

Managing Student Content Creators: TikTok as Artistic-Cultural Platform and Virtual Community Engagement

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Abstract

This study falls within the scope of arts management in a digital setting. In the context of this research, arts students are regarded as arts managers tasked to operate an online artistic-cultural platform. As such, TikTok was selected for the purpose of achieving the organizational objectives of the student-art managers. The study aims to explore the nature of the virtual organization and further the dissemination of artistic-cultural contents which inform part of the members' identity, strategy, and goal. Underpinned by theories of management, digitalization, innovation and the media, this study employs the mixed method approach in which data was collected in the form of the group's formation and content uploads. Analysis of the content uploads include a qualitative analysis of the contents, and a quantitative analysis represented by numbers of views and likes. A further objective of the study is the examination of community engagement in which thematic analysis was performed on the interaction between the content creators and users for the categories of positive, negative, and neutral comments. This study provides findings and discoveries on critical aspects of students as arts managers operating in a virtual setting and the expression of art and culture for young people. Additionally, it serves to describe the manner of the creator-audience engagement and the identification of issues in such an undertaking.

Keywords: digital management, arts and culture, engagement, TikTok

Introduction

Management basically refers to the process of dealing with or controlling things or people. Within the discipline of management, Akmaeva et al. (2020) attempted to present the updated core principles of the new version of management as supposedly, the older version of

management has become outdated due to its dependence on the principles of standardization, specialization, hierarchy, control, and owners' interests that are no longer relevant in today's world. In contrast, a 21st-century organization faces new challenges and tendencies, the main of which is an incredibly increased pace of technological modernization. Hypercompetition is regarded as another distinctive feature of the new management. This requires organizations to adopt a new strategy toward competition. Essentially, they need to be more creative and inventive by determining and sustaining their core competencies and dynamic abilities on a regular basis by manufacturing what they can produce better than their competitors can (Akmaeva et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, scholars have long debated on the notion of arts management, and this conundrum is further made profound by the introduction of other connecting concepts such as digitalization and innovation. The term Arts and Cultural Management (ACM) has long been contested and still lacks a clear cut definition at present (Rentschler & Liu, 2022). In terms of functionality, arts management is synonymous to "planning, leading, organizing, and monitoring." In opposition, the critical school of thought conceptualizes the terminology with aesthetic experiences though the discourse of management (Mäenpää, 2020). The inclusion of technology in arts management expands the scope of arts management into newer territories. Tied to this embrace of technology is a widespread sense among arts group leaders that digital technologies are critical to the spread of the arts (Thomson et al., 2013a). Various dimensions in the impact of technology on arts and cultural management are of researchers' interest, such as technological developments and their influence on aesthetic organizations as well as cultural policies and management. Matters of attention include shifts in production conditions and artistic practices, newer designs in cultural policy and management, novel organizational concepts and working models, and the role of social media in marketing (Mäenpää, 2020). Marketers are also drawn to TikTok as it reflects a key social media trend for creative skills and collaboration amongst young audiences (Battisby, 2023).

For instance, Brancato et al. (2022) were concerned with the influence of digital technology in the art of management. They found that better establishment performance, provision of training, greater job complexity and worker autonomy are among the positive impacts associated with the presence of some digital technologies for data-driven

management. By contrast, lower workers' well-being and a higher prevalence of reported psychosocial risks in the workplace are among the negative impacts at the establishment level.

Aside from arts and cultural management in a digitalized setting, digital application in the classroom is also no longer a novel idea as digital interaction in higher education is nowadays the norm (Prinsloo et al., 2016). The years of Covid-19 have further pushed the inclusion of technology across curriculum. Whereas mobile phones and apps were initially regarded a nuisance, they now play an important role in bridging teaching and learning in education. Educators in various fields have more than ever make applicable of digital media which includes social media platforms. While education is increasingly social, creative tools are believed to better engage the public in community and urban design projects (American Planning Association, 2011).

The use of TikTok as an educational tool is gaining prominence with studies in numerous disciplines reporting on the outcomes. Irimiás et al. (2022) posit that collaboration in digital art learning enhances creativity and self-efficacy, among others, in a managerial setting, thus forwarding the innovative digital collage creation project. In their study, Elstad and Jansson (2020) investigated the differences between university arts graduates working in managerial and non-managerial positions in terms of self-perceived working conditions and professional identity. The findings revealed that those in managerial roles viewed their working conditions better than those without managerial responsibilities. Additionally, they had higher job satisfaction, a stronger leadership, creativity, interest, and an artistic identity at par with non-managers.

