions. The second part probed respondents about their digital media, both general use as well as how it is used for ballet. The third part posed questions concerning participants' relationship with digital media technologies, including cameras or recording devices, and the final part was focused on the ballet community and its culture. To grasp an understanding of the metaprocesses of digital mediatization over multiple periods, the time frame of questions varied from past, present, and future tense (Patton, 2002). Sequencing of questions shifted throughout the data collection process to maintain a conversational flow with each respondent.

5.5 Interview Procedure

Person-to-person interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom in the presence of the researcher and interviewee only. Cameras and audio were enabled for both the participant and researcher. All participants were asked to provide oral consent to participation as well as permission to video and audio record the conversation held over Zoom. In the initial communication, each interviewee was provided with a summary of the research as well as the right to withdraw from the interview at any point and refusal to respond to questions or omit data from the record. All interviewees were guaranteed anonymity upon publication. Following oral consent, the researcher enabled Zoom's video and audio recording as well as transcription capabilities, and a semi-structured interview began. The duration of the interviews was between 25 minutes and 23 seconds and 52 minutes and 22 seconds, with an average duration of 36 minutes and 45 seconds. Following the interview, the video and audio recordings as well as the transcription were downloaded, labeled according to each participant's name and interview date, and stored electronically on the researcher's personal laptop, which was password-protected and accessible by only the researcher and supervising faculty upon request.

5.6 Data Analysis

Considering the investigatory objective of the research, thematic analysis was used to analyze the interviews. A five-step procedure adapted from the work of Willard and Lavallee (2016) was applied to analyze each interview:

1. Each interview was recorded in its full length and transcribed verbatim using Zoom's recording and automated transcription features, respectively, to ensure accuracy, with correctness reviewed by the researcher. During the interview, the researcher attempted to capture observations of nonverbal pauses and cues in her field notes.

2. The researcher examined each interview transcript in depth to gain familiarity with the responses and mitigate the need to return to the data to identify “missing links” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 163) during analysis. During this initial phase of coding, the researcher took note of bits of data she deemed interesting or potentially relevant to the study.
3. The researcher reviewed her open coding and identified “recurring regularities in the data” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 203) for each participant to define raw data concepts (or themes) and apply malleable conceptual labels that reflected the researcher’s interpretation of what was shared.
4. The researcher compiled the raw data themes of all respondents to make comparisons and derive a common “master list” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 206) reflecting patterns across participants.
5. The researcher reviewed her preliminary coding from the previous step to conduct axial coding and determine higher-order themes deduced from Schulz’s (2004) four dimensions of mediatization: extension (digital media can overcome physical and temporal boundaries), substitution (digital media is used to partly or wholly substitute previously non-mediated practices), amalgamation (when traditionally non-mediated and digitally mediated practices become interwoven), and accommodation (when media logic becomes dominant).

Preliminary coding began after the first interview “because the first data serve as a foundation for further data collection” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 163).

6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section offers the results derived from the thematic analysis of the 10 interviews with, as well as the social media activity, of five ballet dancers. Quotes extracted from the interviews were anonymized and labeled alphabetically according to the participant’s last name. Interview transcripts were thematically analyzed following a five-step procedure articulated in the previous section. Schulz’s (2004) four dimensions of mediatization are used as the main themes of the research, and sub-themes related to the main themes were gathered from the interviews. When considering the different models by which to analyze the data, institutional and technological-centric approaches, though common in mediatization studies, were determined to be inadequate in capturing the sociocultural processes that occur. Because

Schulz's socio-constructivist framework considers mediatization a metaprocess that influences various media environments uniquely and accounts for a shifting social dynamic, his conceptual model was deemed the most appropriate approach.

6.1 Extension

Over the course of its history, ballet has become heavily mediated. Ballet dancers have reacted quickly to the development of new digital technologies; however, digital media has become the most prominent source of information and channel of communication for ballet dancers, extending what can be shared and how it is shared. The social media platforms YouTube and Instagram have played important roles, and the social media platform TikTok appears to be of burgeoning significance to the extension of communication processes.

6.1.1 Information and Knowledge

Ballet dancers use digital media to promote technical and professional development through sharing information about career opportunities, advice, and experiences as well as seeking inspiration and motivation by watching past performances or other dancers. Before the advent of social media and networking sites that are widely adopted by ballet dancers today, one respondent (Interview B) reported using video home system (VHS) tapes as the first place to access existing choreography and gain knowledge about how certain steps should or could be conducted. Every other respondent, however, accredited YouTube as the first place they acquired footage of past performances to acquire similar information. YouTube serves not only as a more accessible and broader repository of performance footage than physical tapes but also as a source of advice that may be refined for relevance with the 'search' and 'suggested' features. Regarding this particular function of YouTube, a 21-year-old female pre-professional ballet dancer (Interview F) recounted,

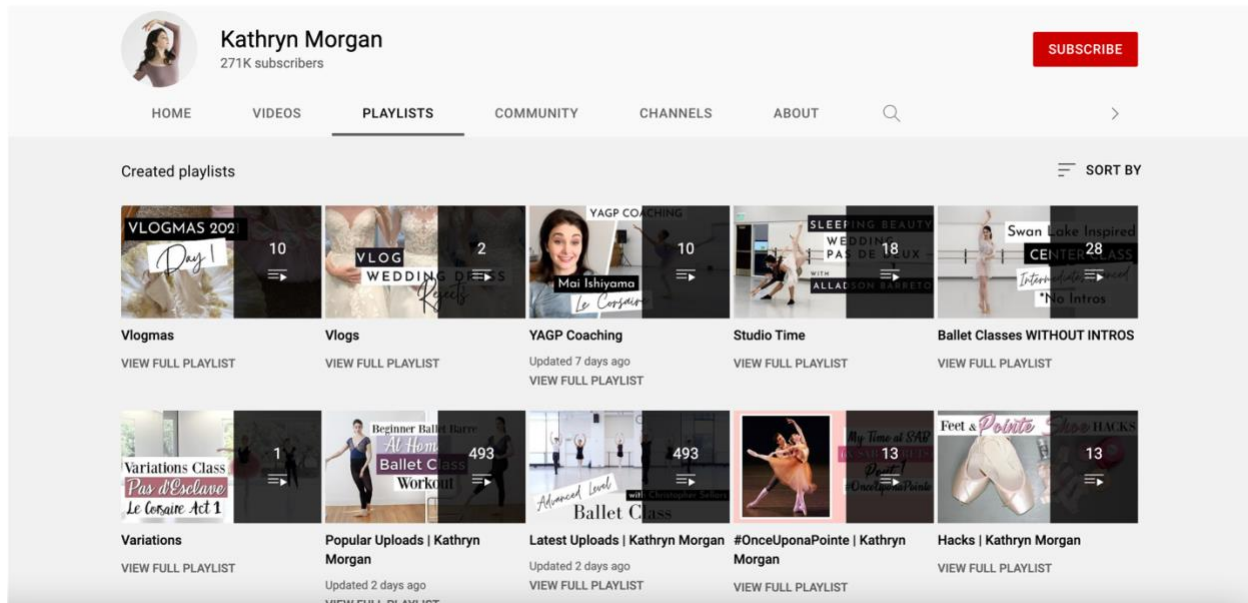
"I would go to YouTube to look up variations of different ballets as research. I would watch how people danced and maybe try to emulate them...I use it as a form of research and to get information."

