



Lo-Fi & Fusion Sitar Trends on Social Media: A New Listening Culture

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Abstract - The rapid expansion of social media platforms has significantly transformed the ways in which music is created, circulated, and consumed. Traditional Indian classical instruments, particularly the sitar, are increasingly being re-imagined through lo-fi and fusion musical frameworks on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Spotify. This research paper examines the emergence of lo-fi and fusion sitar trends on social media and analyses how these trends contribute to the formation of a new listening culture. Using qualitative content analysis and secondary literature from peer-reviewed and UGC-CARE listed journals, the study explores audience engagement, aesthetic shifts, and cultural reinterpretation of the sitar in digital spaces. The findings reveal that lo-fi and fusion sitar music promotes accessibility, emotional engagement, and cross-cultural reach, while simultaneously raising concerns regarding authenticity and classical purity. The paper argues that social media has become a transformative cultural space where traditional instruments acquire new meanings, functions, and audiences.

Keywords - Lo-fi music, fusion sitar, social media, digital listening culture, Indian classical music, music hybridization.

I. Introduction

Music has always evolved alongside technological developments, from oral traditions and written notation to recording technologies and digital streaming. In the twenty-first century, social media platforms have emerged as powerful agents shaping musical taste, production practices, and listening habits. Unlike earlier modes of music dissemination, social media allows musicians to directly interact with audiences, bypassing institutional gatekeepers such as concert halls, recording companies, and academic institutions.

Within this digital ecosystem, Indian classical music—traditionally transmitted through the guru-shishya parampara—has entered a new phase of representation and consumption. Among classical instruments, the sitar occupies a unique position due to its historical significance, expressive range, and global recognition. However, contemporary audiences, particularly younger listeners, often encounter the sitar not in full-length raga performances but through short-form digital content integrated with modern genres such as lo-fi and electronic fusion.

Lo-fi music, characterised by soft beats, ambient textures, and deliberate sonic imperfections, has gained immense popularity on social media and streaming platforms.



Its association with relaxation, study, and emotional regulation makes it particularly suitable for digital lifestyles. When combined with sitar sounds, lo-fi aesthetics create a hybrid musical form that blends traditional timbre with contemporary sensibilities. This fusion does not merely represent a stylistic experiment but reflects a broader cultural shift in listening practices.

This research seeks to examine how lo-fi and fusion sitar music on social media contributes to the emergence of a new listening culture, where music functions less as a formal performance and more as a companion to everyday activities such as studying, commuting, or content creation. The study explores how audiences engage with this music, how artists adapt classical elements for digital platforms, and how cultural meanings of the sitar are being redefined in the process.

II. Review of Literature

lo-fi music and digital consumption

Scholarly studies on lo-fi music highlight its strong connection with digital youth culture. Researchers have observed that lo-fi music functions as background sound rather than focal listening, aligning with multitasking habits encouraged by digital environments. Its emotional neutrality and repetitive structures make it suitable for prolonged listening during non-musical activities.

Several studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic note that lo-fi music gained popularity due to increased screen time, online education, and psychological stress. The genre's calming effect and accessibility contributed to its widespread adoption across platforms such as YouTube livestreams and Spotify playlists.

Indian Classical Music in the Digital Age

National peer-reviewed and UGC-CARE listed journals have documented the growing presence of Indian classical music on digital platforms. Scholars argue that social media has democratized access to classical music by enabling artists to reach audiences beyond traditional elite circles. However, concerns have been raised regarding the shortening of musical forms and the simplification of complex structures for algorithm-driven platforms.

Research on digital pedagogy in classical music suggests that while online platforms expand reach, they also challenge traditional notions of authenticity, depth, and discipline. The transformation of classical music into short videos and fusion formats represents both opportunity and risk.

Fusion Music and Cultural Hybridisation

Fusion music has been studied as a form of cultural negotiation, where traditional elements interact with global musical idioms. Scholars emphasise that fusion is not merely a blending of sounds but a reflection of changing cultural identities in a globalised world. In the Indian context, fusion involving classical instruments often aims to balance cultural preservation with contemporary relevance.



Despite growing literature on fusion music, academic research specifically addressing lo-fi sitar trends remains limited, highlighting the need for focused scholarly inquiry—an academic gap this paper attempts to address.

III. Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, supported by descriptive and analytical methods. The focus is on understanding cultural patterns, audience perception, and aesthetic transformation rather than numerical generalisation.

Data Collection

Content Analysis

A purposive sample of approximately 200 social media posts (Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts) featuring lo-fi and fusion sitar music from 2023–2025 was analysed. Selection was based on hashtags such as #LofiSitar, #SitarFusion, and #IndianLofi.

Audience Interaction Analysis

Comments, captions, and engagement indicators were examined to identify listener responses, emotional expressions, and cultural interpretations.

Secondary Sources

Peer-reviewed articles, UGC-CARE listed journals, and scholarly books on digital music culture and Indian classical music were reviewed.

Analytical Tools

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to emotional response, accessibility, authenticity, and cultural identity. Musicological observation was applied to understand how sitar elements were adapted within lo-fi structures.

Results

Increased Youth Engagement

The analysis revealed that lo-fi and fusion sitar content attracts significantly higher engagement from younger audiences compared to traditional classical performances. Listeners frequently associate the music with relaxation, focus, and emotional comfort.

Shift in Listening Purpose

Unlike conventional concert listening, lo-fi sitar music is consumed as background sound. This indicates a functional shift where music supports daily routines rather than demanding concentrated attention.

Reinterpretation of the Sitar

Audience comments suggest that the sitar is perceived as both a cultural symbol and a modern aesthetic tool. While some listeners appreciate the innovation, others express concern about oversimplification and loss of classical depth.

Discussion

The findings suggest that lo-fi and fusion sitar trends on social media represent a significant transformation in listening culture. Music is no longer confined to formal settings but integrated into everyday digital life. This shift challenges traditional



hierarchies of musical value, where complexity and discipline were prioritised over accessibility.

From a cultural perspective, lo-fi sitar fusion functions as a bridge between tradition and modernity. It enables global audiences to engage with Indian classical sounds without requiring prior musical training. However, this accessibility also raises questions about cultural dilution and the future of classical pedagogy.

For artists, social media offers both creative freedom and algorithmic pressure. Musicians must balance artistic integrity with platform-driven visibility, often resulting in shorter, simplified musical expressions.

IV. Conclusion

This research concludes that lo-fi and fusion sitar trends on social media have contributed to the emergence of a new listening culture characterised by emotional engagement, accessibility, and digital integration. While these trends expand the reach of the sitar and introduce it to new audiences, they also challenge traditional values of classical music performance and transmission.

Rather than viewing this transformation as a decline, the study argues that it represents an adaptive cultural response to changing technological and social realities. Future research may explore long-term impacts on classical pedagogy, artist identity, and global perception of Indian classical music.

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