Based on the need for an alternative mode of project execution of undergraduate drama students as arts managers and the necessity to innovate coupled with the limited opportunities for live shows due to the pandemic, among others, this study thus aims to investigate the applicability of TikTok in the arts management course, identifying the nature, strategy, challenges and other outcomes which will in the end contribute to theory, policy, and practice. For the relatively unknown arts creators with the dual responsibility as arts managers, TikTok may likely serve as a viable option as a place for "discovery" and authenticity, akin to that as shown in the Nielsen Custom Authenticity Study (see TikTok, 2021). Inquiries in the research revolves the nature and extent of the

students' managerial role and responsibilities both as arts managers and content creators, the nature of artistic-cultural expressions, and the nature of community as well as digital engagement.

Community, Digital Engagement, and the Arts

Scholars in the literature have provided their take on the matter of (virtual or digital) community engagement, with some focusing on the aspect of digital linguistics (written text).

The American Planning Association (2011) defines community engagement as “the process of public participation and involvement that promotes relationship building through learning, action, and the expression of needs and values.” The spectrum of community engagement involves informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering with the goal of public participation (Fedorowicz et al., 2020). There are four primary ways in which people participate in arts and culture: attending programs and events, encouraging their children to participate, making or performing art as amateurs, or support the arts through donations of time and money (Walker et al., 2003).

Not only does the arts promote community engagement, but that the engagement is also civic. Chitiga's (2014) study highlights performing art for effective civic engagement to measure its impact and outcome. Among others, it allows students to engage in respectful, genuine, and civil discourse with members of the audience during the interactive performances and deliberative dialogues. In a report on the arts and civic engagement, Rabkin (2017) provided survey insights on the social effects of the arts. These include personal development, social cohesion, community empowerment, local image and identity, and imagination and vision. The features and aspects of community engagement as described in the literature therefore justifies the present study's inclusion of the element of community engagement in its investigation of the nature of an online art 'organization' managed by young individuals as arts management.

Ray et al. (2014) places engagement as central in online communities. Nevertheless, this engagement is parallel to satisfaction. Schoenenberger (2021) examined the practitioners of Theatre for Young Audiences' innovative effort to deepen young people's experiences of

recorded performances in the digital space. According to her, we are currently presented with an opportunity to measure the impact of in-person to digital artistic experiences, and vice versa. In their study, Savoy and Crozier (2020) assessed the value of digital community engagement. Accordingly, digital engagement better the community by way of improving individual wellbeing through civic participation, enhancing social capital and connection, increasing trust in governing bodies, and working towards community consensus. It further benefits the arts organization by increasing team capacity, making community-informed decisions, and learning and implementing good community engagement practices.

RMIT (2020) provided a preliminary report on digital engagement strategies in the cultural sector during Covid-19 which can be categorized into three, namely, virtual exhibitions, curatorial talks, viewing rooms and tours, education and engagement, and programming and events. Key learnings and insights on the opportunities and challenges for engaging audiences were provided. These involve embedding innovations around mobile media as part of the engagement curation, co-creating content for social inclusion with digitally diverse audiences, understanding digital engagement as communication science and knowledge repositories, and deploying social media as part of museum curatorial practice around new visualities.

In her research, Khlusova (2021) seeks to identify opportunities and challenges for arts in public engagement in the digital environment. The positive outcomes to going digital to increase engagement include widening engagement and reach, cost-efficiency, enhancing inclusivity, interactivity and collaboration, sharing outputs and evidencing impact, and enhancing future research and career development. The drawbacks, on the other hand, include challenges resulting from institutional practices, challenges resulting from training and skills gap, challenges in the online space, managing technology, managing concentration and engagement levels online, and other aspects that cannot be successfully adapted into an online format.

In lieu of the nature and context of this study, both the variables of community engagement and digital engagement will be a main factor in the examination of the student-arts managers' engagement with the community in TikTok.

Social Media and the Arts

In her exploration on the use of social media in visual arts programs, Kirby (2016) discussed the pros and cons of social media as a creative tool in arts education. Among the identified benefits include social media's learning communities, collective knowledge, media literacy, navigating technology, meaningful engagement, and connecting to broader online communities. The disadvantages, on the other hand, relate to teacher constraints, safety concerns, and commercial priorities.

Lim and Baboo (2016) studied the use of social media by creative arts students, and found that social media plays a role in obtaining feedback for developing creative artwork, although there was the danger of information credibility afforded by the platform. In addition, social media allowed the expansion of the students' networking and a place to promote and exhibit their work. However, both advantages and disadvantages were expressed by the learners depending on their acceptance of the media. In another study, Baboo and Lim (2018) investigated the perspective of creative practitioners on the use of social media. They discovered that while the respondents have a positive view of social media, there was concern over the attitude and skills of creative arts students in enhancing their creative productivity. Nevertheless, the authors argued that there is a need for creative arts students to utilize the features of social media in order to generate a better opportunity for talent and career expansion.