The 32-year-old professional ballet dancer and social media influencer Kathryn Morgan maintains a YouTube channel with more than 270,000 subscribers, dedicated to sharing career advice and her experiences as a student and professional dancer. Morgan's videos cover an array of topics, including "10 Secrets to Becoming a Ballet Dancer" (2017), "Picking Variations for

Auditions & Ballet Competitions” (2017), and “Ballet Networking? Tips for Trainees? Funniest Backstage Stories?” (2021). Figure 1 shows Morgan’s YouTube channel.

Figure 1

Kathryn Morgan's YouTube Channel



Despite the demonstrated functionality of YouTube, Instagram has surpassed the digital platform in terms of significance for the ballet community. This is primarily due to Instagram’s affordances. In regard to technical and professional development, two prominent affordances are visibility and permanence, with the aforementioned pertaining to the ability to share content and access content from a broad user base and the latter having to do with the potential for content to be published and remain accessible. A 27-year-old female professional ballet dancer (Interview C) accounted for the observed shift in this way:

“[...] As social media got more popular and advanced, I feel like there was a lot of dance videos, specifically on Instagram, of dancers posting their own content...It was more personal footage.”

Instagram also enables users to view and engage with content from a diverse social network that is not inherently ballet-centric. Reflecting on visibility, two respondents remarked how this passive, unintentional exposure has made them feel more knowledgeable about the ballet world. In reference to Instagram, 21-year-old Interview D claimed:

“It’s the most accessible...I can be scrolling through pictures of my friends and then also be up on what’s happening in ballet.”

Despite the abundance of magazines and other traditional media dedicated to ballet, dancers find social media to be more immediate and accessible for the dissemination of information on news relevant to the ballet world.

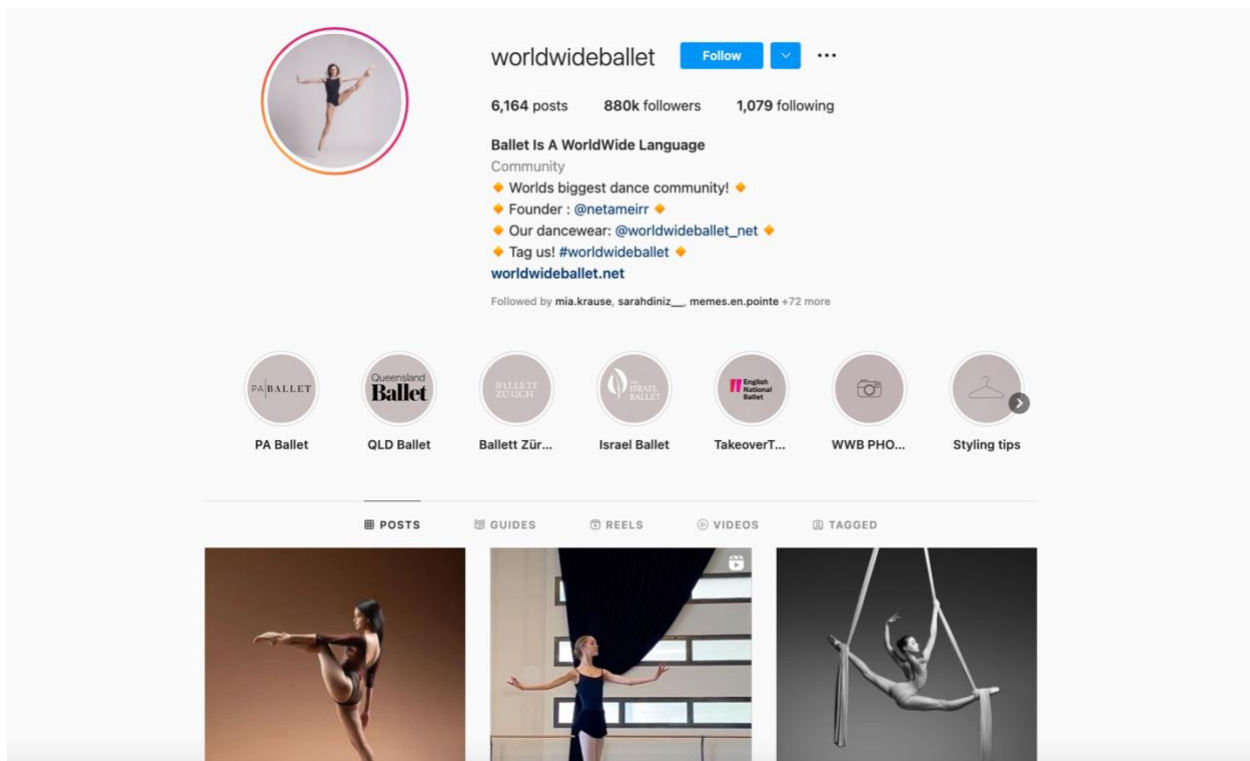
6.1.2 Transnational Connectivity and Collaboration

Ballet dancers use digital media technologies, specifically social media platforms, to contact and connect with other ballet dancers globally. This corresponds to the idea brought forth by Wulff (1998) that, as a “highly specialized occupation” (p. 37), ballet inherently leans into transnationality. While Instagram is the more popular social media platform for the ballet community, there does not appear to be a dominant platform for cultivating this transnational body. When asked how ballet dancers come together as a community, most respondents referenced the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that compelled ballet companies, studios, and theaters across the globe to temporarily suspend in-person activity. In early March 2020, Interview C observed:

“[...] A lot of dancers were turning to social media and Zoom to take ballet classes. [...] It kind of sped up that process of dancers coming together online. I saw dancers from all over the world taking the WorldWide Ballet classes, and I thought that was really interesting to see these big-name ballet stars taking class with students from small towns.”*

One participant (Interview F) cited WorldWide Ballet’s World Ballet Day virtual dance class as her first exposure to ballet online. Figure 2 shows WorldWide Ballet’s Instagram account.

Figure 2

WorldWide Ballet's Instagram Page

*Note. WorldWide Ballet is a dancewear brand that periodically hosts master classes from professional ballet dancers (@worldwideballet)

When barriers (e.g., personal equipment and adequate flooring or space) disallowed participation in a virtual ballet class, ballet dancers were still able to be active members of the ballet community by following other members—both those with whom they had a relationship offline as well as those who they admired or with whom they did not have an offline relationship—on social media and engaging with their digital content. Referring to Instagram, a 21-year-old respondent (Interviewee D) shared:

“[...] When the pandemic hit and I started going to college, it became a good outlet for seeing what was still happening in the art form.”

For all levels of engagement in ballet (e.g., recreational, pre-professional, and professional), social media is used as a networking tool. Relating once more to the visibility afforded by Instagram, Interview G identified that:

“There are opportunities that arise by having an Instagram and getting a following because there are more people and directors that are able to see your profile from around the world [...].”

Digital media also allows ballet dancers to come together over low-stake challenges, tricks, and trends. The design of this “spreadable content” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 193) is to “encourage further dialogue with the industry” (p. 192). On February 26, 2022, 38-year-old professional dancer James B. Whiteside participated in the Beyoncé Partition Drop Trend that went viral on TikTok in early 2022. In the video published on his Instagram account (Figure 3), Whiteside is wearing a knee brace to tend to an injury, so it may be deduced that the intention of the post was not to showcase skill but to be an active participant of a broad community.

Figure 3

Instagram Post by James B. Whiteside



Some respondents voiced concerns with this development, as some of the tricks, trends, and challenges emphasize the athleticism by exploiting very few similar steps—“pirouettes and balancing” (Interview F)—and thus risk reducing ballet to several steps rather than promoting it as an art form centered on movement quality.

The adoption of digital media technologies has also encouraged collaboration across ballet companies. While companies have historically exchanged choreography, costumes, and dancers (Wulff, 1998, p. 39), it has become more prevalent in recent years. Interview D accounted for the amplification in this way:

“From the perspective of principal dancers, they can get more exposure. [...] And it’s another way to promote the company to new people.”

Digital media can greatly contribute to the development of the cultural field of ballet by extending the communication capabilities of ballet dancers and providing a platform through which they can connect globally to share knowledge and stay in contact. Ballet dancers value this affordance and the amplified familiarity. However, certain forms of collaboration (i.e., challenges and tricks) may be problematic if they encourage ballet dancers to push their bodies to physically unhealthy points.

6.1.3 Generational Divide

The degree to which digital media technologies extend communication processes or other activities is correlated with a ballet dancer’s age. When responding to questions relating to digital media use and influence, six respondents alluded to an inverse correlation with age. Interview B, for instance, finds:

“[...] This current generation of dance performers, because of their age, is probably more on Instagram and maybe TikTok. I’m too old to understand that [...].”

Because of the disparity in use, ballet dancers belonging to different generations are affected unequally by digital media. Interview A, a 30-year-old professional ballet dancer, expressed that matters of mental health (i.e., extreme body consciousness), though already prevalent across the field (McLean, 2008, p. 215), are exacerbated in generations with higher recorded social media use:

“It can become problematic and damaging to young people’s mental health. [...] To sort of circle back from my experience consuming ballet on social media, it is going to be much different than a 14-year-old right now.”

The sensationalism derived from digital iterations of ballet has prompted questions concerning the mental health of young dancers. Regarding the consumption of digital content, Interview A also noted:

“It can become problematic and damaging to young people’s mental health [...] because they’re going to be so much more aware and have so much more information that it might be harder, I can imagine, for them to find their own voice.”

Although digital media has the capacity to extend certain communication processes, respondents indicated that the adoption of new digital media technologies could hamper both the diversification of the sociocultural field if certain populations within the ballet world cannot overcome the learning curve associated with a shift toward a centralized digital platform for communication as well as the progression if digital media continues to exacerbate existing challenges (i.e., mental health) for ballet dancers.

Digital technologies and social media platforms are effective for facilitating communication across the ballet world, such as extending the information that can be shared, how it is shared, and with whom it is shared, yet the aforementioned disadvantages, as well as the difficulty in assessing the credibility of information communicated online have perpetuated the importance of offline engagement. Comparing what she experienced beginning her professional ballet career before the advent of social media platforms to what she witnesses today, a 42-year-old professional dancer (Interview B) observes that physical proximity can foster a greater connectivity that contributes to the overall quality of a performance:

“Really strong bonds form from working together. In the sort of setting that we’re in, you have to be comfortable with your body being close to somebody else’s body.”

This finding is consistent with Wulff’s (1998) study that concluded that intimacy within the ballet world is strengthened by “close social distance” (p. 107). Thus, digital potential is limited. Nevertheless, the adoption of digital media is valuable to the ballet world in allowing for the dissemination and consumption of digital content to be used for the purpose of technical and professional advancement.

6.2 Substitution

Ballet dancers use digital media to substitute various activities and institutions within the ballet world. Although the most critical influence on the development of the art form has been the digital substitution of in-person performances, there are other ways in which this substitution has impacted ballet.

6.2.1 Substitution of In-Person Performance

Ballet dancers are increasingly creating and presenting digital forms of dance in lieu of in-person performances. One impetus for this occurrence has been the COVID-19 pandemic, as briefly mentioned in the previous section. While screen dance—a piece exclusively created to be seen and shared digitally (Interview H)—has persisted since the early 20th century (McLean,

2008), its popularity greatly expanded since mid-2020. Recorded versions of existing ballets were primarily accessible via physical tapes or YouTube, yet some ballet companies have created their own or uploaded their content to existing streaming platforms to circumvent certain pandemic restrictions and share their craft with audiences. Interview C expressed:

[...] Since the pandemic started, it kind of forced us to quickly switch to this virtual platform because that was the only way to get content out effectively.”

The skill of creating a screen dance is even becoming a part of a collegiate ballet dancer’s curriculum. Interview F shared:

“It was an opportunity I probably wouldn’t have gotten if the pandemic hadn’t happened.”

Digital adaptations have proven to allow ballet to be more accessible for some audiences, including those who do not have an expendable income, as well as those who do not live near a ballet company. Ballet thereby appears to be moving away from the previously “circumscribed world” (Mazo, 1976, p. 103) it was toward one which is unbarred. Reflecting on this shift, Interview F noted:

“The lines are being blurred, and I like that. Before, ballet used to be closed off and kind of felt like it was only for the elite.”