Al Hashimi et al. (2019) examined the effectiveness of social media in enhancing creativity among art, design, and digital media students. The findings indicate several multimedia-based classroom practices that might encourage student creativity. Meanwhile, the study of Setiawan et al. (2020) focused on social media as a platform for performing arts education during the Covid-19 pandemic. In view of social media as an alternative for art creators to present their work, the study describes the communication between the creators and audiences in the context of performing arts in Indonesia. The study determined Facebook as the most popular social network worldwide, but YouTube as the preferred media for Indonesian artists. The authors construct the communication process between the audience and artistic creators in terms of response features such as likes and comments which are interpreted as the audience's involvement in appreciating the art work.

Similarly, the present study seeks to examine the aspect of digital engagement between the students as content creators and arts managers in an online platform which will add to existing literature in the field.

TikTok

TikTok was initially released in September 2016 for the Chinese market (Iqbal, 2022; Tidy & Galer, 2020). It functions as a video-focused social networking service. Known as Douyin in China, it is owned as Chinese company ByteDance Ltd. (Isaac, 2020). Available in 40 languages, the network hosts various short-form user videos of differing genres including dance and entertainment (Bailey, 2020; Ceci, 2022;). Durations of the videos range from 15 seconds to three minutes (Kastrenakes, 2021). In 2017, TikTok was launched for iOS and Android in most markets outside of mainland China, and became available worldwide on 2nd August 2018 after merging with Musical.ly, which is another Chinese social media service (Geysler, 2021; Russell, 2018).

According to Bailey (2020), the five key genres of TikTok can be broadly categorized as jokes, stunts, pranks, promos, and tricks. A study researching the most popular categories and content categories on TikTok worldwide as of July 2020 by number of hashtag views indicates that the most popular content categories on the video sharing social app TikTok all have over one billion views. The most viewed content category on the app was entertainment content, with this category having accumulated 535 billion hashtag views collectively. The second most viewed content category was dance with a total of 181 billion hashtag views. In terms of popular content categories, entertainment recorded the highest hashtag views with 535 billion, followed by dance with 181 billion hashtag views. Other popular content categories include pranks, fitness/sports, home reno/DIY, beauty/skincare, fashion, recipes/cooking, life hack/advice, pets, and outdoors (Ceci, 2022). In his report, Iqbal (2022) provided key statistics in which TikTok is accessed by over 600 million users daily in China and had 1.2 billion monthly active users in the fourth quarter of 2021. It is expected to reach 1.5 billion by the end of 2022. At present, TikTok has been downloaded over three billion times. By region, TikTok users in South-East Asia reached 198 million in 2020, with the percentage of users aged 19-29 at 35 percent, and under 18 at 28 percent. In terms of gender demographics, the percentage of female users account for 59 percent (Curry, 2022). It was one of the top three fastest growing brands

of 2020 (Grothaus, 2020), and emerges as the world's fastest-growing brand in the latest report released by Brand Finance (Ghosh, 2022).

TikTok and Community Engagement

TikTok makes participation particularly easy as it is socially acceptable to be a performer or an audience member, or both, and a user can determine the extent to which they prefer to engage with others on the platform (Stanning, 2020). In 2021, TikTok launched its marketing promotion which aims to facilitate and promote the platform's capacity on community engagement called 'CommunityToks'. CommunityToks is intended to drive niche engagement which can assist businesses and branding (Hutchinson, 2021). Barnett (2022) offers three principles of engaging fans on TikTok. These include allowing users to be the stars of their own show, building narrative content threads, and using contextual humor. Stanning (2020) further posits that youth realize reaching a wider audience and drawing strength from those who "follow" and "like" their videos help to support their own agenda in using the platform.

TikTok claims itself as the leading destination for short-form mobile video, with the mission to inspire creativity and bringing joy (TikTok, 2022). This mobile app allows users to create short videos which often feature background music. Its features are engaging and interactive. For instance, the "For You" page on the platform is a feed of videos that are recommended to users based on their activity on the app. The artificially-generated content depends on the content a user liked, interacted with, or searched (Hall, 2021; TikTok, 2020). The app's "react" feature allows users to film their reaction to a specific video which is located in a small movable window around the screen, while the "duet" feature allows users to film a video aside another video, provided that both parties adjust their privacy setting (Ha, 2018; TikTok, 2019). Users can also send their friends messages, emojis, and videos with direct messaging. Influencers often use the "live" feature, although this feature is only available for those with at least 1,000 followers and over 16 years old (Delfino, 2021). When users follow other users, a "following" page is located on the left of the "For You" page (Newgia, 2020). The app is continuously making further changes and progress on its interface with many other features introduced.

TikTok in Education and Arts Education

Whereas mobile devices were seen as a distraction in the classroom, tech tools and digitalization are the creative means in which education embraces today (Jaeger, 2021). TikTok is now used for creative lessons, increase student engagement, and as a creative assignment (Jaeger, 2021). Edwards (2021) provide several strategies in the application of TikTok in the classroom. They are by creating a school-wide platform, creating a final project, teaching a lesson with TikTok, explaining lessons using TikTok, and to compare and contrast ideas through TikTok.

In higher education, research was designed to study the incorporation of TikTok from the pedagogical perspectives of corporal expression sport sciences course. Escamilla-Fajardo et al. (2021) found that TikTok was an educational innovation used as a learning tool which has an impact on a corporal expression course. It can further help create a motivating learning environment for students, enhances curiosity and creativity, and allows the inclusion of movement, music and rhythm. To determine young people's acceptance of TikTok in education, Azman et al. (2021) assessed university students' perception of TikTok in academia. The findings revealed an encouraging outcome. All factors demonstrated a positive correlation to the acceptance of TikTok on youths' educational development, as respondents agree with TikTok as social media platform (SCOMED), TikTok as a window for online learning (ODL), and TikTok to improve communication desire, and technology skills as education tools will influence the acceptance of TikTok for academic progress.

In his article, Zucker (2021) contemplates on the practicality of TikTok in art education. Based on his observation, he found students were able to provide the four essential components to differentiate and explain in regards to a work of art's qualities and cultural significance. The students successfully included an overview of an artwork's form, function, content and context in the 15-seconds clips they were generating. Rijal and Sukmayadi (2020) studied the use of TikTok in music education and expect TikTok to function as an interactive learning medium to assist students in understanding and accepting the music learning process.

Nevertheless, others like Klein (2019) have also warned of its weaknesses. Albeit its advantages, TikTok has the potential to become a bullying platform, privacy concerns, and a dark side featuring

controversial contents such as self-harming which can be detrimental to the mentality or psychology of people, especially the young. Education-wise, it can still pose as a major troubling classroom distraction and a discipline conundrum (Klein, 2019).

The use of TikTok in education is justified by several factors. For instance, empowered creators and influence as a new accreditation. According to TikTok statistics, as a content distribution platform, “entertainment” is the most popular content category on the platform worldwide. This particular hashtag has amassed 535 billion hashtag views. The next most popular categories include dance, pranks, fitness/sports, and home renovations/DIY (Shepherd, 2023). Interestingly, albeit its entertainment status, TikTok is recognized more in the field of medicine (see Comp et al., 2020; Khlaif & Salha, 2021; Nikookam & Guckian, 2021), and science (see Hayes et al., 2020; Syah et al., 2020), and little, if any, in arts education and the Malaysian education for that matter. As such, the current study aims to fill this identified gap in the literature concerning the manner in which arts students as arts managers make use of an online platform for the dissemination of artistic and cultural contents in the Malaysian setting, which is largely missing in available literatures.

Methodology

This study employs the mixed method research in which information is gathered in the form of qualitative and quantitative data. The present study adds to the scope within the literature by documenting the use of TikTok among a group of undergraduate drama students in a Malaysian public university in Kuala Lumpur for the purpose of investigation. It examines the students’ artistic-cultural presentations as content creators, their formulated roles as arts managers, as well as the nature of their digital and community engagement in the online project. This project was conducted as part of the arts management course, and the project itself took 10 weeks to complete with the end result of a finalized report. The aim of the project was to assess the students’ capability, knowledge and skill as arts managers, which in this case was expanded to content creators in TikTok. The students were simultaneously provided with ongoing lectures, instructions, feedbacks, and tutorials on arts management as they progressed with their project.

Participants

Table 1 provides the demography of the student-participants. All were undergraduate students with a majority in their first year, second semester of the undergraduate program. With a total of 19 members, eight were males while 11 females. Half of the participants were Malay, and this is followed by the group of Chinese students, Indians students, and a Sabahan.