Although the substitution of in-person performances poses benefits for both those within and beyond the ballet world, all respondents acknowledged that in-person performances cannot be perfectly substituted. Mazo writes, “watching dance like watching sport is feeling as well as seeing” (1976, p. 85). Most respondents alluded to an unidentifiable “feeling” that is lost with a digital alternative. A 20-year-old pre-professional ballet dancer (Interview E) conveyed:

[...] Even if you’re watching it live, there’s still something about watching it in person—a sort of added level—that you don’t get in a video.”

While Interview G applauded how this substitution is “innovative,” she maintained:

“I don’t think anything can replace in-person performance. [...] I had a special sense in the theater, though I don’t know what it is.”

One respondent (Interview A) proposed “liveness” as this absent quality:

“Ballet is a live, moving, and breathing art.”

Another fascinating facet of this substitution is how digital platforms subject these digital renditions to new standards of evaluation and alter their meanings. Two respondents resolved

that this is due to the amalgamation of ballet and other forms of digital entertainment.

Considering ballet performances presented digitally, Interview B claimed:

“There’s a disconnect, and I feel like I enjoy it less than I would have had I seen it in person. I don’t know it that’s because we watch TV and have become desensitized to that fact that these are live humans doing a thing.”

Interview D discerned specific evaluative standards, such as lighting, sound quality, and videography:

“Now, it’s not even evaluating the technique or the artistry but all of these other aspects.”

Furthermore, this substitution requires the refinement of traditional terminology for the cultural field. Given that patrons no longer need to set foot in a physical theater to witness ballet, the term “full house” may now be anachronistic. In some digital ballets, there is no longer a curtain to draw. As Interview B reiterated:

“The classical ballet line is created very specifically to be viewed from a specific angle.”

Substitution has, therefore, prompted a change in the nature of the activity. The substitution of in-person performances with digital alternatives demonstrates not only a development in the field but the ballet world’s responsiveness to previously exogenous factors.

6.2.2 Substitution of In-Person Auditions

Ballet dancers are able to attend or submit digital auditions in place of in-person auditions, which are critical components of a ballet career (Wulff, 1998). Almost as an extension to the affordance of transnational connectivity, this development enables ballet dancers to overcome barriers that may have inhibited them from pursuing professional opportunities, including but not limited to the monetary cost of travel and opportunity cost of time away. Digital auditions were becoming increasingly common prior to the pandemic (Wingenroth, 2018), although ballet dancers experienced a rapid boom because of additional constraints. As a result, competition in an already competitive practice is amplified.

While most respondents recognized the value of virtual auditions, some addressed concerns. Interview H, for instance, noticed:

“Before, you’d get one shot. There was no ‘alright, we’re going to cut this’ or ‘we’re going to start over,’ whereas when you film, you can say, ‘okay, let’s go back to reshoot this because we didn’t get the right angle, or there was something else wrong.’”

One affordance of digital auditions is that each section can be retaped as well as strategically filmed and selected to showcase a dancer's strengths and conceal weaknesses.

Counterintuitively, however, the presence of a camera, according to most respondents, negatively affects their performances. When asked if having a camera or recording device around shaped her dancing, Interview I shared:

[...] I always get more nervous, and it almost becomes more robotic. I think it's because the camera adds an extra layer of pressure."

Another (Interview A) noted:

"It's just not as enjoyable. I'm pretty sure my feet are going to point no matter way, but the mental strain definitely makes it more exhausting."

Interview F was the only respondent to express a wholly positive experience:

"I'm more nervous with actual people in the room than if there's just a camera set up."

Furthermore, filmed auditions raise the question of authenticity and equity. According to some respondents, this substitution works to counterbalance rather than level the field, as some ballet dancers have access to certain equipment that can enhance the quality of the tape and draw focus from one's technique and artistry. A few respondents reconciled this concern with the fact that ballet remains a performing art in which there is still a demand to perform at par or above in-person. Interview G held that:

"Your dancing needs to speak for itself in the studio."

The substitution of in-person auditions with digital enables ballet dancers to circumvent several barriers that may have prevented one from pursuing professional opportunities and thus proves valuable to the development of ballet, though, similar to the replacement of in-person performances, the demonstrated drawbacks imply that a perfect substitution does not exist.

The provided examples illustrate how digital media, alongside other exogenous factors, such as the pandemic, act as a "molding force" (Hepp, 2012, p. 24) on the ballet world. Digital media has altered how ballet dancers pursue and obtain professional opportunities by affording them the means to substitute traditionally in-person activities, primarily performances and auditions. These digital alternatives, however, are not perfect replacements and have reshaped the evaluative framework for these activities.

6.3 Amalgamation

In response to a rapidly evolving digital media environment, ballet dancers amalgamate digital media with other aspects of the field, specifically training, auditioning, and interpersonal

communication processes. Within the ballet world, there has been “a dissolution between mediated and non-mediated boundaries” (Sculz, 2004, p. 89).

6.3.1 Digital Media Technologies in Training

Ballet dancers have become reliant on digital media technologies to provide feedback on their technical and artistic capacity in the classroom and in rehearsal to better their performances. When respondents were asked if they often have a camera or recording device with them when dancing, most admitted to the affirmative. Most content is used exclusively as “a practice tool” (Interview I) to improve one’s own technique and artistry. On this topic, Interview A said:

“My phone is always on me. Sometimes, I take it out and film myself a pirouette or something. It might not always be to post, though. It might just be to use as another coach or a mirror.”

Some, however, especially professionals, revealed the detriment of adopting such tools and why digital technologies could not completely substitute in-person training and feedback. In the eyes of a 28-year-old professional dancer (Interview G):

“I feel like videos [...] flatten out your dancing, so I don't like thinking of myself as what I see in the video. [...] In-person is a whole different experience.”

Interview D echoed this sentiment by admitting how the amplification of self-criticism, when not functioning constructively, may negatively impact one’s training:

“It can be hard to not judge yourself.”

Importantly, all respondents acknowledged the functional capacity of digital camera technology and social media platforms outweigh the disadvantages of technical and professional development. Interview G explained:

“There are times when you're preparing for a part and want to film the variation, so you need to critique yourself. I think filming is a great way to do that.”

While it appears digital media technologies will never completely substitute in-person training and feedback, ballet dancers will continue to adopt them as tools for greater efficiency and advancement in the activity.