Table 1: The Participants

Factor	Description	No.	%
Status	Undergraduate	*All	100
Level	First Year, Second Semester	*Excluding one	95
Gender	Male	8	42
	Female	11	58
Race	Malay	11	58
	Chinese	4	21
	Indian	3	16
	Sabahan	1	5
Total		19	100

Data Collection and Analysis

As mentioned, the study employed a mixed-method approach in which quantitative data was derived in the form of numbers and percentages of several factors (i.e., number of followers, total uploads, views and likes), whereas qualitative data was gathered via a content description of the uploaded clips. This further generated into themes. Comments were derived from the individual content uploads with the thematic classification of positive, negative, or neutral/other feedbacks. The procedure of observation was also utilized in the study as the students progressed weekly through their project which provided a general impression of the overall process.

Data on the group formation was retrieved from the group’s formal TikTok account which was created solely for the purpose of the project’s execution as well as the proposal and finalized report. The group formation

provides indication and details of the members' responsibilities and roles, which interchange from the arts manager to the content creator. As for the content uploads, video clips were retrieved from the same TikTok account following their upload. The clips were categorized thematically based on its nature, either as a content on performing arts (music, dance, drama, or a mixture of the arts), and others. Other information were also gathered from the individual clips, such as the number of views and likes. Furthermore, for the purpose of community engagement analysis, comments posted on the individual clips were also retrieved, coded, categorized, counted and turned into percentages according to themes. All of the data gathered provide information on the group's formation, artistic-cultural contents, execution strategies to achieve their goals, nature of community engagement, and arising issues as observed in the analysis.

The Relevant Theories

Roth (2022) claims that most guiding distinctions of management and organization theory are false based on his analysis of George Spencer Brown and Niklas Luhmann's groundwork in outlining a general framework for the digital transformation of management and organization theory. He concludes with an outlook briefly expanding on the distinction between an electrification and a digital transformation of management and organization theories. Nevertheless, the theory of innovation management is another with relates to management. Innovation management involves the process of managing an organization's innovation procedure, starting at the initial stage of ideation, to its final stage of successful implementation. It encompasses the decisions, activities and practices of devising and implementing an innovation strategy. Here, the complexity of the new product and its technological level will also determine how the innovating organization manages the innovation (Robertson, 1974). In the area of digitalization, the new media theory conceptualizes the implications of digital technologies (Giraud, 2018). New media theory posits the rise of interactivity as a form of audience participation which is a strongly held and culturally based desire to participate in the creation and transformation of the text that has been denied by previous technologies of media production and distribution, and that interactivity achieves a new stage in the democratisation of user participation (Cover, 2004).

All of these theories relate in some way or another to the subject matter of the study, especially since its focus lies on the digital application

of technology or new media for an arts organization and management members which will require innovation of some sort.

Findings

This section describes the findings of the study. In terms of group formation, Table 2 provides details of the project duration, the selected platform, the members’ organizational role, number of uploads, followers, views, likes, and comments generated within the span of the project.

Table 2: Group Formation

Factor	Description	Details
Project Duration	10 weeks	Week 5-Week 14 (Apr. 6 th -July 16 th 2021)
Platform	TikTok	@wearelivingart_um
Organizational Role / Position	Administration	2 members
	Scheduling	2 members
	Production	10 members
	Marketing	3 members
	Journal managers	2 members
Total Number of Uploads	52	Average five weekly uploads
Total Number of Followers	250	Local and foreign
Total Views	153,137	Average 2,944.9 views
Total Likes Generated	4,312	Average 82.9 likes
Total Comments Generated	349	Average 6.7 commentary posts

As seen in Table 2, the members uses the handle @wearelivingart_um in TikTok, which is their formal account created solely for the project’s purpose. The members comprised two in administration, two in scheduling, 10 in production, three in marketing, and two journal managers or report writers. To note, their roles shift as the project progresses in order to balance out the workload and to offer a larger opportunity for each of the members to take on different roles,

responsibilities, and tasks in the project. The group recorded an average of five weekly uploads throughout the duration of the project, with an average of 2,944.9 views per upload, an average 82.9 likes per upload, and an average of 6.7 comments per upload.

Content Uploads

Table 3 provides the most and least viewed upload, the most and least liked upload, the most and least generated comments, and the longest and shortest clips produced by the student content creators.

Table 3: Content Uploads

Factor	Description	Details
Most Viewed	The reality of being a drama student	42.5K views
Most Liked	YOU ARE DESTINED FOR GREATNESS !!	355 likes
Least Viewed/Liked	“A” is not everything part 2	156 views 14 likes
Most Comments Generated	The reality of being a drama student	37 comments
Least Comments Generated	Makeup Tutorial Check, Perjalanan Misteri Part 3, Apa Salahku Part 1	Nil
Longest Clip	Makeup Tutorial Check	00:02:51
Shortest Clip	How to disappoint your parents	00:00:07

Table 3 indicates that the most viewed clip was *The reality of being a drama student* which also generated the most comments while the most liked was *YOU ARE DESTINED FOR GREATNESS !!* Although the group uploaded many clips which showcased various performing arts such as dance, music and drama scetches, these contents did not record the highest numbers of views, likes, or generated comments. As such, as initial indication of the nature of the art signals a higher tendency and favor toward the real. In this case, the representation of the reality proves to be a niche in the group’s marketability. This factor will be discussed further in the discussion section of the paper.

Comments

As further basis to examine the nature of community engagement and interaction between members and users in the TikTok platform, data in the form of generated comments was gathered. Table 4 provides details of the number, rate and/or percentages of the nature of the comments, either positive, negative, or neutral/other as well as the rate of the creator response.

Table 4: Generated Commentaries

Numerical Description	Nature of Comments				Total
	Positive	Negative	Neutral/Other	Creator Response	
Number/Rate	268	8	44	29	<i>n</i> =349
Percentage (%)	76.79	2.292	12.607	8.309	100%

Table 4 provides details of the generated commentaries represented by percentages according to the generated themes. Positive comments recorded the majority 76.79 per cent, and neutral comments at 12.607 per cent. Only 2.292 per cent of the total generated comments were negative or critical in nature. Meanwhile, creator responses totaled to 8.309 per cent, which is a relatively low range of engagement. The next section further discusses the findings of this study.

Discussion

The findings described in the previous section highlight several elements critical to the research which include aspects of strengths and weaknesses of the contents and manner in which the project was managed and executed. These features are therefore duly discussed in following subsections.

Group Formation: Shifting Roles and Responsibilities

In the pre- and production stages, members of the group designated roles, tasks, and responsibilities on a rotational basis. Essentially, they switched roles in managerial positions and as content creators in TikTok which was done in favor of having greater exposure in differing roles and supposed workload balance. Given the limited timeframe and their background, it was a challenge for the students to perform as arts managers and content creators, expounding their preference for a more direct approach to performing and producing the arts, which is staging a show in a physical location in front of a live audience. As a group with 19 members, this is not considered uncommon as members in smaller groups have to play additional roles in the everyday functioning of the organization.

The data further demonstrates their promotional strategy as content creators which was initially geared towards introducing their TikTok to peers, acquaintances, and family members largely via word of mouth. This explains for their limited number of international followers, albeit the group attained a total of 250 followers during the length of their project, which is nonetheless justified by the short presence of their official TikTok account.

Among other issues faced with the group's formation include decision-making, leadership, communication, commitment, and others as found in the group's weekly report and journal entries. Observed was the complex dynamic between peers in the group and in maneuvering at least dual roles. The students were also in need of explicit instruction on managing and executing the project, and some were even in need of convincing of the viability of the project. These factors were only minimized as the project progressed.

Content Uploads: Diverse but Shadowed by Coordination Issues

The clips that were uploaded by the student-creators adhere to the basic features of TikTok uploads. The first few clips uploaded were introductory in nature, with the last one a farewell clip. The student-creators produced various arts and culture-based contents that show their university life, basic lifestyle, personal and academic dilemmas, arts promotion, arts education, and others. Analysis of the contents indicate to the student-creators' interest and meaningful engagement, which revolved

around the need to justify themselves as drama students and their academic program, as well as their own identity. Among the earliest uploads following their introduction, the student content creators addressed certain perceived discrimination towards the arts and the need to justify themselves as arts students. This matter has been an interest among writers and critics as well. Prabhu (2018) calls for discrimination against arts courses to stop. Others have also addressed this issue and similarly defend the arts program (see ISM, 2018).

To attract an international audience of the TikTok global community, the student-creators uploaded contents that address different cultures, for example, the difference between US-based lifestyle and the Malaysian lifestyle. Interestingly, relatable contents (i.e., the pressure of academic excellence) that target audience of more or less the same group generate both positive and negative reactions. *The reality of being a drama student* which showcased their real-life experience as a university drama student was the most viewed clip and that which generated the most comments, signaling the viewers' preference towards what is real. Additionally, a motivational clip was the most favored or liked which signals a preference towards the positive. This further points to another peculiar finding, in which arts-based contents received the least reactions (i.e., *Makeup Tutorial Check*, *Perjalanan Misteri Part 3*, and *Apa Salahku Part 1*). This suggests that the audience or viewer favors realistic portrayal rather than a curated scenario. Even though "*A*" is not everything part 2 was the least viewed entry, this may be due to the gap between the first and second part of the clips.

Hence, among the issues observed in relation to the uploads include unstructured or non-systematic uploads. These gaps between sequential parts or clips may cause followers to miss relevant updates on the continuation of an initial upload, or that the viewer has simply lost interest.