6.3.2 The Adoption of Digital Portfolios

While having a social media account or some sort of digital media presence is not yet an absolute requisite to succeed socially or professionally across the ballet world, ballet dancers

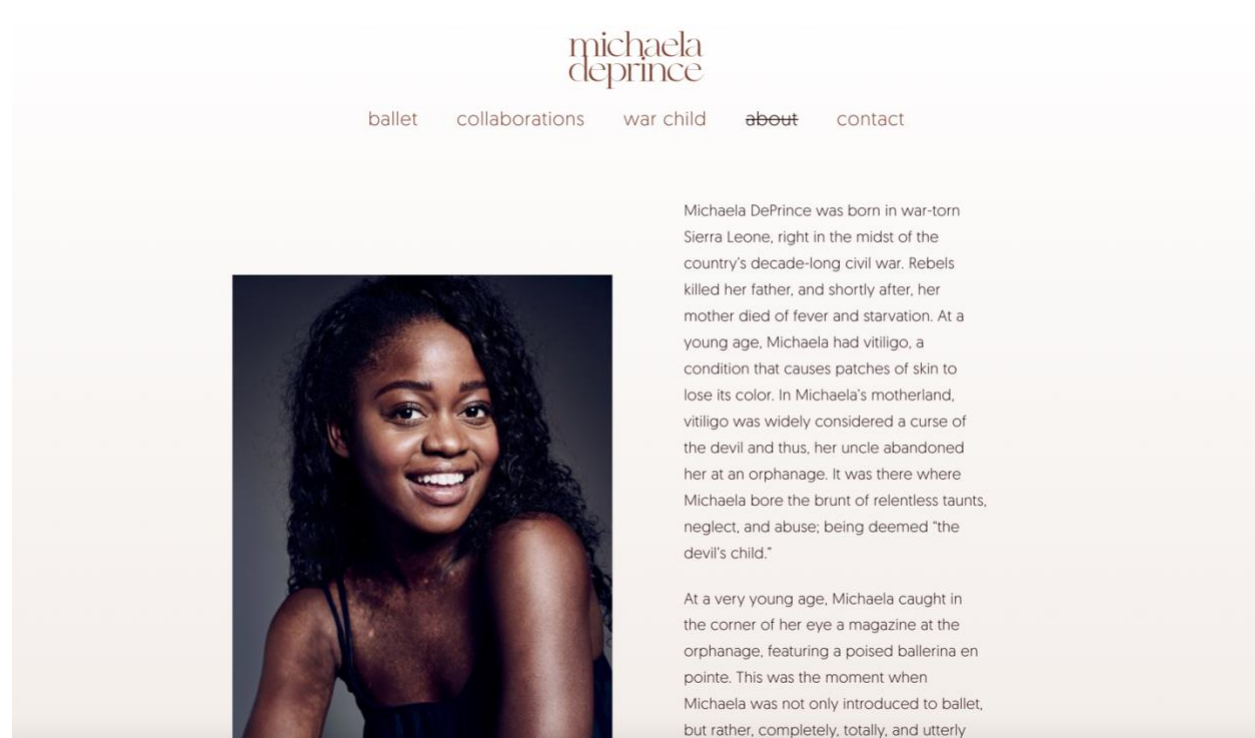
have discovered that it does help as a supplement to in-person self-presentation. Interview F has observed:

“Especially if you are a professional dancer, you want to have a kind of online portfolio for someone to easily find. It may not be everything, but it can get you in the doors. [...] When you’re auditioning for companies, maybe you have to pick one out of about 10 videos. If some of those other videos or snippets of your career are on your social media, directors can look up your social media and see that.”

In addition to her public social media accounts, 27-year-old professional ballet dancer Micheala DePrince maintains a website (*About*, n.d.) where she displays highlights of her ballet career and other projects with which she is involved, including a Band-Aid campaign, photoshoot with women’s fashion magazine *Harper’s Bazaar*, and commercials (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Michaela DePrince’s Personal Website



Digital media can be used as a “highlight reel” (Interview E) to elevate one’s status within the ballet world.

Additionally, digital portfolios allow ballet dancers to exhibit versatility. As “the emphasis [in ballet] is moving from classical to contemporary” (Interview G) repertoire, this trait is becoming increasingly important.

Ultimately, the use of digital media by ballet dancers to complement their in-person performances is indicative of how “media is woven into the fabric of everyday lives” (Schulz, 2004, p. 89). Ballet dancers are building digital portfolios to augment their reputation across the field.

6.3.3 Interpersonal Communicative Processes

Digital media is used by ballet dancers to cultivate community within the cultural field by amalgamating digital interpersonal communication with face-to-face interactions. When asked in what ways ballet dancers come together as a community, each respondent proposed a different approach. The unifying thread across each response, however, was the role of digital media.

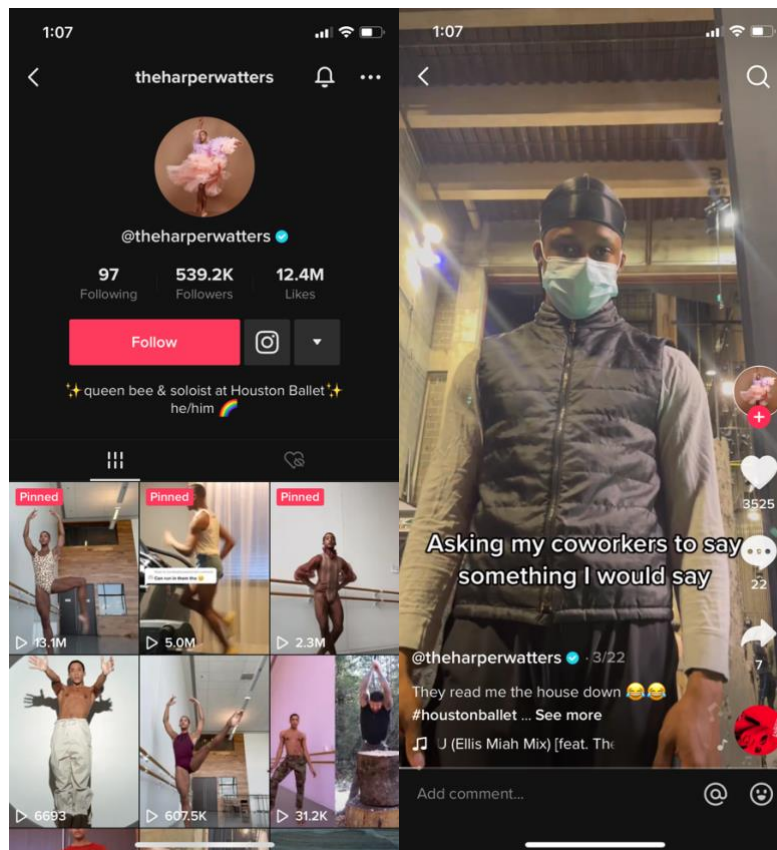
Interview B describes an overt adoption of digital media in face-to-face communication:

“When I was dancing in the company, before company class, every morning, we would always be talking with each other and just sort of catching up verbally. [...] I noticed now that if I’m teaching a company class, they’ll be warming up with headphones in and not necessarily interacting with each other. It’s fascinating to me because they don’t need to ask how someone’s night was because they probably saw it in a story. Maybe they’re more connected in the way that you know what everyone’s doing at every moment.”