Community Engagement: The Positive and the Negative Communication, Viewership

The comments generated by the creators and viewers were mostly in Malay and mostly positive, dominated by member postings. They were largely supportive in nature, expressing adoration towards the arts and even positive intent towards the program and university. The members

gained individual fans and received a lot of support from their audience, while both local and international viewers left requests in the comments section, although these requests were not entertained in general. However, the domination of Malay instead of English may explain for the creators' lack of international audience and appeal.

The student-creators further made use of music, gimmicks and/or gestures, and miming to a dialogue or song aside from acting, dancing, or direct verbal dialogue to address their viewers. Note that these categorizations are not straightforward for all cases, as there were interlaps in the contents produced, but nonetheless necessary for a systematic analysis. Furthermore, the clips uploaded generated written comments or feedbacks and a heavy use of emojis and symbols.

Nevertheless, analysis of the comments also revealed criticisms targeted at the creators, attacking their character, skill or talent, and sarcasm in rare instances. A linguistic barrier was the use of informal or colloquial language or slang that may be foreign to some viewers. In addition, the admin or creator responses were limited and mainly served to express thanks or gratitude to the viewer. See Table 5 for samples of the comments.

Table 5: Sample Comments

Nature of Comments	Sample Comments
Positive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ma: wah kim!! • J: lengluliii • BH: Mantapppp *spy emoji* • R: wawwww lawaaa betoihh • PL: kimmmm *hearts eyes* • aa: ok raklu join UM (w1) • S: Uishhhhhh • f: I see siti saleha, engku aleesya, and moon ga yong • NJ: wahhh looks fun! • ma: memang gempak la geng! • N: niceeee • BS: nice • NJ: UISHHHH
Negative/Critical	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A: Talented but still need to be polish! (w3) • y: I felt that slap • n: Tp enn x amik drama pon blh berlakon kat teater *laughing emoji* okay bye • n: I think, next time maybe better korang set up good costume, good location ?? Acting was bolehlahh ampak real tpi dull *smiley* (w2) • BA: Guess that main actor have a period issue *smirk* • BSH: astagaaaa pelakonnya pnyalaaaa • c: the banyak songeh one so annoying
Neutral/Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BH: *mice emojis* • BH: *shocked emojis*
Creator response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • thank you guys and keep supporting us *heart faces* • Hey yeap we are exclusive art student (1) • OMG thank you for the advice we will do better next time *hearts faces* (2) • Thank you for your feedback! We will do our best *smiley* (3) • good luck for your future thanks for support *heart* (1) • thank you and good luck for your future *heart* (2)

TikTok's as Artistic-Cultural Platform and Virtual Community Engagement

Based on its findings, the study may conclude the viability of TikTok as a platform for cultural-artistic engagement which serves a two-way benefit. Whereas the viewers gain educational and entertaining contents, for the content creators, they gain support and encouragement from their viewership which may motivate them to produce better contents. The two-way interaction enhances community engagement and the platform offers a greater audience and member reach. The student creators in this study were successful not only in terms of project execution and completion, but also in generating artistic-cultural contents and in garnering community or audience (viewer or commentor) engagement.

Not only that, the students' familiarity with the platform assisted them in navigating TikTok as content creators. The shorter clips were manageable, the content variety showcases a richness, and the longevity offered by the platform that is not restricted by a physical space help to establish the students' presence in the online arts community available in TikTok. The platform has also acted as a space for the students to polish their screen presence, skill development, and managerial competence. As they played multiple roles throughout the project, the students were able to expose themselves to the many roles in both arts management and art performance.

However, institutional practice and norm pose a challenge, as convincing the student population of the benefit of online platforms as a means to artistic-educational engagement can be a tricky task. Unlike the findings of Azman et al.'s (2021) report, this study has found students' non-acceptance of TikTok as a project-based learning medium. As these students are young adults who engage in such platforms for a different purpose or objective rather than education, training, and performance, some may find it too unrelatable and face difficulty in grasping the advantage and opportunity offered by the digital world towards achieving an academic aim or purpose.

Identification of Issues

Some have documented the problems with the implementation of digital technology in education. For instance, Wilks et al. (2012)

documented the dual nature of partnership, balancing between the easy and the uneasy, between digital technology and the visual arts classroom due to the absence of the “educational piece” in the implementation. Similarly, this study recommends the inclusion of digital arts management instruction which will impact policy, practice, and instruction in the classroom. A related problem as identified in this study is the lack of any established guideline for the student managers slash content creators to refer to in relation to the use of digital media and the roles and responsibilities as digital arts managers.