On March 22, 2022, 30-year-old professional dancer Harper Watters posted a video to his TikTok account (@theharperwatters) demonstrating this amalgamation, as he used interactions with other members of his ballet company to create a TikTok video (Figure 5).

Figure 5

TikTok Post by Harper Watters



Interactions between ballet dancers occur both online and offline, and conversations initiated in one sphere are often carried into the other. Conversations about mental health and diversity, equity, and inclusion, for instance, have become prevalent across digital media, and these conversations have influenced certain practices within the field. As Interview I put it:

“[...] Dancers being more aware of mental health and diversity in the field and then sharing that along, not even just with dancers but also those who maybe are not super familiar with the dance community.”

Reflecting on digital media’s influence on these practices, Interview F explains:

“We have the space and resources to talk about it. [...] We are being given the agency to find that knowledge and apply that knowledge to our lives and realize that our lives could be better if we said and did something awesome.”

Overall, digital media converges with face-to-face communication to better the quality of interpersonal relationships across the ballet world. One of the primary ways ballet dancers

amalgamate digital media with traditional communication processes is by engaging in one conversation across both spheres, including that centering on mental health.

Leaning into Lundby's (2014) belief that "mediatization implies the reshaping and alteration of interpersonal relations by technically mediated communication" (p. 122), digital media has influenced the manner in which ballet dancers interact with each other and the broader ballet world. Amalgamating certain social and behavioral processes has altered and contributed to the development of ballet by enabling greater efficiency in acquiring feedback, creating a more holistic representation of a ballet dancer and allowing for greater variability in performance, and warranting more intimate interpersonal relationships.

6.4 Accommodation

Ballet dancers have conceded to media logic by adapting their institutional and social rules, activities, and values to reflect the complexity of digital media environments. This includes but is not limited to the creation of a digital persona, exploiting digital media's affordances for democratization, and the amplified commodification of ballet.

6.4.1 Creation of a Digital Persona

Some respondents admitted to developing and sustaining what Lundby terms a "persona" (2014, p. 506), representations of identities created to accommodate to logic of various environments. Mazo (1976) alludes to Lundby's notion when describing the palpable shift in ballet dancers as they transition from the street to the studio and to the stage (p. 83), although respondents suggested the notion of a 'digital persona' that allows one to navigate both in-person and digital realms. This is perhaps best illustrated by one respondent's (Interview G) use of a "stage name" as her Instagram handle. Her identity within the ballet world is as much derived from performances on stage as from those on social media.

One respondent (Interview C) introduced the term 'influencer.' When asked what the role of being an influencer looked like, she shared:

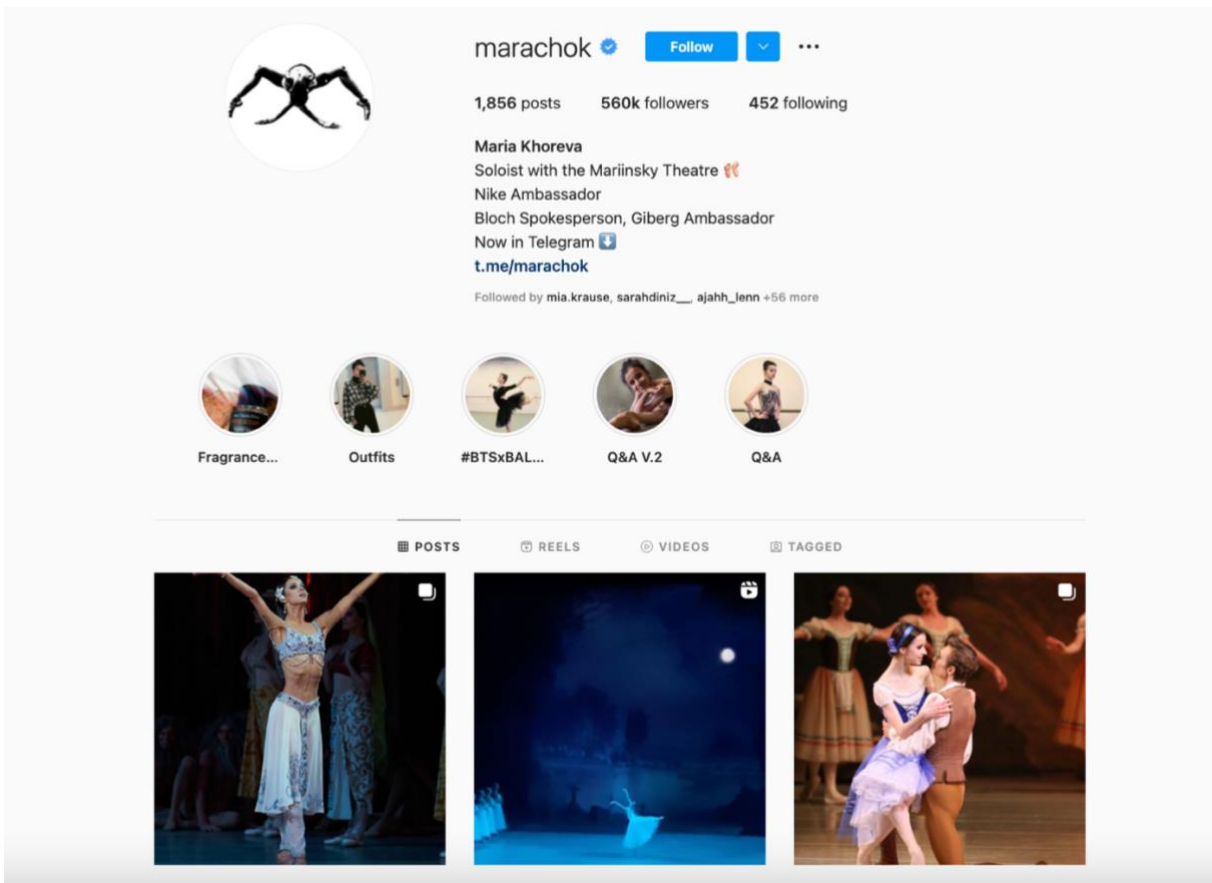
"I feel good about promoting their items, not just because of the free stuff but because I know that this brand has gotten me through my ballet training and into my professional career."

Similarly, 21-year-old professional ballet dancer Maria Khoreva is a spokesperson for dancewear brand Bloch as well as an ambassador for activewear brand Nike and Swiss jewelry and watch

company GIBERG (@mariachok, n.d.). Figure 6 captures how Khoreva displays her digital persona.