Additionally, the status of TikTok itself which lacks recognition as a viable and credible educational tool hinders its application and acceptance in academia, as shown in some of the members’ initial and end response to its use in the project. As TikTok is out of the norm of the supposed ‘traditional’ instruction and manner of project execution, its value and impact was minimized. Apart from that, the study identifies the missing component of digital arts marketing in the course components which may affect instructional policy and practice in the long run, since technology application in theory and practice can not be ignored in today’s curricula. The study also acknowledges its limitation in providing contradicting instruction which concentrated on general arts management as opposed to digital arts management. If this limitation is addressed, students may perform better at their task due to being equipped with the right knowledge and information.

Recommendations

Based on the identified issues and challenges, this study therefore makes several recommendations on the use of TikTok for an arts-based project.

In terms of management, team members should first start with assessment. This means identifying the pros and cons of a particular platform of their choosing, identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the select platform as well as the team members, and to select the most suitable media to achieve the project purpose. Aside from setting the formative goals, the team is further encouraged to collaborate and seek for entrepreneurial opportunities. As learners, they further need to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitude, and the right

frame of mind in handling a project, especially one that is out of the norm and beyond their comfort zone.

Content-wise, the creators may wish to study the elements of famous contents to identify their appeal. To increase interaction, the creator responses should be more varied. As such, they need to increase their rate of responses, to use English and other languages, or to make use of the translation feature for foreign comments. Further, they may have guest invites. Language-wise, it is recommended for the creators to provide subtitles and to perform the required editing or proofing to increase the linguistic quality of the clips. This will allow the creators to take requests from followers or subscribers, to hold live broadcasts, Q&A sessions and many others which will help improve their engaging presence on the platform.

In terms of growing the number of TikTok following, Johnston (2021a) suggests content creators should participate in community management, hit the For You Page to allow users to find their content, start a new trend or challenge, post regularly, collaborate with other creators, cross promote on other social channels, and to find their niche. Johnston (2021b) further adds the use of the Q&A feature, audience interaction, replying to comments with a video, and to stitch and duet with others on TikTok.

As with any social media, there will be danger. To combat potential issues on TikTok, Jaeger (2021) advises monitoring for harmful behavior and cyberbullying and ensuring student safety on TikTok. These relate to user privacy, private accounts and friend lists, comment restrictions, duet and stitch settings, and just saving instead of posting.

In terms of future studies, this study suggests for a longer duration offered by a longitudinal study as a longer presence in the online platform may generate different results and impacts. Arguably, it is inconclusive to state the full potential of the project as it was only a few weeks old, thus the necessity of a longer-duration project.

Conclusion

The world is continuously moving along technological development which includes digitization. The education field is not immune to this expansion and has more than ever embraced technology in the classroom.

As such, the performing arts in academia should also move along with this progress. The Covid-19 pandemic, for instance, has been critical towards the emphasis on the need for the arts to move in parallel and in tandem with this advancement.

This study has shown the viability of TikTok as an alternative to the more common physical project execution for creative artistic-cultural projects. In fact, the availability of TikTok as artistic-cultural platform and virtual community engagement is readily present and should thus be utilized. The inaccessibility of a physical space can no longer hinder the continuous development and innovative activity in arts and culture as well as educational evolution. As seen in the study, among the strategies employed by the student-managers-crators were the categorization of tasks and responsibilities, but that which was non-stagnant, decision-making in the nature of content via mutual agreement, and the branch into many types of arts showcase in the digital platform selected.

In its impact, the study has made evident of learners' openness and willingness to branch out of their comfort zones by taking on different roles and tasks, which contributes to a wider view of opportunities and areas for expansion. This further sets the stage for the further and additional application of technology in the managerial course, as well as the apparent chance for collaboration, teamwork, and leadership. This project has additionally allowed learners to put in place theories and practice in management and its related components, as well as the performing arts. Moreover, the nature in which the project was executed afforded ongoing feedbacks in instruction and continuous audience engagement in community engagement as opposed to live shows. Similarly, Thomson et al. (2013b) found that arts organizations agreed with the notions that the internet and social media have "increased engagement" and made art a more participatory experience, and that they have helped make "arts audiences more diverse." They also agreed that the internet has "played a major role in broadening the boundaries of what is considered art."

To conclude, the student-led project has contributed in the identification of the norms of artistic-cultural engagement, management, and the nature of community engagement in social media. The project has allowed the expansion of knowledge, whether direct or indirect, to other realms such as communication and technology. As with any new endeavor,

skepticism and challenges exist, especially with those which are traditionally-rooted and normalized by physical space and face-to-face tendency. Essentially, knowledge of the arts, organizational management, digital technology, and social media is essential to help ease this transition and application.

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