Figure 6

Maria Khoreva's Instagram Account



Acknowledging the respondent's mention of a relationship with a brand that has likewise been mediated, this example also demonstrates how companies too are accommodating a digital media landscape by cultivating digital personas to best engage with audiences and consumers. In this respect, ballet dancers have altered their ways of reflecting on their own identities to accommodate the digital media environment. 40-year-old professional ballet dancer Marianela Nuñez almost exclusively publishes content related to ballet on her Instagram page. In Image 7, she uses this persona to elevate her ballet-related projects and affirm her identity as a ballet dancer.

Figure 7

Instagram Post by Marianela Nuñez



6.4.2 Democratization

Ballet has traditionally been bound by rigid hierarchal principles (Mazo, 1976, p. 94), yet digital media technologies have enabled ballet dancers to circumvent those institutional norms and become agents of change within their sociocultural field by “[adapting] to the rules of the media system” (Schulz, 2004, p. 89). Where ballet dancers’ organizational statuses were once exclusively determined internally, social media has undermined the once absolute authority of Artistic Directors. The dispersal of authority is exemplified through the account of Interview D:

“My friend, [NAME], uses social media as a way to market himself, and this has created a way for him to work his way up. He’s getting better parts and more ever since he started.”

The pervasiveness of digital media has altered the communication framework; thereby the perpetuation of the “discussing elites” (Lundby, 2014, p. 123) has become an anachronism. This “democratization of dance” (Milovanovic, 2021, p. 130) suggests that professional success is

correlated with both balletic ability as well as one's digital presence, leveling the competitiveness of the field.

Nevertheless, artistic directors maintain much authority in regard to who is hired and cast as well as what is performed. The visibility afforded by digital media has enabled dancers to exert increasing pressure on leaders to reflect shifting values. Interview D explains:

"I think the mediation of ballet has forced it to catch up with the times and become a diverse space. [...] It has to start telling real stories instead of just the old, historical, and fantastical ballets."

Supporting this observation, Interview A finds:

"[...] It's up to our leaders, our artistic directors around the world, and our executive directors to change the storyline [...] And there's that pressure to do something."

In addition to what is represented on stage, ballet dancers are also reevaluating means of self-advocacy regarding contract terms. As Interview E shares:

"I like to think of the valley world is changing. That would be really nice. I think it needs to change, and it feels weird to say that my generation of dancers—people who are in high school and college or are lower in ranks—are the ones who are going to have a lot of power to change that. We're the ones who can say no to contracts and can negotiate terms and everything, whereas people who have been in it for a really long time might not necessarily feel like they have that option because they're already in it or would rather retire and move on."

This statement also alludes to the aforementioned notion of a generational imbalance in regard to digital media use and thereby suggests that democratization is experienced more strongly by ballet dancers who are more immersed in a digital media environment.

Penetrating nearly every facet of a ballet dancer's life, digital media logic has shaped how they perceive themselves within the ballet world. It has given them greater agency to advocate for a reflection of contemporary values in performances and just treatment in the ballet studio.

6.4.3 Commodification of Ballet

Ballet dancers have accommodated "to how the media operate" (Schulz, 2004, p. 89) by succumbing to the pressure to be "on demand" (Lundby, 2014, p. 513) for communication and interaction as well as by marketing themselves via digital platforms, especially Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.

The ubiquity of digital media technologies, as well as the affordance for permanence, has established a standard of availability by which one must make oneself accessible at all times, yielding to the demand of patrons. Respondents' content production and digital media habits varied considerably, though all were conscious of what content concerning themselves was available online. This is similar to what Schulz (2004) says in regard to accommodation, namely that one way actors adapt to media logic is by "trying to increase their publicity and accept a loss of autonomy" (p. 89). Most ballet dancers want to perform leading roles, get promoted, and make more money.

Ballet dancers exploit the affordances of digital media platforms, primarily Instagram, to market themselves. A few respondents considered the reception their content would receive. Interview F, for instance, admitted:

"Social media is my highlight reel. For me personally, I don't usually post super deep things."

Alternatively, Interview E sought a different reception:

"I think when I am posting dance pictures or videos, I'll usually post it with a deeper caption that's hopefully thought-provoking."

While some respondents protested the "commercialization" (Interview G) of one's life, each respondent described carefully thinking about what content would be worth posting. They reported sharing to social media a picture or video that was either captured intentionally to be posted or from a video that was originally to be used only as a tool if it showcased technique and artistry or elicited a desired response. As all respondents and many ballet dancers are affiliated with a ballet school or company, promotion of oneself often supports these affiliations and is instrumental in making ballet more recognized in general.

Ballet dancers of all levels of involvement have accommodated to the evolving digital media environment in several ways. Specifically, ballet dancers, primarily professionals, have created a digital persona to more effectively navigate the complex environment. Accommodating media logic, ballet dancers have also contributed to the democratization of the sociocultural field. Finally, they have accommodated digital media by commodifying themselves as well as ballet itself.

7 CONCLUSION

By applying Schulz's (2004) four dimensions of mediatization (extension, substitution, amalgamation, and accommodation), this study concludes that mediatization has influenced the development of ballet, affecting technical, professional, and social processes. Attitudes toward and adoption of digital media can shape the development of the sociocultural field of ballet. The evolving digital media environment continues to alter the trajectory of the ballet world.

The mediatization of ballet, although a complex process, was captured well with the use of Schulz's (2004) four dimensions. It was determined that ballet dancers use digital media to extend communication processes, substitute activities in part or completely for efficiency, and amalgamate with other activities. Finally, ballet dancers accommodate to digital media logic and adapt both their ways of engaging with ballet and perceiving their roles within to reflect the growing ubiquity of digital media in the field. The use and perceived purpose of digital media in ballet is inversely correlated with age and differs across degree of involvement. Although respondents acknowledged several disadvantages of mediatization, ballet dancers overall adopt a positive attitude toward the mediatization of ballet for the development of the field.

The study features a concise sample of self-identified ballet dancers with varied degrees of involvement who all reside and practice predominantly in the United States. For future studies, a more refined understanding of the mediatization of ballet could be captured by broadening the sample and incorporating perspectives of international dancers who practice ballet in diversified digital media environments. Additionally, this study sought to explore mediatization in ballet by analyzing the attitudes and experiences of ballet dancers, though a more holistic approach could consider that of other members of the ballet world, including choreographers, directors, critics, and costumers. Careful attention could be paid to those groups who currently hold power within the field, as democratization threatens to undermine their authority.

An important aspect that emerged from the research was the relationship between digital mediatization of ballet and seemingly exogenous factors, namely COVID-19. As many of the identified changes can be related to the pandemic, it will be interesting to observe if certain processes regress over time with the dampening of the predominance of COVID-19. Ultimately, the results from this study could be applied to further the ballet world by fostering a more democratic environment, enhancing accessibility, implementing more efficient training processes, and becoming more reflective of contemporary values.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Interview Participant Details

Count	Identifier	Age	Sex	Level of Involvement
1	A	30	Male	Professional
2	B	42	Female	Professional
3	C	28	Female	Professional
4	D	21	Female	Recreational
5	E	20	Female	Pre-Professional
6	F	21	Female	Pre-Professional
7	G	28	Female	Professional
8	H	24	Male	Professional
9	I	20	Female	Recreational
10	J	34	Female	Professional

Appendix 2 – Interview Guide

Pre-Interview

Record date and method (Zoom).

Offer an introduction of the researcher and the research project.

Request consent to record audio and video from the interview.

Ask if there are any questions from the interviewee before beginning.

Part 1 – Background

1. Can you please introduce yourself (name and age), tell me how and when you got into ballet?
2. How often you practice today?
3. Tell me about a typical ballet class.
4. Do you consider yourself a ballet dancer?
5. Is there such a thing as the “typical ballet dancer?”
6. Why do you dance ballet?

Part 2 – Digital Media Influence

1. Tell me about how you first came to interact with ballet online.
2. How and which digital media do you use for ballet? Is there a main platform for the ballet community?
3. How important is online interaction for you and/or the ballet community?
4. What other ways do you use digital media? Does the way you use digital media for ballet vary from these?
5. Is digital media a part of ballet for you?
6. Do you watch ballet videos? What kind of videos?
7. Is there a certain feeling that you experience when watching a video of ballet? How does the context (studio, performance, freelance, etc...) affect you, if at all?
8. When you think of how you dance ballet, does digital media have an impact on that?
9. Are there any downsides to using digital media in ballet for you?
10. How do you see the ballet world changing, if at all? Why?

Part 3 – Digital Technologies

1. When you dance, do you usually have a camera or another recording device with you?
2. How frequently do you record yourself dancing? What motivates you to record yourself?
3. What is more important for you, dancing ballet or documenting ballet?
4. Who do you consider as your audience of the content you share online? Who do you produce it for?
5. Did the development of new media technologies or platforms have an impact on your and other dancers’ way of doing ballet? Is there something special about them? What would that be?
6. Did digital media technologies have an impact on your own video consumption habits? Do you find certain technologies especially interesting?
7. Does the activity change for you if there is a camera/recording device around?

Part 4 – Performance and Community/Cultural Influence

1. In what ways do ballet dancers come together as a community?
2. How important is performance in your eyes and for the development of ballet? Is it becoming more so? Is there a need for in-person performance today?
3. Is there a shifting focus on the standard of evaluation for these performances?
4. Do you think videos influence your and other ballet dancers' style?
5. What is more important for the ballet community, digital media or performances?
6. What else would you like to share related to ballet and digital media?

Appendix 3 - Coding

Dimensions	Sub-Themes	Definitions	Examples
Extension	Knowledge and information	Digital media is used as a tool to promote personal, technical, and professional development through sharing information about career opportunities, advice, and experiences as well as seeking inspiration and motivation by watching past performances or other dancers.	"I would go to YouTube to look up variations of different ballets as research. I would watch how people danced and maybe try to emulate them....I use it as a form of research and to get information." (Interview F)
	Transnational connectivity	Digital media technologies, specifically social media platforms, are used to contact and connect with other ballet dancers globally.	"[...] A lot of dancers were turning to social media and Zoom to take ballet classes. [...] It kind of sped up that process of dancers coming together online. I saw dancers from all over the world taking the WorldWide Ballet classes, and I thought that was really interesting to see these big-name ballet stars taking classes with students from small towns." (Interview C)
	Generational divide	The degree to which digital media extends communication processes within ballet is inversely correlated with one's age.	"I think this current generation of dance performers, because of their age, is probably more on Instagram and maybe TikTok. I'm too old to understand that [...]" (Interview B)
Substitution	Substitution of in-person performances	Digital iterations of ballet performances have been created and presented to audiences in lieu of in-person performances.	"[...] Since the pandemic started, it kind of forced us to quickly switch to this virtual platform because that was the only way to get content out effectively." (Interview C)
	Substitution of in-person auditions	Digital iterations of ballet auditions have been organized in place of in-person auditions.	"Before, you'd get one shot. There was no 'ahhight we're going to cut this' or 'we're going to start over,' whereas when you film you can say 'okay let's go back to reshoot this because we didn't get the right angle or there was something else wrong.'" (Interview H)
Amalgamation	Digital media technologies in training	The reliance on digital media technologies to provide feedback on participants' technical and artistic capacity in the classroom and in rehearsal to better their performances.	"My phone is always on me. Sometimes I take it out and film myself a pasouette or something. It might not always be to post, though. It might just be to use as another coach or a mirror." (Interview A)
	Adoption of a digital portfolio	Having a social media account or some sort of digital media presence as a supplement to in-person performance to benefit one socially, professionally, or technically across the ballet world.	"Especially if you are a professional dancer, you want to have a kind of online portfolio for someone to easily find. It may not be everything, but it can get you in the doors. [...] When you're auditioning for companies, maybe you have to pick one out of about 10 videos. If some of those other videos or snippets of your career are on your social media, directors can look up your social media and see that." (Interview F)
	New interpersonal communicative processes	Digital media is used to cultivate community within the cultural field by amalgamating digital interpersonal communication with face-to-face interactions.	"When I was dancing in the company, before company class every morning we would always be talking with each other and just sort of catching up verbally. [...] I noticed now that if I'm teaching a company class, they'll be warming up with headphones in and not necessarily interacting with each other. It's fascinating to me because they don't need to ask how someone's night was because they probably saw it in a story. Maybe they're more connected in the way that you know what everyone's doing at every moment." (Interview B)
Accommodation	Creation of a digital persona	Ballet dancers have developed a "digital persona" that allows one to navigate both in-person and digital media realms.	"[...] It definitely opens up opportunities, especially as you become a bigger name. [...] People will contact you through [social media] and maybe ask you to be an influencer. It can channel into your career and some different ways." (Interview G)
	Democratization	Digital media has enabled dancers to circumvent organizational hierarchy and become agents of change by leaning into media logic.	"I think it's just up to our leaders, our artistic directors around the world, and our executive directors to change the storyline [...] And there's that digital pressure to do something." (Interview A)
	Commodification of ballet	Ballet dancers have accommodated to digital media logic by seeking to be accessible at any moment for communication and interaction as well as by marketing themselves via digital platforms, especially Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube.	"My friend [...] almost uses social media as a way to market himself [...]" (Interview D)